

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA, SHRI PRANAB  
MUKHERJEE AT THE INAUGURATION OF VISWA  
MALAYALEE MAHOTSAV**

**Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala: 30-10-2012**

It is indeed a pleasure to be here in Kerala, God's Own Country for the Viswa Malayala Mahotsavam, the grand festival of Malayalam.

This is my first visit to Kerala after assuming the office of President. I am extremely happy that this occasion affords me the opportunity to meet a cross section of the vibrant literary and academic communities present here today. It is also significant that this Festival is being held on the 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Kerala, on the basis of linguistic re-organisation on November 1, 1956.

I extend my warm greetings to you all - and through you, to the people of Kerala.

You will deliberate, over the next three days, on the significance, current evolution and development as well as the future of Malayalam. You will address shared concerns, and you will take initiatives based on your collective sense of what needs to be done.

Distinguished guests,

The canvas of Indian culture is a vast and unique kaleidoscope. It is enriched by the heritage and cultural traditions of its constituent societies. India's 'unity in diversity' has always provided the space that is required for their sustenance and growth. Within this happy co-existence, Malayalam is the essence and embodiment of the rich history, culture, art and heritage of the Malayali people.

The Viswa Malayala Mahotsavam-2012 that is being inaugurated today, celebrates the language and unique cultural identity that is Malayalam.

On this occasion, we are also acknowledging Kerala's unique and ancient history. It has been a melting pot of cultures and races and linguistic and religious influences.

The Sumerians, one of the earliest urban societies to emerge in the world in Southern Mesopotamia more than 5000 years ago, knew Kerala as a major spice trading centre. The Aitareya Aranyaka which belongs to the Aitareya Shakha of the Rig Veda composed in the period between 1700-1100 BC is the earliest Sanskrit work that specifically mentions Kerala.

With regard to the language, Malayalam, carvings in the Edakkal Caves in Wayanad provide evidence that the common people of Kerala were expressing themselves in Malayalam at about the end of the 4th century AD. The earliest known record in Malayalam is an inscription dated to approximately 830 AD. The script, as Koleluttu or "Rod Script", is derived from the Grantha script, which in turn is derived from Brahmi.

Experts generally agree that Malayalam evolved either from a dialect of Tamil or from the branch of the Proto-Dravidian language - from which modern Tamil also evolved. They agree that Sanskrit words had influenced Malayalam. It is recorded that although Tamil continued to be used as the literary idiom for some time, eventually, the people's language prevailed in this region and Malayalam became the language of communication for all purposes by the beginning of the early 9th century AD. But Malayalam's links to Tamil and Sanskrit have endowed it with a number of unique characteristics still evident in the modern language.

Today, an estimated 35 million Malayalam speakers can be found around the world, the majority of them concentrated in India.

The earliest literary work in the Malayalam language is said to be the "Ramacharitam" (which translates literally to "Deeds of Rama"), an epic poem dating to the 12th or 13th century.

In later centuries, a more comprehensive body of Malayalam literary work began to emerge. Some well-known Malayalam language writers include the classical poets Thunchath Ezhuthachan and Kunjan Nambiar as well as Kumaran Asan of modern period and the novelists C.V. Raman Pillai, Chandu Menon, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai. The latter's works brilliantly portrayed Kerala society and events. At the same time, there was an equal interest in literary works of other languages. The epic, 'Vyasa Mahabharatham' was first translated into Malayalam. Not to forget, every major Bengali work of literature has been translated into Malayalam.

Malayalam being one of the most evolved languages of our country, it is but natural that many of the greatest literateurs of our times are Malayalis. Starting with G. Sankara Kurup, the recipient of the first 'Jnanpith Award', contemporary Malayalam writers have set high standards. I am delighted to know we have with us today

two 'Jnanpith Award' winners, Shri M.T. Vasudevan Nair and Shri O.N.V. Kurup.

Distinguished participants,

A language, however much it may be enriched with traditional values and heritage, would lose its relevance and popularity if it did not evolve. It is therefore necessary, while safeguarding our cherished languages, to promote them through all the modern means at our disposal today – while at the same time, taking care to nurture their uniqueness. A language that is ill equipped to meet the requirements of the new generation, cannot be safe in its hands. This Mahostavam will, no doubt, address such issues.

I understand a new Malayalam University will start functioning from November 1, 2012 at Tirur and will be dedicated to the study of Malayalam linguistics, literature, performing arts, visual arts and architecture, cultural anthropology and cultural and intellectual heritage studies among others. I have no doubt that the research

and activities in this University will positively impact the preservation and propagation of Malayalam.

I see the Viswa Malayala Mahostavam as a very timely initiative in this context. Kerala is rightly referred to as a land blessed with the bounties of nature and a people who have proven themselves to be at the forefront of social and educational reforms.

This is the first state in the country to attain cent percent literacy. With the development of Malayalam, a 'Keralite' identity has evolved while simultaneously remaining open, tolerant and hospitable to new elements and influences.

For Malayalis within the state - and more than 30 lakh who are spread across the world, I am sure that this sammelan will provide a platform to share experiences, hopes and aspirations.

You will, no doubt, use this occasion to set the agenda and the goals to be achieved through this platform. I once again wish

you all a very purposeful sammelan and look forward to hearing of its successful outcome.

With these words, I inaugurate the Viswa Malayala Mahotsavam-2012.