

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB
MUKHERJEE ON THE OCCASION OF FLAGGING OFF THE
9TH JAN VIGYAN YATRA ORGANIZED BY P.N. PANICKER
VIGYAN VIKAS KENDRA**

Thiruvananthapuram on October 30, 2012

It gives me great pleasure to join you today to flag off the **9th P.N. Panicker Vigyan Vikas Yatra**. I was very much interested when I heard about this annual event organized by the P. N. Panicker Vigyan Vikas Kendra in collaboration with the Government of Kerala and other agencies. I understand that the Yatra is one of the flagship events of the Kendra - whose mission it is to spread education to reduce poverty.

I understood this to be a remarkably effective method of outreach which has proven to be successful and result oriented. It has become widely known as a focused grass-root level campaign to encourage reading and love for books among the young. I was struck by its simplicity – and its evolution from a small reading room in a village into a movement for mass literacy – which shows that it has been embraced by the people for whom it is meant. They have not only responded, but taken full advantage of it.

It is hardly any surprise that this programme of mass contact has successfully instilled in the young people in Kerala, a thirst for learning and a scientific temper by taking knowledge

and the instruments of learning to those who have no access to them.

Today, the Government of India's national literacy mission draws inspiration from the work and methods of Shri P.N Panicker.

This is also an opportunity to pay tribute to the Shri P.N. Panicker, father of the Library Movement, who dedicated his life to initiate and guide this highly successful literacy movement.

From the Travancore Library Association that he founded in 1945 with 47 rural libraries, he developed a series of similar units which has now grown into a network of 6000 libraries and a tremendously successful movement for total literacy in Kerala. The results speak for themselves. Kerala has the distinction of being the first State in India to attain 100 percent literacy.

Shri P.N. Panicker had a simple but powerful slogan, '*vayichu valaruka*' which exulted all children to read and grow.

Shri P.N. Panicker, like many of us, was driven by Gandhiji's words - that "*Mass illiteracy is India's sin and shame and must be liquidated*".

In keeping with his commitment to Gandhian ideals, he also built into his programme a campaign to foster social amity and harmony.

I am indeed satisfied to note that the Yatra aims at discussions on participatory democracy, panchayat-centred

development and awareness about the importance and significance of *grama sabhas*.

I note that the yatra will cover a distance of 2000 kms. in 30 days and will cover a population of about 30 lakh citizens. In undertaking this Yatra, the young participants will propagate the message of P.N. Panicker and spread awareness of his invaluable service to this State.

I am also happy to note that the yatra has very specific plans - of creating micro units of excellence, innovation through entrepreneurship, better productivity and competitiveness.

The yatra has rightly chosen a target group of farmers, unorganized labourers, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and other under-privileged communities. I understand that the participants will interact with the populations that they will cover - through a direct method of presenting concepts through street theatre. I commend them for choosing to focus on developing an interest in the youth – the leaders of tomorrow - and motivating them to think about their own individual contribution to the growth and progress of their societies.

I would like to congratulate the Government of Kerala for their observance of 19th June, the date of the passing of this great visionary, Shri P.N. Panicker, as the “Day of Reading” which is annually marked by a week of public events and activities in schools and educational institutions. There could be no better way to honour the monumental contribution of Shri P.N. Panicker to literacy and education in this, “God’s own Country”.

With these few words, I extend my best wishes to the participants in the P.N. Panicker Vigyan Vikas Yatra and wish them every success in their project.