

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND
ON THE OCCASION OF LAUNCH OF
VARIOUS WELFARE PROGRAMMES ORGANISED
BY THE MATA AMRITANANDAMAYI MATH**

Kollam, October 8, 2017

This is my first visit to Kerala since taking charge as President. My first visit outside Delhi had taken me to Leh, Ladakh, Jammu and Kashmir, in the extreme north of our country. I had gone there to be with soldiers defending our borders in extremely difficult conditions.

This visit is to the opposite end of our country – to the south. And yet it is also a visit to a state that has done so much to defend our ethos and our culture. I refer to Kerala's role as one of the leading spiritual homes of our country and of our composite society.

The bravery of our soldiers on the one hand and the compassion and wisdom of our spiritual leaders on the other are twin pillars on which we rest our hopes. These keep our civilisation secure. The flame of spiritualism shines brightly in Kerala and has done so for thousands of years. I refer to such revered people as Adi Shankaracharya, Sri Narayana Guru and Ayyankali. They did so much to unite our country with a common sense of spiritualism – as well as to push for much-needed social reform.

Kerala's spiritual consciousness is well beyond faith and religious distinctions. The Christian community here is one of the oldest not only in India, but anywhere in the world. The first mosque to be built in India is in Kerala. I have been told it was constructed by Arab merchants in the Seventh Century, during the lifetime of the Prophet.

Kerala also has a rich Jewish heritage. Jews settled here, I am given to understand, after the Romans drove them out of Jerusalem about 2,000 years ago.

These historical instances reflect the mutual accommodation and understanding of different faiths and religious communities in Kerala. This is a state where one community has willingly given space to another. This is a history that we cannot forget and must learn from. And this is an accommodation and understanding that is at the essence of spiritualism.

Mata Amritanandamayi represents this enlightened spiritual tradition of Kerala. Like Adi Shankara or Ayyankali, Amma sees her spiritual mission as a contribution to nation building. She recognises, as only the truly spiritual can, that the greatest service to the Divine is service to fellow human beings.

And the greatest service we can render to our fellow human beings – especially to those less privileged than us – is to help them achieve their potential. This includes building their capacity in health and education, and ensuring that they get equal opportunities. Amma has worked precisely in these areas.

I am told the Mata Amritanandamayi Math is providing scholarships to over fifty thousand children from poor families. It is also running one of India's best universities – the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham.

Addressing a College event in Delhi recently, I had said, “The truly educated are not those who collect degrees, but those who use those degrees and the under-lying scholarship to become nation builders in our society.”

I am moved to learn that the Amrita University follows a similar philosophy. As Amma herself has said: “Today, universities and their researchers are ranked mainly based on the amount of funding they receive, the number of papers they publish and their intellectual calibre. But along with this, we should take into consideration how much we have been able to use their research to serve the lowest and most vulnerable strata of society.”

I highly commend such thinking. I also commend the Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences and Research Centre and the other medical

institutions run by the Math. I am told that in the past two decades they have provided absolutely free treatment, including surgeries, to 43 lakh patients. This is a big number! I look forward to the inauguration of the second Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences, coming up in Faridabad, near Delhi.

Friends

Spiritualism challenges us to raise the quality of human consciousness – and raise the quality of life of every human being. The projects of the Math that are being initiated today do just that. They aim to provide clean drinking water in 5,000 villages across the country. And they strive to make villages open defecation free.

Such initiatives promote the health and well-being of individuals and families. Such initiatives are reflective of both the spiritualism and the progressive ideals of Kerala – as embodied by Amma.

Above all, such initiatives help build a better society and a happier nation.

While concluding, I would like to wish Mata Amritanandamayi good health and a long life to serve humanity in the coming years.

Thank you
Jai Hind!