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From: **Madan Bhattarai** <kutniti@gmail.com>
Date: 6 May 2014 16:50
Subject: Speech for the Closing Ceremony of the 150th Birth Anniversary
To: Maki Hayakawa <sacra82c@gmail.com>
Cc: Medhasananda Swami <medhasananda@gmail.com>

Rev. Swami Suhitanandaji, General Secretary of Ramakrishna Mission,

Rev. Swami Medhashanandji,

Other Friends from the Vedantic Society,

Excellencies,

Esteemed Friends,

I am pleased to attend the closing ceremony of the 150th Birthday Celebration of Swami Vivekananda amidst such a wonderful programme today. I thank the organisers for so kindly inviting me to this function. You have been very kind to remember me on such important occasions.

 It is all the more appropriate that the programme has come after another programme hosted by the Vedantic Society on March 16 to celebrate the closing ceremony of the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa as Swami Vivekananda was the most important disciple of the great saint who was possibly the greatest icon representing HIndu and Bengali renaissance.

Swami Vivekananda was a genius who was responsible for imparting a new dimension to the understanding of Vedanta and Yoga particularly in the Western world. He can be rightly credited with promoting interfaith awareness among different religions in the Sub-continent and outside.

Swami Vivekananda was instrumental in reviving Hinduism, preaching and spreading its innate value and spirit of tolerance and enhancing it to the status of a major world religion during the 19th century as so illustratively outlined by his landmark address to the Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, United States, in September 1893.

It is relevant to note that Swami Vivekananda visited Japan covering several major cities including Tokyo that year and made regular visits to other Western countries and widely travelled in the Sub-continent on lecture tours earning the support and admiration of his audience.

Swami Vivekananda was a brilliant man both in terms of knowledge and powerful oratory that could keep people spellbound. With sterling academic achievements during his student life, he had comprehensive mastery on such diverse areas like fine arts, logic, Western philosophy, European history and, last but not least, music. It may be noted that when Swami Vivekananda first met Sri Ramakrishna in November 1881 at the residence of Surendra Nath Mitra less than five years before the latter's demise, the first thing he did was to sing and impressed all those present. The other point is that Swamiji became an ardent disciple of Sri Ramakrishna after being indifferent if not outright critic for some time as he used to examine every aspect with a critical and analytical bent of mind.

It is tragic that Swamiji did not survive long as he passed away at the young age of 39 but his achievements in the short span of life were phenomenal. It is an irony that many great people did not enjoy good health and it applied to him as well. His auspicious birthday that fell on January 12, 1863 that coincided with Makar Sankranti when devotees take a holy plunge in various parts of the Sub-continent including Sagar Island off the coast of Diamond Harbour in West Bengal, is celebrated as National Youth Day.

As a regular visitor to Belur Math during my stay in Kolkata for five years in the eighties and several visits to the city that I consider my second home, I am so much impressed by the life and teachings of Swamiji. I have also been to Kanyakumari to visit the Vivekananda rock.

The Ramakrishna Mission that Swamiji founded on May 01, 1897 stands testimony to the monumental contributions that this great icon made to the world. It is most appropriate that the temple of Dakhineswar that was the principal locus of Sri Ramakrishna and Belur Math that espouse his great ideals are located on the two banks of Hooghly so majestically illustrating the highest degree of complementarity between the teacher and the disciple.

With these words, let me pay my highest tributes to Swami Vivekananda.

Thank you all.

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