

Remarks by Ambassador Sibi George at the event to celebrate Swami Vivekananda in Japan, June 1, 2024

Our Chief Guest Her Excellency Madam Akie Abe

Hon'ble Swami Medhasananda

Distinguished Speakers & Guests

Ladies and gentlemen!

A very good afternoon to all.

I would like to begin by welcoming each one of you who have joined us today to celebrate Swami Vivekananda. It is indeed a pleasure to see you all gathered here to celebrate the life of India's youth icon Swami Vivekananda today.

I am honoured to welcome Madam Akie Abe who have joined us today. I thank her for accepting our invitation to join this event as our Chief Guest and address us today. I am reminded of the personal connect that Madam Akie Abe maintained with India throughout her life along with her beloved husband Prime Minister Late Mr Shinzo Abe. On behalf of all present here today I extend a very warm welcome to Madam Akie Abe.

I congratulate the Vedanta Society of Japan for collaborating with the Embassy of India Tokyo for organising this event.

Dear Friends,

We commemorate the life of Swami Vivekananda not just an individual but a phenomenon, who cannot be described in just mere words. Swami Vivekananda was a colossal figure in our nation's history who played a leading role in bringing about a new awakening in India. I recall how he inspired my generation when as school children we used to recite his powerful words 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached'. Swami Vivekananda emphasised on the ideals of service and renunciation. His belief in Yuva Shakti was unwavering; which found expression in his iconic saying 'give me 100 believing youth and I shall transform India'. Belief, here, means belief in oneself.

I recall the words of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi who said, and I quote: "Our freedom fighters were influenced by Swami Vivekananda. His works have always been effective in instilling nationalism in the youth. Time passed, the country became independent, but we still see Swamiji's influence today." Unquote.

It's a coincidence for us today that Hon'ble Prime Minister is currently at the Swami Vivekananda Memorial in Kanyakumari, the southernmost point of the Indian peninsula where the Arabian Sea, Indian Ocean and the Bay of Bengal meet, where Swamiji is believed to have attained his enlightenment.

Dear Friends,

As a young student and later as a diplomat I was fortunate to visit many places associated with the life of Swamiji. The Vivekananda memorial in Kanyakumari, his ancestral home in Kolkata, the site in Chicago where he delivered the historic 1893 address, which is still hailed as the most memorable speech that introduced India's civilizational ethos, our mantra of 'Vasudaiva Kudumbakam' to the Western world.

Swamiji's message has spread all across the world. I recall, one of the first places in Switzerland that I visited as India's Ambassador was Saas Fee to pay homage to Swami Vivekananda who travelled to that beautiful town in the Alps Mountain in 1896, where a memorial and a statue of Swamiji stand. One felt so happy to see how Indians and foreigners visit Saas Fee in large numbers to pay homage to him.

And today, when we assemble here to celebrate Swamiji's life here in Japan, I recall his visit to Japan in 1893 on his way to Chicago. He reportedly said that "the key to Japan's greatness is the faith of the Japanese in themselves, and their love for their country." You would recall that Hon'ble Prime Minister had referred to the words of Swami Vivekananda in his address to the community in Tokyo in 2022.

Dear Friends,

When we talk about Swamiji in Japan, we recall the words of former Prime Minister His Excellency Late Mr Abe who in 2007 at the Indian Parliament began in his address by quoting Swami Vivekananda. He said and I quote: "It gives me tremendous pleasure to be able to begin my address today with the words of Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual leader that India gave the world. The different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea." Prime Minister Abe again spoke about Swami Vivekanda in his speech, I quote: "Vivekananda came to be acquainted with Tenshin Okakura, a man ahead of his time in early modern Japan and a type of Renaissance man. Okakura was then guided by Vivekananda and enjoyed also a friendship with Sister Nivedita, Vivekananda's loyal disciple and a distinguished female social reformer." Unquote. Late Prime Minister again quoted Swami Vivekananda in his address, I quote "I would like to quote, if I may, Vivekananda again, part of the conclusion of deeply meaningful remarks he delivered in Chicago in 1893. He said, "help and not fight," "assimilation and not destruction," "harmony and peace and not dissension."

Unquote. Again in his message on the occasion of the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda Prime Minister Abe expressed the hope that the Japanese people of present day will remember Swami Vivekananda and his words.

Dear Friends,

Swamiji's teachings will continue to influence the lives of every Indian, whether in India or abroad, and also several millions in other countries. We have named this auditorium in memory of Swami Vivekananda. I recall the unveiling of the portrait of Swamiji here last year, which will serve as a reminder to us and also to all visitors to our Mission on the contributions of Swamiji who energized the young people, made them aware and unleashed their creative energies. It will continue to be a reminder for us all on the Indianness that Swamiji embodied which continues to guide and inspire us and continue to inspire millions of our young brothers and sisters.

I once again thank the Vedanta Society of Japan for collaborating with the Embassy of India Tokyo for organising this event. I thank you all for your participation today.

Thank You

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