

Inaugural Speech of H.E., Governor of Uttarakhand, Smt Margaret Alva, at the 35th Annual Conference on Oriental Heritage at the Indian Institute of Oriental Heritage, Kolkata, on February 2, 2012

Honourable President Maha/maho/padhyay Murari Mohan Vedanta/ditirtha/sastri, Chairman of the conference, VCs of universities, national and foreign scholars and intellectuals, my greetings to all of you. To begin with, I thank Professor Dr. Ramkrishna Sastri, chairman of the Indian Institute of Oriental Heritage, Professor Gopa Sastri, President, Indian Institute of Oriental Heritage, and Shri Gopal Chakraborty, General Secretary of the Institute, for inviting me to inaugurate this international event of Scholars, despite the fact that I cannot claim to belong to any of the learned categories of participants at the Conference. By lighting 35 lamps, symbolizing 35 glorious years of the Institute's existence, we acknowledge the enlightenment that this Institute has brought to countless people over these years.

The Indian Institute of Oriental Heritage has been holding this Conference annually, bringing together intellectuals and dignitaries from all walks of life in India and abroad, helping to bring into focus their views and experiences in today's social scenario.

The participation of renowned scholars, Governors, Central and State Ministers, Supreme Court and High Court Judges, Vice-Chancellors, famous personalities and representatives of different religions, makes this Annual International Conference, a special and important event. The Conference also gives the Institute an opportunity to assess its past activities and plan its future programmes.

Oriental heritage has evolved over the centuries and is the result of the wisdom of India's ancient sages. The supreme distinction of oriental wisdom lies in its universal approach. The oriental way of life has predominantly been regulated by spirituality which is reflected through the observance of rituals and activities aimed at acquiring wisdom

about the ultimate truth. This “adhya/atmik/taa” defines how life originated as also the various traits of the mind.

Vedic hymns and the Upanishads have vividly described the universe, and creation; and tell us a lot about human and even animal life. The doctrines of Vedanga, Vedanta, Ayurveda, Astrology and Vastu Shastra, are nothing but the outcome of persistent and comprehensive analysis of the universal truth, and realities as unraveled by great Oriental scholars of bygone days. The most striking distinction of Indian or Oriental wisdom, as compared to many other civilizations, lies in its humanistic approach, universality, and a keen desire for peace and harmony in human relationships. Its ultimate aim is to ensure an elevated relationship between an individual and the Supreme power. Indian Philosophy enlightens the human being about the omnipresence of the divinity. Indian Astrology aims at finding out why a particular person suffers at one time and gets happiness at another time in life.

Since it was established in 1978, the Institute has been consistently striving for the restoration of our ancient cultural heritage, especially Sanskrit, and linking the same with high speed development of science and technology, for a balanced growth of body, mind and soul.

Its mission has been to provoke a systematic and scientific enquiry and research in the field of Oriental learning. It has the rare distinction of launching the first and foremost concerted attempt in West Bengal, to stimulate research on various streams of Oriental Heritage. In today’s perspective, Oriental learning faces a big challenge from the so-called intellectually advanced circles. Therefore, the avowed and sincere scholars of oriental learning have the responsibility to upgrade their knowledge and skills and create a scientific codified system for it.

Extensive research studies are urgently required to usher in a new era in all streams of Oriental Heritage, to illuminate the path of mankind with the light of knowledge and to restore the glory of this branch of wisdom with a view to evolving a scientific and methodological enquiry and popularizing these spheres of learning. In this, the Indian Institute of Oriental Heritage is, and must continue to play a crucial role.

The Vedas which are among the oldest and most authoritative Indian scriptures, date back to between 2000 and 1000 B.C. Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa is the real link between ancient and modern India. Through amazing spiritual efforts, he relived the entire range of spiritual experiences of the sages and saints of the past, from Vedic times to his times. Paramahansa was simple and so were his words of wisdom. He once said, “A boat may stay in water, but water should not stay in the boat. An aspirant may live in the world, but the world should not live within him.” This says in a nutshell, all that is needed to live a peaceful and stable life.

Narendranath, later to be the great Swami Vivekananda, who was the disciple of Paramahansa, also put his thoughts in simple but profound words. In one of his discourses, he said (and I quote), “The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him – that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free”. (Unquote)

Another profound thought expressed by him and I quote : “All that is real in me is God; all that is real in God is I; the gulf between God and human beings is thus bridged. Thus we find how, by knowing God, we find the kingdom of heaven within us.” (Unquote)

Over the past few decades, Oriental learning has evoked an active interest among the Western world. It has been acting as a lighthouse to the intellectuals of the west lost in

the great ocean of life and to whom creation of wealth has been the central point of existence. Oriental learning is now a bond between the East and the West. And strengthening this bond are institutes like the Institute of Oriental Heritage.

The acceptability and utility of Oriental learning have already been recognised by the World Health Organisation. In a report, recently published, WHO has acknowledged that the study of Astrology and Palmistry, the important streams of Oriental learning, is a helpful medium for diagnosing diseases. Vedas teach the fundamental truth of the unity of mind, matter and the universe. In Advaita Vedanta, as expounded by Swami Vivekananda, ‘the dichotomy of man and God, good and bad, faith and reason, finally disappears.’ A renowned Indian science scholar however, is of the opinion, that Swami Vivekananda’s Vedantic thought is inconsistent with science.

In his book, “The Principal Upanishads”, Shri S. Radhakrishnan, our former President, noted, (and I quote), “If the **Upnishads** help us to rise above the glamour of the fleshy life, it is because their authors, pure of soul, ever striving towards the divine, reveal to us their pictures of the splendors of the unseen. The Upanishads are respected not because they are a part of Sruti or revealed literature, and so hold a reserved position, but because they have inspired generations of Indians with vision and strength by their inexhaustible significance and spiritual power. Indian thought has constantly turned to these scriptures for fresh illumination and spiritual recovery or recommencement, and not in vain. The fire still burns bright on their altars. Their light is for the seeing eye and their message is for the seeker after truth.” (Unquote)

The first day of the conference is dedicated to Lokemata Rani Rashmani who was the founder of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple and remained closely associated with Sri Raamakrishna Paramahansa after she appointed him the priest of the temple.

Rani Rashmoni also has to her credit numerous charitable works and contributions to society. She oversaw the construction of a road from Subarnarekha river to Pari for pilgrims. She funded the construction of ghats such as Babughat (in memory of her husband), Ahiritola Ghat and Nimtala Ghat (for the daily bathers in the Ganges). She donated generously to the then Imperial Library (now the National Library of India) and Hindu College (now Presidency College).

It is believed that a divine revelation led her to found the famous temple complex on the banks of the Ganges at Dakshineswar in the North 24 Parganas.

In keeping with the great traditions of Bengal, the Institute has, like the Rama Krishna Mission, and Mother Teresa's Sisters of Charity, been rendering great service to society through its various social activities including flood relief, education for eradication of illiteracy, Self-employment schemes for the downtrodden, medical and blood donation camps, Sports and cultural activities, Computer education and library and reading rooms, reaching out to those in need.

I wish the Institute every success in its future plans. My best wishes to the participants in this Conference. I am confident that the glory of Oriental wisdom and heritage will be further strengthened through this event. Once again, I thank all of you, for the opportunity to be here today.

Jai Hind