

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF
TAMIL NADU AT THE 172ND BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF DR. ANNIE BESANT
ORGANISED BY THE YOUNG MEN'S INDIAN ASSOCIATION AT YMIA PREMISES,
ROYAPETTAH HIGH ROAD, MYLAPORE, CHENNAI ON 01.10.2018 AT 5.00 P.M**

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

Thiru. S. Gurumurthy,
President,
Young Men's Indian Association

Thiru. Tim Boyd
International President,
The Theosophical Society,

Thiru. R.P. Krishnamachari,
Vice President,
Young Men's Indian Association

Thiru. K. Prabhakaran,
Honorary Secretary,
Young Men's Indian Association

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me great joy to be here today at the Young Men's Indian Association on the 172nd birth anniversary of Dr. Annie Besant. The occasion also marks the inauguration of 30 Annie Besant single teacher schools — a novel step to promote high quality primary education.

The Young Men's Indian Association (YMIA) was founded by Annie Besant in 1914, in support of the Indian independence movement. It is a prominent institution of Chennai that offers the youth, opportunities to improve their well being in mind and body and also their moral fiber and character so as to enable them to function as responsible citizens of India.

Mrs. Besant herself sponsored the construction of a building in Madras (now Chennai) for the YMIA, which was completed in 1915. A large public meeting hall in the building, designed to seat 1500 people, was given the name Gopal Krishna Gokhale

Hall after the Indian leader. It was at Gokhale hall that she announced the formation of the Home Rule League in 1916.

In my own way I also share an association with Dr Annie Besant through Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale. A few of you may be aware of it but most people in the audience may not know of this.

I have been associated with a Nagpur daily newspaper called The Hitavada since 1979, which was originally launched in 1911 by Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the mentor of Mahatma Gandhi. It was because of Gokhale's leadership that The Hitavada became a leading newspaper of Central India, whose voice is heard all across the country even today. Gokhale a member of the Indian National Congress since 1889 had worked together with many leaders of those times, including Annie Besant to obtain greater political representation and power over public affairs for common Indian citizens.

In 1912 when Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale visited South Africa, Gandhiji received personal guidance from him which gave him a better understanding of the issues confronting the common people of India. In his autobiography, Gandhiji recognizes Shri Gokhale as an admirable leader who was pure as a crystal, gentle as a lamb, brave as a lion and chivalrous to a fault and the most perfect man in the political field.

When Annie Besant joined the Indian Independence struggle in 1914, she was also drawn towards Shri Gopal Krishna Gokhale. Unfortunately Shri. Gokhale died in 1915 and it was in the same year that the Gokhale Hall was made the seat of operation for the Young Men's Indian Association in honour of his memory.

You are all aware that Dr. Annie Besant was one of our foremost freedom fighters and won recognition as the President of the Indian National Congress, to which office she was elected in 1917.

In the same year she was arrested and interned because of her increasingly agitationist approach work for India's Home Rule. But seeing the Home Rule movement spread from the cities to the countryside throughout India, the British government had to commit to a policy of gradual movement toward Indian Home Rule. Soon afterwards Dr. Besant was released from prison.

She also started two journals: *The Commonwealth*, a weekly dealing with issues of national reform; and the Madras Standard a daily newspaper which for 15 years was a

powerful instrument to promote Home Rule and revolutionized Indian journalism, inspiring Indians with a dynamic vision of India's future.

Annie Besant who became the President of the Theosophical Society, Adyar in 1907 continued to hold that position till 1933. She had moved towards spiritual theosophy in the late 1880's and distanced herself from Marxism as she found the mindless pursuit of the economic side of life, lacking the spiritual dimension. In the Theosophical Society under the leadership of Annie Besant there was emphasis on Buddhist philosophy and esoteric Christianity and the tenets of Hindu philosophy of Central India. Hence it was no surprise that she worked with Pandit Madhan Mohan Malavia for creating the Hindu University at Banaras which started functioning from 1917.

In an inspiring lecture she delivered at Adyar she said and I quote, "What is the ideal for a nation? It must have spirituality, expressed in many-graded religions, suitable for every class in the nation: and if, as here, there are various religions, they must be friends, not rivals, acknowledging their common origin—divine wisdom—and their common aim—the uplifting of the nation. . . . It must have healthy conditions of life, a robust and vigorous manhood, a strong and refined womanhood. These are the things which make up the ideal; and education is to bring them to realization."

About India Annie Besant said and I quote "The India that I would give my life to help in building is an India learned in the ancient philosophy, an India to which all other lands should look towards, for spiritual life—where the life of all should be materially simple, but intellectually noble and spiritually sublime."

The Nightingale of India Dr. Sarojini Naidu had this to say of Dr. Besant "She was a combination of Parvathi, Lakshmi and Saraswathi. Had it not been for her enthusiasm, one could not have seen Mr. Gandhi leading the cause of Indian freedom today. It was Dr. Annie Besant who laid the foundation of modern India".

I am happy to note that the ideals for which Annie Besant lived and worked for are being pursued with vigour and enthusiasm even now by institutions such as the Young Men's Indian Association and the Theosophical Society.

I am happy to see that on Dr. Annie Besant's 172nd birthday, a special effort is being launched by Young Men's Indian Association to take education to those who are beyond its reach.

The single teacher schools that will be started with dedicated teachers will I am sure, provide the right avenues for children to flower into good citizens of India in the future.

Good education is dependent on good teachers, but Character building goes beyond being good. To be able to distinguish between good and evil and to stand on the side of goodness is the first step towards character building. One must have the courage of conviction in the greatness of goodness, rise above jealousy, suspicion and other petty failings and have the strength to support all those who are doing good. This is the true essence of character building. Academic brilliance, combined with a robust body in a healthy mind and character embellished with a nationalistic spirit is what a student must aspire for. And it is a welcome sign that institutions such as the Young Men's Indian Association that are dedicated guiding and leading the students on this noble path are entering the field of education.

I Congratulate the President, and other office bearers of the Association for this innovative step.

I am sure that in the coming years the schools will grow from strength to strength and rise to a position of great eminence.

May the Young Men's Indian Association continue its yeomen service in the task of nation building and may India, our nation rise to become the Jagat Guru of the world.

NandriVanakkam....

Jai Hind....