

# Balavikas Youth Competition 2024 Recitation

## Intermediate

### My Faith in My Own Land

I am proud of the history of my faith in my own land: of the travels of Adi Shankara, who journeyed from the southernmost tip of the country to Kashmir in the north, Gujarat in the west and Odisha in the east, debating spiritual scholars everywhere, preaching his beliefs, establishing his mutths. I am reaffirmed in this atavistic allegiance by the Harvard scholar Diana Eckwriting of the 'sacred geography' of India, 'knit together by countless tracks of pilgrimage'.

The great philosopher-president of India, Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, wrote of Hindus as 'a distinct cultural unit, with a common history, a common literature, and a common civilization'. In reiterating my allegiance to Hinduism, I am consciously laying claim to this geography and history, its literature and civilization, identifying myself as an heir (one among a billion heirs) to a venerable tradition that stretches back into time immemorial.

Above all, as a Hindu, I belong to the only major religion in the world that does not claim to be the only true religion. I find it immensely congenial to be able to face my fellow human beings of other faiths without being burdened by the conviction that I am embarked upon a 'true path' that they have missed. This dogma lies at the core of the 'Semitic faiths', Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father [God], but by me' (John 14:6), says the Bible; 'There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet', declares the Quran, denying unbelievers all possibility of redemption, let alone of salvation or paradise. Hinduism asserts that all ways of belief are equally valid, and Hindus readily venerate the saints, and the sacred objects, of other faiths. I am proud that I can honor the sanctity of other faiths without feeling I am betraying my own.

After all, as the philosopher Raimon Panikkar put it so brilliantly in his *The Vedic Experience*, 'It is precisely faith that makes thinking possible, for faith offers the unthought ground out of which thinking can emerge. It is faith that makes moral and other decisions possible, opening to us the horizon against which our actions become meaningful.' As a Hindu I seek meaning in my actions within the context of my religious beliefs.

-Shashi Tharoor