

**ADDRESS BY THE HON'BLE PRESIDENT OF INDIA
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF RECEIVING THE COPY OF BOOK - ADI
SHANKARACHARYA: HINDUISM'S GREATEST THINKER**

April 21, 2018, Rashtrapati Bhavan

I welcome all of you to Rashtrapati Bhavan. I am happy to have formally received the first copy of the book “Adi Shankaracharya: Hinduism’s Greatest Thinker”, written by Shri Pavan Varma. I congratulate him and the publishers on the book’s release.

Today has been well chosen for this event. I am told that by the lunar calendar, April 21 is Adi Shankaracharya’s birth anniversary. Born over 1,200 years ago in Kerala, his imprint is still apparent in contemporary India and in fact in all parts of our country. He remains among the most influential personalities in our long and rich history. He was a spiritual leader, a Vedantic philosopher, a monk, a scholar and an explorer. His contributions are not just in the religious or spiritual sphere – they continue to be a guide to everyday life.

As the book points out, while modern technology expands our knowledge of the universe, it is our ancient wisdom that helps us to reconcile our very existence with today’s cutting-edge inventions and discoveries. That is why 21st century India is a synthesis of both the Upanishads and the Internet. Both are important for the Indian soul.

Adi Shankacharya instinctively understood this. Way back in the Eighth Century, he combined pride in India’s earliest philosophical traditions with the realities of his age. He was curious to study the spiritual sources of our nation, and how these are represented and expressed differently in different regions. For this, he travelled throughout the country. He established four peethas – in the north, south, east and west. These peethas were and are different – and at once they were and are the same. That is the beauty of India.

I have been fortunate to have travelled to all four of Adi Shankaracharya's peethas. I have visited Dwarka in Gujarat, Badrinath in Uttarakhand and Rameswaram in Tamil Nadu. Rameswaram, of course, is also the birthplace of my distinguished predecessor, Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. And only a few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to go to Jaganath Puri in Odisha. A visit to these four peethas of Adi Shankaracharya – a char dham yatra as it is called – should not be seen as just a pilgrimage. It is actually a cultural exploration of the frontiers of Indian civilisation and of our diverse society.

I am particularly glad that Shri Varma has found time to write such a book despite a busy schedule in public life. This is important, because reading and writing expand the human mind. When our political functionaries and public servants undertake such activities, it raises the calibre and quality of public debate in society. That is why I would urge all our political friends to undertake their intellectual pursuits at all times – and not just on prime time.

With those words, I once again congratulate the author. And I hope this book succeeds in taking the story and message of Adi Shankaracharya further and wider.

Thank you

Jai Hind!