

## Vivekananda Medal 2009 Presented

Professor Brij Nath Kaul of Kashmir was presented the 'Vivekananda Medal 2009' by the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture at an impressive function in the Vivekananda Hall on 18 November. The gold Medal, a citation and other gifts were handed over to Professor Kaul by Mr Gopal Krishna Gandhi, Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal, as a token of recognition of his outstanding work for the dissemination of the ideas of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the Kashmir Valley and for uplifting the conditions of the rural and tribal people irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

Professor Kaul was the fifth recipient of the prestigious Medal instituted by Nivedita Vrati Sangha, an eminent women's organization that has been inspired by the noble mission of Sister Nivedita. The earlier recipients were Sri Shiv Shankar Chakraborty (1999), Sri Subimal Chatterjee (2000), Dr H. Sudarshan (2004) and the 'Seva-Rural', Gujarat (2007).

Welcoming the guests and congratulating the awardee, Swami Sarvabhutanandaji Maharaj, Secretary of the Institute, said that Professor Kaul, as a prominent youth of a group of young men, set up in 1955 a small centre called the Ramakrishna Ashrama in Sri Nagar. 'Against all odds and threats of the militants in Kashmir, he has nurtured the Ashrama, even risking his life.'

Resigning from the post of a Professor of Physics in the Kashmir University, the Swami added, Mr Kaul dedicated himself fully to the cause of the common people of Sri Nagar, both Hindus and Muslims. For

his lifelong sacrifice and devotion the Ashrama has now become a branch centre of the Ramakrishna Order. Not only that, Professor Kaul has inspired many youths of the Valley to embrace a life of sacrifice and service. Some of them have even joined the Order.

The Chief Guest of the function, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, General Secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, said that Professor Kaul deserved the award. 'I am very much impressed by the service that the small centre in Sri Nagar has been offering.' Swami Vivekananda himself during his life time, he said, had expressed his wish that such a centre should be started there and there was an offer of a land. But, for technical reasons the plan did not materialize. However, subsequently, a centre was started in May 1954 but it couldn't continue for various reasons.

Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj in this connection also briefly recalled the exemplary deeds of the past recipients of the 'Vivekananda Medal'. He said, the first recipient, late Shiv Shankar Chakraborty, was the Director of the Loka Shiksha Parishad at Narendrapur who contributed greatly to the development of rural Bengal and reshaping some notorious slums of Calcutta, especially Rambagan. The second recipient, late Subimal Chatterjee, who happened to be the right hand man of Swami Atmananda, worked admirably among the tribals of Abujhmarh in the midst of political chaos. The third, Dr Sudarshan, was awarded the Medal for his wonderful service in the B. R. Hills among very poor

tribals. The fifth recipient of the Medal was the 'Seva-Rural' of Gujarat in recognition of its splendid service there.

Revered Maharaj in his long illuminating address also referred to a book entitled *A Frank Friendship: Gandhi and Bengal* which has been 'wonderfully written, carefully compiled and skillfully edited' by Mr Gopal Krishna Gandhi, who incidentally presided over the function. Prabhanandaji said, 'We shall remember Mr Gandhi for his support given to this Institute of Culture and to all our activities all over India'.

He reminded all that it is Swami Vivekananda's life and message that had inspired and is still inspiring so many people. It inspired the late Professor Santwana Dasgupta, the Secretary of the Nivedita Vrati Sangha, who instituted the Medal, and it has also inspired the awardees. Swamiji's wonderful discovery, 'The national ideals of India are renunciation and service. Intensify her in those two channels and the rest will take care of itself' inspired all—the national leaders, social workers, and the monks and nuns like us.

Swamiji himself, he said, was not only inspired by Sri Ramakrishna but also by the scriptures, especially the Upanishads, and particularly the message of the *Isha Upanishad* that says '*tena tyaktena bhunjithā*', ie enjoy through renunciation. Based on this teaching, Swamiji gave some practical suggestions. He said: He who sees Shiva in the poor, the weak, the diseased, really worships Shiva. If he sees Shiva only in the image, in the temple, his worship is but preliminary. These wonderful stirring words electrified so many people including Mahatma Gandhi.

Accepting the Medal with great humility, Professor Kaul remarked that 'the award in fact, is a recognition of the contribution of the Ramakrishna Movement all over the world in general and the spiritual and cultural

traditions of our country in particular.

Tracing the history of the Kashmir Valley and the contributions the Kashmiri stalwarts made to enrich its religio-cultural heritage, Professor Kaul said that 'the Ramakrishna Movement we started in the Valley is nothing new because we know that Sri Ramakrishna lived the essence of Indian spiritual values. That is why his thoughts received a ready response from the people steeped in the Shaiva tradition.'

In his Presidential Address, the Hon'ble Governor said that the 'Vivekananda Medal' has gone to the right person. Then he said: 'Kashmir is an extraordinary creation of history and geography, of time and space. Where can we find in this world such extraordinary perfection? The presence of all the faith traditions of the Hindus, Buddhists, and, of course, Islam are found in this one place. Let us hope that the ray of hope which Professor Kaul referred to will grow to a dawn and extraordinary illumination.'

He reminded the audience that when we speak of Kashmir, we must also remember Prince Dara Shukoh who built a *mahal* on the fringes of the Dal Lake in Sri Nagar. It was meant to be a centre for astronomical studies. It was also meant to be a place for religious concord. So Dara Shukoh's great legacy also preserves and protects the great coming together of all the faith traditions in Kashmir.

Mr Gandhi also mentioned that had Dara Shukoh not translated the Upanishads into Persian, the world perhaps would not have received the light of the Upanishads, because from the Persian came the German translations, and from German translations came other translations into other languages.

Swami Bodhasarananda gave the vote of thanks and gave a touching account of his experiences of working with Professor Kaul in his formative years. ■