

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF UNVEILING OF STATUE OF P.N.
PANICKER**

Thiruvananthapuram, December 23, 2021

My dear brothers and sisters of God's own country.

Every visit to Kerala fills me with special joy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I feel a great deal of satisfaction after unveiling the statue of the pioneer of learning, literacy and library movements, the Late P.N. Panicker. I am thankful to the members of P.N. Panicker Foundation for giving me this opportunity to be here with you all. The contributions of Shri Panicker have been so noteworthy and widely praised that leaders from different political parties have been brought together today on this stage in his memory.

This special occasion makes me think about the simple yet great vision of Shri Panicker. A visionary can see what others don't see. I believe that Shri Panicker would have seen his pioneering steps leading to the great strides Kerala took in the areas of literacy and education. An area of illiteracy can remain an area of darkness. The light of literacy can brighten the path to individual and collective progress.

I am told that the young P.N. Panicker used to read the daily newspapers to groups of illiterate people of different ages. He started a reading centre in a small room provided by the local cooperative society in his village in Kuttanad. Shri Panicker held Mahatma Gandhi in very high esteem. He wanted to remove the evil of illiteracy which Gandhiji

had described as a curse and shame of the country. Shri Panicker spread a very simple and most potent message - "Vayichu Valaruka" which means "Read and Grow".

Shri Panicker made libraries and literacy a movement of the people. In fact, he made it a popular cultural movement. It is a unique feature of Kerala that in every village, even in the remotest villages, there is a library. People feel an emotional connect with the library in their village or town just as they feel a special connect with the temple or church or mosque or school in their village or town. Libraries created by the movement of Shri Panicker later became nerve centres of all social and cultural activities of which the literacy movement of Kerala is an impressive example. Children come to read in the libraries. Older people also come to read and meet and discuss issues relevant to them. The credit for libraries having a central place in the culture of Kerala goes to Shri P.N. Panicker who connected common people to libraries. It is understandable that when books are made easily available to the people, those who cannot read will find a trigger as well as a facility to read. The Granthashala Sangam started by Shri Panicker with about 50 small libraries in 1945 grew into a large network of thousands of libraries. Through this large network of libraries, the common people of Kerala could get to know the thoughts and ideals of Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, V.T. Bhattathiripad and other great masters. The cosmopolitan outlook of an average person from Kerala can be traced to the library and literacy movement of Shri Panicker.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very happy to note that P.N. Panicker Foundation is carrying forward his mission with dedication. The Foundation is promoting the cause of digital literacy as a tool to realise the cause of inclusive growth. I am told that the Foundation was established about two decades ago under the chairmanship of Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer. During my days as an advocate in the Supreme Court, I closely observed and highly

admired Justice Krishna Iyer as a great jurist and judge whose heart would beat for the poor and the downtrodden. Justice Krishna Iyer looked at the system of law as an instrument of social and economic justice. It was only natural for him to get involved in such activities of social development and inclusion. I am happy to note that the Foundation started digital learning in rural areas since the beginning of this century and this effort has succeeded in establishing thousands of home digital libraries. This effort of the Foundation is a very meaningful tribute to the memory of Shri Panicker.

I must appreciate the efforts of Professor P. J. Kurien, Former Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha and Shri N. Balagopal, Vice Chairman of P. N. Panicker Foundation in reaching the unreached through initiatives like P.N. Panicker National Reading Mission. I have been informed that the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has directed the Foundation to reach 30 crore under-privileged people in the country through the National Reading Mission by 2022. I have been told that the Foundation has made substantial progress in the direction of realising this target.

I am happy to note that the commendable work done by P.N. Panicker Foundation resulted in the setting up of P.N. Panicker Vigyan Vikas Kendra by the Government of Kerala as an autonomous organization. As mandated by our Constitution, it is one of the Fundamental Duties of every citizen of India to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform. The objective of the Vikas Kendra is to reduce poverty through knowledge. The Vigyan Vikas Kendra also seeks to inculcate scientific temper among the youth.

Observing the punyatithi of Shri Panicker on 19th June as 'Reading Day' is the most appropriate way of paying tribute to the great nation builder. I am happy to note that the Panicker Foundation has been associated by Niti Aayog to take up development programs in some aspirational

districts of the country. These programs go beyond literacy and utilise the tool of learning to help improve agriculture and bio-diversity.

I am glad to note that the Foundation is celebrating Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav by organising a large number of awareness camps with the help of gram-panchayats throughout the country. I am very happy that the activities of the Foundation are now spreading to other parts of the country as well as some foreign countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The 'Sakshara Keralam' movement became popular and effective due to the foundations laid down by Shri Panicker. Kerala became the first State to have hundred per cent literacy. The high literacy and education levels in Kerala have had a multiplier effect. Kerala leads other states on several indices of human development, including aspects of sustainable development. Successive governments in Kerala have kept sustained focus on the agenda of growth and development. Therefore, the State has maintained its leadership position on several markers of excellence.

The Governor of Kerala, Shri Arif Mohammed Khan and the Chief Minister, Shri Pinarayi Vijayan are among the most experienced and sagacious personalities in the area of public service. I am glad that the people of Kerala are benefitting from the guidance of the Governor and the leadership of the Chief Minister to scale even greater heights of excellence and inclusion.

Kerala displays India at its cultural and harmonious best. It has attracted people from all parts of the world, absorbed different cultures and religions while maintaining its distinct features. The people of Kerala have earned respect and goodwill in the rest of India and in different

parts of the world. The enterprising members of the Indian diaspora from Kerala have not only been sending large amounts of remittances home but also kept the prestige of India very high in the lands they have adopted as their work-places.

The service sector professionals from Kerala, especially the nurses and doctors are highly respected and relied upon by people everywhere. Recently, when the Covid-pandemic affected the entire world, nurses and doctors from Kerala were among the most visible Covid-warriors in India, the middle-east and so many other regions on the globe. The people of Kerala enhance the pride of India.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I love visiting Kerala also because this state fills me with energy which it derives from its bountiful blessings of Mother Nature. I recall our former Prime Minister, Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, whose birth anniversary we will celebrate on 25th December, had chosen this land to welcome the new millennium. During the five days he spent in Kumarakom on the banks of the Vembanad lake, both the poet and the thinker in him were inspired. He penned a series of musings, in which he wrote [and I quote]: “Nature’s silent beauty provides a perfect setting here for contemplation.” [Unquote] In God’s own country, it is indeed a special privilege to be in the abode of Lord Vishnu – Thiru-vananthapuram.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is a saying in Sanskrit - Amritam tu Vidya, which means education or learning is like nectar. I once again commend the Panicker Foundation for distributing this nectar of learning in the entire country.

I extend my heartiest greetings to all of you for Christmas and wish you all a very Happy New Year.

Thank you,

Jai hind!