

## **Vivekananda Award 2009 Presented**

The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture's most prestigious Vivekananda Award (2009) was handed over to its ninth recipient, Sri Asim Choudhuri, on 18 March by Srimat Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, President of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, at an impressive function held in the Vivekananda Hall of the Institute.

The Award included a purse of Rs One lakh, a citation, a shawl and a few holy mementoes. The Award has been given to Sri Choudhuri in recognition of his profound scholarship reflected in his two books, *Swami Vivekananda in America—New Findings* and *Swami Vivekananda in Chicago—New Findings*.

The most revered Swami Atmasthanandaji Maharaj, while presenting the Award, said in his Benedictory Address that Swami Vivekananda worshipped God not only in the temple, he worshipped God also in man—the sick man, the poor man, the illiterate man, the mad man. If we also can serve them with humility and reverence, it will indeed be a very practical form of worship and spirituality.

He said, 'Very rarely this service of man as service to God had been exemplified by any other Incarnation earlier. But it was Sri Ramakrishna who first taught Narendra (later Swami Vivekananda) this mantra of service to the humankind, that worship of jiva is indeed the worship of Shiva. Swamiji learnt it, practised it and preached it and that is how the Ramakrishna Mission is functioning.' 'In the Ramakrishna Math and Mission', he said, 'we not only worship in the temple, but we also serve the poor, the distressed, the affected and afflicted people. That is the spirit of the Ramakrishna Movement everywhere.'

Earlier, in his Welcome Address, the Secretary of the Institute, Swami Sarvabhutanandaji Maharaj, said that 'Swami Vivekananda is relevant even today. But to rediscover him is like contemplation on his great person, or rather it is more like a pilgrimage to the soul. We find many admirers of Swamiji took to this arduous task of rediscovering him and ended up finding newer facts. After the publication of Marie Louise Burke's magnum opus *Swami Vivekananda in the West* in six volumes, we thought further research on Swamiji was a closed chapter. But it seems Swamiji likes to spring surprises. So he hooked Sri Choudhuri who carried on his research and we have got two books. The first appeared in 2000 and the second in 2008. Sri Choudhuri's painstaking efforts have proved that tracing the footsteps of Swamiji is still a live issue and this spirit of working for Swamiji will continue for years to come.'

The Presidential Address was delivered by the Hon'ble Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court, Mr S. S. Nijjar.

Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, was among the many dignitaries who graced the occasion.