

Beat: News

Indian President Releases Postage Stamp Commemorating 200 Years Of Old Seminary

Orthodox Church Made Contributions

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USPA NEWS - President, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee releasing a Postage Stamp commemorating the 200 years of the Orthodox Theological Seminary or Old Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala, in Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi on April 21, 2015. Union Minister for Communications & IT, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad is also seen.

The President of India Mr. Pranab Mukherjee released a Postage Stamp commemorating the 200 years of the Orthodox Theological Seminary or Old Seminary, Kottayam, Kerala at Rashtrapati Bhavan on April 21.

Speaking on the occasion, the President said, "for nearly 14 Centuries, the three major religions of Kerala, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have existed in peace and harmony, respecting each other's belief and cooperating to promote social welfare. In fact, Kerala was the first state in the country in which both Christianity and Islam took roots with people voluntarily choosing different religious beliefs.

The Old Seminary was set up by the Malankara Orthodox Church situated in Kerala, a state known for the peaceful co-existence of different religions and communal harmony. The Seminary and the Orthodox Church played their part in achieving this goal which led to the state realizing the complete separation of spiritualism and communalism. The lighting of oil lamps in and around Churches, the raising of the flagstaff and flags during festivals and the custom of entering the Churches barefoot are all Hindu traditions that have become a part of the Church practice. These bear testimony to the sharing of traditions by both the religions.

The President said, "the Orthodox Church has made enduring contributions to the betterment of the life of the people of Kerala. The role of the Church in spreading education cannot be ignored. Christian Community established a large chain of elementary Schools throughout Kerala, under the supervision of the Seminary and its leaders. The Seminary was the first indigenous initiative towards universal literacy and education, which has today made Kerala the most literate state in the country.

The charity and healthcare activities of the Syrian Church also originated in the Old Seminary under its leadership. It contributed to the improvement of the overall literacy in the state, created greater access to healthcare and empowerment of women leading to higher standards of living and quality of life in the state. The role of the Church in healthcare, women's empowerment and upliftment of the less privileged section of society are unparalleled.

The President said, "it is not without reason that the Seminary has to its credit several "firsts" in the area of Human Development, apart from its contributions to the training and development of the clergy of the Church. He said that he was informed that the "Cottayam College", which was co-located with the Seminary was the first English teaching institution in the State. The College taught, apart from Malayalam, Greek, Latin, Syriac, Hebrew and Sanskrit. The first printing press was also established in the premises and scholars of the Seminary took active part in unifying and standardizing the common Malayalam Script.

Benjamin Bailey along with Hermann Gundert, were among the pioneers of the development of modern Malayalam language and script. To imagine that the first Malayalam Dictionary was developed and published by a Theological Seminary is a tribute to the commitment of the leaders of the Seminary and the Church itself to the overall development of Kerala. The credit of translating Bible into the first Indian language, Malayalam, also goes to the Seminary and College under the leadership of Benjamin Bayley.

The Orthodox Theological Seminary known as the Old Seminary or Cottayam Syrian College is run by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the St. Thomas Christians. This is a heritage monument recognized by the Government for its importance as a two hundred year old quadrangular edifice where English education was started for the first time in Kerala.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com