

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR
OF TAMIL NADU AT THE VALEDICTORY FUNCTION OF THE OSKON 2018 AT
TAJ COROMANDEL, CHENNAI ON 29.07.2018 AT 11.00 A.M.**

Anaivarukkum Kaalai Vanakkam

Hon'ble Vice-President of India
Shri Venkaiah Naidu Ji

Thiru. D. Jayakumar
Minister for Fisheries and Personnel and Administrative Reforms

Dr.C.Vijaya Baskar
Minister for Health and Family Welfare

Dr.S.S.Badrinath
Chairman Emeritus, Sankara Nethralaya

Dr.Vasanthi Badrinath

Dr.Girish S Rao

Prof. Christopher

Smt. Prabavathy Seethapathy

Dr.Prema Padmanabhan

Dr. K.S. Vasan

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a privilege to be here today at the valedictory function of OSKON 2018 in which the Hon'ble Vice-President of India is the Chief Guest. This conference is being dedicated to the memory of Professor Giancarlo Falcinelli.

The fact that the conference marks the launch of an awareness campaign at the national level to prevent corneal blindness makes it even more significant.

Corneal Blindness is a visual impairment that occurs from the cornea becoming clouded, or scarred by infection that ultimately affects the transparency of cornea, making a person blind. 25% of India's 15 million blind people owe their condition to corneal blindness, and therefore the need for improving awareness about corneal blindness is being keenly felt.

Man is endowed with the five senses of vision, smell, touch, hearing and taste. It is estimated that 80% of the inputs to the sensory system of a human being is through eyesight. This is increasing day by day particularly with the discovery of appliances such as Television, Computer, and Cell Phones.

For most people, it is a matter of course that when they open their eyes, they see the world. But we must understand that there is a complex process by which the eyes function.

When you see an object or read a magazine, the light rays reflecting off the object penetrate our eyes and first strike the Cornea. After the Cornea, the rays traverse the anterior eye chamber and pupil in the iris. The anterior chamber is filled with the fluid which nourishes the Cornea and the lens of the eyes. A ventilation system drains out the excess fluid. The iris dilates or shrinks the pupil regulating the quantum of light rays penetrating the eye. The rays then go through the lens of the eye, which is enveloped by the ciliary muscles which regulate the curvature of the lens. After passing through the lens, the light rays strike the Retina which has photo receptors numbering more than 100 million. The information from the Retina is relayed to the vision centre of the brain, through the optic nerve. It is, thus that we see an object or a picture. As you can all see the process of vision is a complex one. Even if one of the components in the process is affected, vision is impaired.

Many of the causes of corneal blindness are avoidable. Corneal conditions amenable to primary prevention include measles infection, Vitamin A deficiency, trachoma, ocular trauma, the use of harmful traditional eye medication remedies and congenital rubella syndrome. Corneal blindness resulting due to these

diseases can be completely prevented by institution of effective preventive or prophylactic measures at the community level.

It is estimated that 50% of corneal blindness is treatable. The prompt diagnosis and appropriate treatment of corneal ulceration and the easy availability of antibiotics and anti-fungals, should be the aim of community health programs. Many of those currently blind from corneal diseases can be visually rehabilitated by corneal transplantation. Penetrating keratoplasty is the most effective and most often performed solid organ transplantation.

As corneal blindness is a major public health problem and the status is expected to change over time, there is a need to periodically review the published literature on the subject.

Conferences such as these greatly help in disseminating the latest developments in the field leading to adoption of the latest techniques and strategies for prevention and cure. Considering the stature of Sankara Nethralaya and Dr. Badrinath I am sure that the outcome of the conference will greatly benefit society and the nation.

The founding of Sankara Nethralaya almost 40 years ago was based on 2 clear Gandhian values

1. Create a world class ophthalmic facility right here in India, at a time when eye care was largely dispensed along with other treatments in a general hospital. This was a clear reflection of Gandhian ideal of 'Self Reliance'
2. The institution was founded on the command of the Pontiff of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt to dispense eye care with love and a personal touch without disparity to paying and non paying patients. The institutions functions to this day on this strong Gandhian principle of 'Service to society'.

Dr. S.S Badrinath the founder chairman of Sankara Nethralaya has been decorated with the Dr. Bc Roy award and the Padma Bhushan in addition to a number other honours conferred on him.

It has always been part of the tradition of India to care for the weak, the poor and the suffering. Swami Vivekananda feelingly spoke of '*Daridhra Narayana*', which basically means that service to the poor is equivalent in importance and piety to service to God. Veda Vyasa also brings out the greatness of helping people by stating succinctly in two words – '*paropakarahpunyaya*' – *Helping others is the best virtue*.

The great Tamil poet Thiruvalluvar has beautifully summed it up as “giving to the poor is charity”, all else have the quality of expecting a return.

I call upon the Sankara Nethralaya and all those assembled here to redouble their efforts and expand the coverage of their operations as much as possible so as to reach out and offer the best eye care not only in Tamil Nadu but also all over India.

I am sure that there will be many more well-intentioned philanthropists to support this initiative. While assuring them all my support, I extend my best wishes to the team of doctors under Dr. S.S. Badrinath and exhort them to go wider, deeper and farther.

Nandri Vanakkam
Jai Hind Jai Tamil Nadu