



# Institutions like Harijan Sevak Sangh doing yeoman service and deserve a helping hand: Vice President Rededicates Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya

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The Vice President of India, Shri M. Venkaiah Naidu has said that Institutions like Harijan Sevak Sangh doing yeoman service and deserve a helping hand from philanthropists, corporate and other resource persons. He was addressing the gathering at an event to rededicate Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya, unveiling the renovated Statue of Thakkar Bapa and unveil the plaque for pile foundation of Didi Nirmala Deshpande Nilayam, in Chennai, Tamil Nadu today. The Governor of Tamil Nadu, Shri Banwarilal Purohit and the Minister for Fisheries, Personnel and Administrative Reforms, Tamil Nadu, Shri D. Jayakumar were present on the occasion.

The Vice President said that Didi Nirmala Deshpande, who headed this organization till her last breath, was a dedicated Gandhian, who set an example to thousands of people not only in India but all over the globe. He further said that she had participated in the Bhoodan Movement and undertook 40,000 km padayatra along the length and breadth of the country to popularize the message of Mahatma Gandhi's Gram Swaraj. She was a true messenger of peace and also strove for communal harmony, he added.

The Vice President expressed his happiness over unveiling the plaque of Shree Geeta Bhavan Trust for their kind contribution. He congratulated all the awardees who have extended their help to revive and continue this service on the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi.

The Vice President said that Harijan Sevak Sangh and its units are participating in a big way on the Swachh Bharath Programme launched by Prime Minister. He congratulated them for taking up this noble cause with enthusiasm and vigor.

Following is the text of Vice President's address:

"I deem it a privilege and an honour to be associated with the premier Gandhian Institution, the Harijan Sevak Sangh-- the constitution, rules and regulations for which were written by Mahatma Gandhi himself in 1932. I am particularly happy to rededicate Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya and unveil the plaque for pile foundation of Didi Nirmala Deshpande Nilayam today as it also happens to be the birthday of Didi Nirmala Deshpande, who was known to me for decades.

Didi Nirmala Deshpande, who headed the organization till her last breath, was a dedicated Gandhian, who set an example to thousands of people not only in India but all over the globe. She had participated in the Bhoodan Movement and undertook a 40,000-km padayatra along the length and breadth of the country to popularize the message of Mahatma Gandhi's Gram Swaraj. She was a true messenger of peace and also strove for communal harmony.

I was quite distressed to know that Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya was ravaged by floods and went under eight feet of water in 2015 and was again damaged by the cyclone in 2016. It is all the more saddening that 10,000 books on Gandhiji were destroyed in the floods. However, I am happy to know that following an appeal several people have donated books on the Father of the Nation to the Vidyalaya. I am also happy to know that the Vidyalaya's workshop and machinery have been renovated to the maximum extent.

The statue of Thakkar Bapa, who was a close associate of Gandhiji, was also submerged and had been renovated. I deem it an honour to unveil the renovated statue. I am told that the statue was originally unveiled on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

It is indeed a matter of pride that stalwarts like Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Shri Rajagopalachari, Shri Venkataraman and Didi Nirmala Deshpande were associated with this Institution.

This Institution, which commenced as an Industrial School for Harijan boys in 1935, is now admitting students of all sections and integrating them as desired by Gandhiji, while giving priority to brothers and sisters of the community. I am delighted to know that this campus also has a school providing free education from pre-K.G to primary level, a working women's hostel providing a home away from home and a Gandhi public library.

Didi Nirmala Deshpande Nilayam of Harijan Sevak Sangh is being built to provide accommodation to girls pursuing higher education. I am glad to know that the Sangh is helping by providing them free boarding and educational facilities with the support of kind-hearted, philanthropic persons and organizations. For a few students, boarding grant is being given by the Governmentt of Tamil Nadu. I am told that the building is planned to be completed by 2020 to provide accommodation to more than 200 girls.

I understand that there is a great demand for this hostel from the girls hailing from rural areas with a difficult socio-economic background.

I am told that the present hostel building is in a highly dilapidated condition and gets flooded even during moderate rains. Under the leadership of Prof. Shankar Kumar Sanyal, the new building project has commenced.

It gives me great pleasure to know that Shree Geeta Bhavan Trust has initiated the new building construction by sponsoring the pile foundation costing 65 lakhs. I congratulate them and I am sure that this will serve hundreds and thousands of girls in the years to come. And I am glad to unveil the plaque of Shree Geeta Bhavan Trust for their kind contribution.

I congratulate all the awardees who have extended their help to revive and continue this service on the path shown by Mahatma Gandhi .

I am told that the proposals of both Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya and Harijan Sevak Sangh as part of CSR initiatives are under consideration of various public and private sector companies like Neyveli Lignite Corporation, ONGC, Coal India, LIC Golden Jubilee Fund, Asian Paints, RCC DIVA [Rajashtan Association], Lions Club and others. I am sure these organizations will take up the projects to help Thakkar Bapa Vidyalaya and Harijan Sewak Sangh.

As Mahatma Gandhi said "Service to humanity is Service to God". These institutions have been doing yeoman service and deserve a helping hand from philanthropists, corporate and other resource persons.

I also know that Harijan Sevak Sangh and its units are participating in a big way on the Swachh Bharath Programme launched by Prime Minister. I congratulate them for taking up this noble cause with enthusiasm and vigor.

Finally as an associate of Didi Nirmala Deshpande, I appeal to one and all to extend a helping hand to this great and noble institution for which Gandhiji himself has written the constitution.

Thank you."

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