

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
AT THE VIVEKANANDA KENDRA**

**Kanyakumari, December 25/26, 2019**

1. My greetings to all of you! I feel blessed here, as coming to the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the Vivekanand Kendra is a very special pilgrimage indeed. We have gathered at a place which continuously emits to us highly positive vibes. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial and the Kendra are among those few spots which are naturally endowed with an ambience of extraordinary serenity. They bring the unquiet mind to rest and lead it to ponder perennial questions.
2. It was this spiritual power of the rock at the very feet of Bharat Mata which drew Swami Vivekananda to Kanyakumari in his quest for inner peace. On this day 127 years ago, in 1892, Swamiji began deep meditation on this sacred spot. In three days and three nights, a simple monk transformed himself into an enlightened being and a global messenger of Bharatiya Sanskriti. Swamiji attained enlightenment here and sparked a unique spiritual revolution. It was not for an individual's own salvation; it was for the rejuvenation of the spiritual values of the motherland and service of its people. More recently I have gone through the wonderful experience of watching a play on the life of Swami Vivekanand at Parliament and was mesmerised by his evolution as a "realised soul".
3. In this context, let me recall a letter written by him on 19th March, 1894 in which Swamiji wrote about his plans. He envisioned selfless sannyasins going from village to village, educating people and working to improve their condition. He wrote, "We, as a nation, have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all

mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses.”

4. Less than a year after his Kanyakumari experience, on the historic day of 11th September, 1893, Swamiji made his epoch-making speech in the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago. He told a gathering of religious leaders from around the world that he was proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

5. When Swamiji's birth centenary was being celebrated in 1963, the people of Kanyakumari thought of building a memorial at the place where the unknown monk became one of the greatest spiritual leaders of modern times. About 650 skilled artisans and workers toiled day in and day out for six years. They made the memorial also a symbol of hard work, commitment and dedication. The Vivekananda Rock Memorial was inaugurated on 2nd September, 1970 by Shri V. V. Giri ji, who was the Rashtrapati then. Over the last fifty years, it has inspired countless visitors, especially youth of this country, to lofty ideals.
6. I am sure many of you are familiar with the campaign that preceded the construction of this memorial. This monument was made possible by the untiring efforts of Shri Eknath Ranade, who mobilised the entire nation for the project.
7. Like a worthy disciple of Swami Vivekanand, Eknathji lived the life of a sage and devoted himself to the work of resurrecting India's spiritual genius. For this cause he put his legendary organisational skills to work. 'Karmayogi' Eknathji organised a mass contact programme and involved lakhs of people in the project. It was with the humble contribution of one rupee each from masses that the funds for this project were collected.

Moreover, he met members of parliament, and convinced 323 of them to sign an appeal seeking support for this cause. He brought together supporters from across party lines or religious lines to make this majestic monument truly national in its scope and ambitions.

8. Eknathji did not want to limit the memory of Swamiji to a granite building. He believed that the real living memorial to Swamiji should be in the hearts of people who would put the nation above the self and serve the needy. To further that aim, the Vivekananda Kendra was established on 7th January, 1972 which has grown into a great organization dedicated to service. The Vivekananda Kendra too will soon celebrate its 50 years.
9. On 2nd September this year, we began the celebrations of the fifty years of the inauguration of the Rock Memorial. On that day, I inaugurated the programme called 'Ek Bharat Vijayi Bharat' Sampark Karyakram. As part of the celebrations, under this programme, the Vivekananda Kendra plans to spread the message of Swamiji to every nook and corner of this land. I am confident that it will make more and more people realise the true significance of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial as a confluence of diversities, unifying them into a spiritual power.
10. India is often described as spanning from Kashmir to Kanyakumari. One is in the lap of the lofty Himalayas, and the other has in its lap this majestic monument. Both the Himalayas and the Vivekananda Rock Memorial remind those living in this land the necessity to expand horizons of our small individual identities. Both constantly invoke us to move from mundane planes to a life on a higher plane. Standing magnificently alone amid bare nature, the Rock Memorial is the ultimate rock house that will continue to guide our ships to our spiritual home amid turbulent seas.

Ladies and gentlemen,

11. One of Eknathji's cherished accomplishments was a book he compiled from Swamiji's addresses, discourses and writings. Let me conclude today by quoting from this work. In his message titled 'Our Punya Bhumi and Its Glorious Past', Swami Vivekanand says, "This is the ancient land where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country, the same India whose influx of spirituality is represented, as it were, on the material plane, by rolling rivers like oceans, where the eternal Himalayas, rising tier above tier with their snowcaps, look as it were into the very mysteries of heaven. Here is the same India whose soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived."
  
12. May Swami Vivekananda's life and deeds continue to inspire this land in years to come!

Thank you,  
Jai Hind!