

THE VISION OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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President of India.

[This is President Shri V. V. Giri's speech at the inauguration of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Vivekananda College, Madras, on September 11, 1971.]

At the outset, I congratulate the management and the students of the Vivekananda College on its completing a quarter of a century of its eventful existence, and, on this occasion of the celebration of the Silver Jubilee, I deem it a privilege to extend my heartiest greetings to all those responsible, directly and indirectly, for making this College a leading academic institution not only in Tamil Nadu, but in the country. Named after Swami Vivekananda who shook the world by his matchless exposition of Hinduism, your College, from small beginnings, has built a reputation for academic excellence. No doubt 25 years is not a very long period in the history of any organisation or educational institution. Nevertheless, it is a significant mile-stone and you have every justification to celebrate this grand occasion. It is equally an opportunity for you to have a stock-taking of the shortcomings that might have come to your notice and see how best you can remedy them. There is no limit to excellence, and there is always scope for improvement with greater effort and zest. I have glanced through your academic report and I am deeply struck by the uniform progress you have maintained in winning many laurels not only in the academic field but also in extra-curricular activities. In fact, our emphasis should be only on having our youth not only pass through the portals of the University and pass examinations, but 'make a grade in life.' This, in my view, is of fundamental importance.

It has been observed that the destiny of India is shaped in her class-rooms. This not merely emphasises the paramount need of

having a well-defined educational policy, but equally stresses the need for vitalising our educational institutions so that the policy is fully implemented. That alone will achieve for us the aim of education. Swami Vivekananda said: 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-forming assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than a man who has got by heart a whole library.' No definition of education could be more appropriate and practical.

Education should thus bring about the discipline of the body and the mind. This is no doubt primarily the task of the teacher and the taught, and both of them must consider themselves truly as partners in the endeavour of building up of not individuals alone, but of society as a whole. Here the general population cannot remain indifferent to the goings on, but must take an active and sustained interest in the proper management and functioning of our educational institutions. Our educational system, it is often observed, is not very realistic and still we pursue the same old method which was more tailored to produce not leaders of thought and action, but merely camp followers.

Perhaps even in the present scheme of things much more can be achieved if there is a proper dialogue between the students and the teachers. The excessive growth of schools and colleges, some maintain, has been responsible for the falling standards, growing indis-

cipline and increasing student unrest. This may be partly true, but the solutions to these problems are to be found certainly not in limiting the number of admissions. Very often we treat our student community as an isolated group. We have to consider them as a part and parcel of the community and the channels of communication must be effective and open not only between the parents and their wards, but also between the student community and the society in general. Unless and until we are able to establish a two-way traffic, we will not be able to tackle their problems in a realistic manner.

The solution to the many baffling problems of present day India in different fields — a challenging task to be accomplished within the life-time of a generation — most obviously will make large demands on the youth who are to assume the leadership of the nation in the coming years. We need, therefore, have a clear focus of the goal before us and have a deeper understanding of the problems facing the country. We should remember that without hard and sustained work in a spirit of dedication, and above all without collective discipline and national character, the realisation of our goals will not be a smooth and easy task.

It is often said that the present generation lack the ideals to guide them and do not have proper moorings in life. They are said to be lacking in seriousness, and to be wasting their youthful energies in frivolous pursuits. I do not agree with this view. We find the members of the rising generation all the world over in revolt. I think this is greatly due to the changing values and is part of a world-wide crisis of character and conscience.

It is not my intention to brush aside the defects that we notice in a perfunctory manner, but it is only to point out that we need not single out our young men and condemn them wholesale. In fact, in our country our young men are somewhat sober and disciplined compared to the extreme types found abroad. Please do not for a moment think that I

condone violence and hooliganism in which our students sometimes indulge. Such acts have to be condemned wholesale and without any reservation. I want to maintain that the problem of student indiscipline is not peculiar to India, but is a deep-rooted malady affecting all countries. Further student indiscipline is but one of the many facets of anti-social tendencies that we have been witnessing; the others being indifference to productive effort, manifested in frequent cessation of work, increasing lawlessness, and destruction of public property etc. This calls for effective remedial measures by way of evolving fool-proof methods. We cannot forget that it is the youth which is the basic raw material that should go into the making of the world of tomorrow. In this regard, important educational institutions like your College have to play a notable part in setting an example to the entire country.

Your College, as I said in the beginning, is named after the great saint and exponent of Indian culture, Swami Vivekananda. It is very difficult to comprehend the many facets of the life, work and message of Swami Vivekananda in the course of a short address like this. He had a vision not only of obtaining a proper place for India in the comity of nations but he had a total comprehension of the mission of India in the modern world. While he believed in spiritual regeneration, he also saw that this could be possible and effective only if India's social conditions are radically altered. To quote Vivekananda, 'I do not believe in a God that cannot wipe the widow's tears and bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth.' What Vivekananda proposed was an integration of educational, philanthropic, and religious activities; and it was thus that the Ramakrishna Mission came into existence.

I would like to emphasise that Vivekananda was not only a great religious teacher. He was also a very great Indian, a patriot who passionately believed in the well-being of his countrymen. He said: 'I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses,

and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics will be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well-educated, well-fed and well cared for.' This is truer today than even before. Swami Vivekananda's life and message will ever remain an inspiration to the countrymen. Again he appealed to each of our countrymen: 'Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud thou art an Indian and proudly proclaim — I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother. . . . The soil of India is my highest heaven and the good of India is my good.'

Today we are faced with many problems, both economic and social. The factionalist and sectarian elements are trying to undermine the solidarity and unity of the nation. We have to make a rapid headway in various spheres. What Swami Vivekananda said nearly 75 years ago is of much significance and is as true today as it was then. 'What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills that nothing can resist, that can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean meeting death face to face.'

Paying a tribute to Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji said that the Swami's writings taught

him to love India even more. Swami Vivekananda's inspiring words would help us in meeting the political, economic and social challenges facing India. We cannot compromise with anyone on the question of our national integrity. Let us remember that it is our duty to respond to the call of the nation and be ready to live and die for the preservation of our hard-won freedom.

Swami Vivekananda was an ardent nationalist, but his nationalism was not of the narrow or parochial type. It was essentially internationalism in spirit. He asked everyone to pray each day, each night:

The soil of India is my highest heaven,
The good of India is my good,
O, Thou Mother of the Universe,
Vouchsafe manliness unto me,
O, Thou Mother of Strength,
Take away my weakness,
Take away my unmanliness,
And Make me a Man.

'Make me a Man' — that should be the prayer of all of us.

I thank the College authorities for affording me an opportunity to meet all of you. I wish you all the best in the years to come.

Jai Hind.

Four great Aspects of the Mother, four of her leading Powers and Personalities have stood in front in her guidance of this Universe, and in her dealings with the terrestrial play. One is her personality of calm wideness and comprehending wisdom and tranquil benignity and inexhaustible compassion and sovereign and surpassing majesty and all-ruling greatness. Another embodies her power of splendid strength and irresistible passion, her warrior mood, her overwhelming will, her impetuous swiftness and world-shaking force. A third is vivid and sweet and wonderful with her deep secret of beauty and harmony and fine rhythm, her intricate and subtle opulence, her compelling attraction and captivating grace. The fourth is equipped with her close and profound capacity of intimate knowledge and careful flawless work and quiet and exact perfection in all things. To the four we give the four great names, Maheswari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati.

— SRI AUROBINDO.