

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF INDIA,  
SHRI RAM NATH KOVIND  
ON THE OCCASION OF COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY  
CELEBRATIONS OF THE MADRAS LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

**Chennai, August 2, 2021**

1. I am glad to be among you here today on this historic occasion. Today, I have just unveiled the portrait of 'Kalaingar' Thiru M. Karunanidhi. It is indeed a momentous day! We are commemorating the centenary of the Madras Legislative Council, as it was known then. August is an especially auspicious month in our national calendar as it marks the anniversary of our Independence Day too. In these years, the nation has made great progress on several fronts, and it was made possible by the joint work of people and the leaders of the country.
2. The history of the Madras Legislative Council, as you know, dates back to 1861. An advisory body set up back then bloomed into a law-making assembly in 1921. Under colonial rule, there were, of course, many limitations and challenges on the functioning of such a body. Also, there were numerous separate constituencies based on caste, community and other parameters. Still, even if partial, it was a move towards a responsible government. Democracy, in its modern form, was returning to the land where it was practised centuries ago.
3. It was a new beginning heralded by the people of the Madras Presidency, which included Tamil Nadu as well as parts of Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Odisha and Lakshadweep. Dreams and aspirations of the people of these regions, shaped by the freedom movement, found an expression in the new Legislative Council. In the Justice Party, which won popular mandates in the initial phase, people had a platform to turn their dreams into reality.

4. The Legislative Council enacted many forward-looking legislations and also underwent many changes in its early decades. That spirit of democracy remains the guiding light of the state legislature. It would not be wrong to say that this legislature became the fountainhead of many progressive legislations which were subsequently replicated across the country to empower the weaker sections of society and strengthen our democracy. The Madras legislature had sown seeds of a fully representative democratic form of governance which were realised after Independence.
5. This legislature can rightly be credited with nurturing the roots of democracy by focussing on governance to uplift the poor and purge social evils. Politics and governance in the region evolved around positive and rational content that targeted the welfare of those living on the margins. Abolition of the Devdasi system, widow remarriage, mid-day meals in schools and distribution of agricultural land to the landless were some of the revolutionary ideas that transformed the society. The concept of the welfare state has taken deep roots in this legislature irrespective of who rules here. Here I would like to quote a few lines from the great Tamil poet, Subramania Bharati, who sums up the progressive thinking of the people of Tamil Nadu and I quote:

मंदरम् कर्पोम्, विनय तंदरम् कर्पोम्  
वानय अलप्पोम्, कडल मीनय अलप्पोम्  
चंदिरअ मण्डलत्तु, इयल कण्डु तेलिवोम्  
संदि, तेरु पेरुक्कुम् सात्तिरम् कर्पोम् [unquote]

This can be interpreted as: [I QUOTE]

We will learn both scripture and science  
We will explore both heavens and oceans  
We will unravel the mysteries of the moon  
And we will sweep our streets clean too [UNQUOTE]

6. It is indeed gratifying to learn that the legislature has a tradition of honouring the greatest stars of land. The assembly already has the portraits of some of our greatest heroes: Thiruvalluvar, Mahatma Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, C. N. Annadurai, K. Kamraj, E. V. Ramasami, B. R. Ambedkar, U. Muthuramalingam Thevar, Muhammad Ismail Sahib, M. G. Ramachandran, J. Jayalalithaa, S. S. Ramaswami Padayachi, V. O. Chidambaram Pillai, P. Subbarayan, and Omanthur P. Ramaswamy Reddiar. Now this hall of fame will also have the portrait of Thiru Karnunanidhi whose entire life was devoted to the people's cause in the state.
7. When I came here, I was thinking about Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, Gandhiji's conscience keeper and a titan among the freedom fighters. He was the first Indian occupant of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, and his presence graced this august house too. He was the first Premier or Chief Minister of Madras State too. His successors too were exemplary political leaders. Among all Rajaji's successors, however, it is Thiru Karunanidhi who ruled the longest, and thus has left a defining stamp on Tamil Nadu.
8. 'Kalaingar' started his political career right in his early teenage years, when India was still fighting for freedom, and he left us only recently. When as a young boy fired by ideals he had started working for the downtrodden, India was in the shackles, exploited under foreign rule for long years, stricken by poverty and illiteracy. When he breathed his last, he must have been satisfied that this land and its people had made astounding progress and development on all fronts. He must have been satisfied too, as he spent every waking hour of his long and productive life in the service of the people of the state and also of the nation.
9. What can I say about his contributions to Tamil literature and cinema? What I know is that there are very few political leaders who are so passionate about language. For him, his mother-tongue was the object of worship. Tamil, of course, is one of the greatest and the oldest languages of humankind. The whole world takes pride in its

rich heritage. But it was Karunanidhi who ensured that it was granted official recognition as a classical language. Kalaignar was a leader in a class of his own. He was among the last links we had with the stalwarts of our national movement.

Ladies and gentlemen,

10. It is to those stalwarts that my thoughts go, as the nation celebrates the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Independence. Our national movement spans from 1857, or even before, to 1947. During these decades, there were radicals and revolutionaries. There were pacifists and constitutionalists. They had different methods and they had different visions. But they were united in their reverence for the motherland. Each, in his or her own way, strove to serve Bharat Mata. Like different tributaries coming together in a river, they all came together for the cause of national independence.
11. They found a confluence in Gandhiji. Mahatma Gandhi not only personified all that was best in our culture and tradition, but he also improved upon the ideas of several western thinkers. Alongside him was a legion of patriots – lawyers, scholars, social reformers, religious and spiritual leaders and others. Each of them was matchless. Think of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar: Such a towering genius and such a visionary! But for each name written in history books, there were countless others whose names were never recorded. They sacrificed comforts, even careers, and sometimes their lives, so that we could live in a free nation.
12. Those few decades, I believe, produced some of the greatest generations ever seen on the face of earth. To them, this country will ever remain in debt. To them, the only tribute we can pay is to be continuously inspired by their lives and their ideals. They gave us the gift of freedom but they also gave us responsibility. Their vision has been taking shape, but it is an ongoing process. Just as they each played their own part, we each have to play our part in taking the nation to new heights.

13. I urge the youth, especially, to continuously engage with the past in order to understand the present and progress in the future. In the lives of Mahatma Gandhi, Subramania Bharati and others, you will find answers to questions that are arising in your minds. I find that the young generation is more and more interested in our recent history. They give me the hope that the work that began with the known and unknown freedom fighters will continue. That India, with its wisdom, will show the way to the world in this century.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

14. I congratulate the people of Tamil Nadu on this auspicious occasion. My best wishes to all of you.

Thank you.

Jai Hind!