

**ADDRESS BY THIRU BANWARILAL PUROHIT, HON'BLE GOVERNOR OF
TAMIL NADU AT THE FOUNDER'S DAY CELEBRATION (132ND BIRTHDAY OF
DR.S.MUTHULAKSHMI REDDY) ORGANISED BY AVVAI HOME & ORPHANAGE
FOR GIRLS AT DR.SUNDARA REDDY MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM, ADYAR,
CHENNAI AT 30.07.2018 AT 5.00 P.M**

Anaivarukkum Maalai Vanakkam

**Dr. V.Shanta
Chairman, Cancer Institute**

**Thiru. Sugal Chand Jain
Chairman, Avvai Home**

**Ms. V.Susheela
Secretary & Correspondent, Avvai Home**

**Ms.Radhika
School Committee Secretary, Avvai Home**

**Ms. Sasikumari
Head Mistress of the T.V.R, School of Avvai Home**

**Ms. Yasodha
Head Mistress of the Primary School of Avvai Home**

Distinguished Invitees

Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me joy and fulfillment to be participating in the Founder's Day Celebrations of the Avvai Home being held here at the Dr.Sundara Reddy auditorium of the institution.

The founder of this great institution was Dr.Muthulakshmi Reddy, a multifaceted genius who excelled in every field that she participated in.

Dr. Muthulakshmi is an inspiring role model for all women. She was the first woman doctor in India and the first woman vice president of any legislative council in the world.

In 1926 when she was nominated to the Madras legislature as a member she enjoyed the distinction of being the first woman member of a legislature in India.

Many were the reforms that she brought about in her life time, the foremost of them being the abolition of the Devadasi system.

Yet another note worthy reform was that of raising the age of consent of marriage for girls to 16.

As a legislator and activist for women's empowerment, she believed that "law and legislations are there only for sanction. It is up to women to energize themselves and put them into action".

Two great personalities who influenced her life were Dr. Anne Besant and Mahatma Gandhi. After Dr Reddy started taking an active part in the freedom struggle, she raised the fertility of fighting the British from within the legislative. She gave up her position as a legislator in the British government, during the quit India movement.

Recognising her services to the nation, the Government of India conferred the Padma Bhushan on her in 1956. With her indomitable spirit, devotion, commitment, empathy and courage to face all obstacles she left behind notable institutions such as the Avvai Home and the Cancer Institute and the womens India Association.

The story of the origin of Avvai Home is an inspiration. Following the abolition of the Devadasi system in the year 1930, three young girls came to Dr Reddy's house seeking protection because they would not be accepted in any hostel and even by relatives. The girls had sought asylum and protection to lead a normal life. Dr Reddy not only accepted the challenge but demonstrated her total commitment to the cause of women. The Avvai Home was born in her own residence. One of the girls became a doctor, another a teacher and the other a nurse.

Avvai Home has grown from being a shelter home to an educational centre.

Today the Home comprises of
a Residential Home with 201 children
a Primary School
and the T.V.Ramamurthi Higher Secondary School.

The birth of the Cancer Institute (WIA) is yet another interesting story.

Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy witnessed the painful and death of her cousin due to cancer, at a very young age. This made her determined to start a hospital to fight the disease. She dreamt of a place where anyone suffering from cancer would receive treatment, irrespective of social and economic status.

She had to face public ignorance and apathy. When she floated the idea she was told – why a Cancer Hospital? People only die of Cancer.

After facing many hurdles her dream did come true, when the Cancer Institute (WIA) was founded under her inspiring leadership in the year 1954.

What started as a hospital of 12 beds with 2 honorary medical officers and 2 nurses and a cluster of huts for in patients her grown into a comprehensive Cancer Centre comprising of a hospital of 550 beds with state of the art Equipment. The Institute also has a Research Centre, a Muthulakshmi College of oncological Sciences, a division of Preventive oncology and Palliative care. It is internationally recognized as a “Centre of Excellence”. And annually, more than one lakh people are treated for cancer. This could be made possible because of total dedication and commitment displayed by Dr. Shanta who has been recently conferred the Padma Vibhushan award.

The central theme of Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy's life was the upliftment that she gained through education.

She realized that education was the force that could shatter the shackles of mindless tradition and pursued her studies relentlessly.

With this great quest for knowledge, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy went to school in her native Pudukkottai till the age of thirteen and then studied under tutors at home to become a matriculate in 1902. She then started exploring the possibility of becoming a graduate.

There was only one college in Pudukkottai and it was only for men.

But with the intercession of the Maharaja of Pudukkottai, she became the only girl student in college and became a graduate.

Her cousin's death during delivery strengthened her resolve to become a doctor and she came to Madras to study medicine.

After that she went on to pursue post-graduate studies in medicine in England, where she specialized in gynecology and paediatrics.

She then took an interest in the study of Cancer and pursued further studies at the Royal Cancer Hospital in the United Kingdom.

This enabled her to start the Cancer Institute in 1954.

This function is being held at the Dr.Sundara Reddy auditorium today. Dr.Sundar Reddy was the first Indian doctor to acquire a FRCS. When he got married to Dr. Muthulakshmi it was with the understanding that he will not stand in the way of her progress in the field of medicine, or legislative business. Dr. Muthulakshmi herself acknowledges his support and the support of her father who encouraged her to study through this statement and I quote, "I want to demonstrate to the outside world how much Indian men respect and honour their women, how deeply they sympathise with all our legitimate aspirations for equal rights, and how much they value our help and cooperation in the administration of the state"

This institution is named after Avvaiyar the famous Tamil Poetess who lived during the Sangam Age. In her Aathichudi she explains the importance by saying “Never stop learning or reading’.

Another famous statement of Avvaiyar which is displayed at NASA is “What you have learned is a mere handful; What you haven’t learned is the size of the world”.

Let me therefore conclude by reiterating that the path to progress is illuminated by the lamp of education. Prosperity knocks at your door when people in society acquire the asset of education.

I am thankful to the organizers for having invited me to this function being organised to honour one of the most illustrious daughters of India. May success greet them at every step and may the name and fame of Dr.Muthulakshmi live forever and continue to be an inspiration for millions of Indians to follow her footsteps.

Nandri Vanakkam

Jai Hind.