

Subramainaya baharathi

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Introduction

Subramaniya Bharathi the Poet of Tamil Nationalism & Indian Freedom " He who writes poetry is not a poet. He whose poetry has become his life, and who has made his life his poetry - it is he who is a poet. " - Bharathy Mahakavi

Subramaniya Bharathi was born on 11 December 1882 in Ettiyapuram in Tamil Nadu. Bharathi died on 11 September 1921. In a relatively short life of 39 years, Bharathi left an indelible mark as the poet of Tamil nationalism and Indian freedom. Bharathi's mother died in 1887 and two years later, his father also died.

At the age of 11, in 1893 his prowess as a poet was recognised and he was accorded the title of 'bharathi'. He was a student at Nellai Hindu School and in 1897 he married Sellamal. Thereafter, from 1898 to 1902, he lived in Kasi. Bharathi worked as a school teacher and as a journal editor at various times in his life. As a Tamil poet he ranked with Ilanko, Thiruvalluvar and Kambar. His writings gave new life to the Tamil language - and to Tamil national consciousness. He involved himself actively in the Indian freedom struggle. It is sometimes said of Bharathi that he was first an Indian and then a Tamil.

Perhaps, it would be more correct to say that he was a Tamil and because he was a Tamil he was also an Indian. For him it was not either or but both - it was not possible for him to be one without also being the other. Bharathi often referred to Tamil as his 'mother'. At the same time, he was fluent in many languages including Bengali, Hindi, Sanskrit, Kannada, and English and frequently translated works from other languages into Tamil.

That many a Tamil web site carries the words of that song on its home page in cyber space today is a reflection of the hold that those words continue to have on Tamil minds and Tamil hearts. He was Bharathi's salute to the Tamil nation and many a Tamil child has learnt and memorised those moving words from a very young age - and I count myself as one of them. Bharathi was a Hindu. But his spirituality was not limited. He sang to the Hindu deities, and at the same time he wrote songs of devotion to Jesus Christ and Allah.

Bharathi was a vigorous campaigner against casteism. We shall not look at caste or religion, All human beings in this land - whether they be those who preach the vedas or who belong to other castes - are one. Bharathi lived during an eventful period of Indian history. Gandhi, Tilak, Aurobindo and V. V. S. Aiyar were his contemporaries. He involved himself with passion in the Indian freedom struggle.

Bharathi served as Assistant Editor of the Swadeshamitran in 1904. He participated in the 1906 All India Congress meeting in Calcutta (chaired by Dadabhai Naoroji) where the demand for 'Swaraj' was raised for the first time. Bharathi supported the demand wholeheartedly and found himself in the militant wing of the Indian National Congress together with Tilak and Aurobindo. Aurobindo writing on the historic 1906 Congress had this to say: "We were prepared to give the old weakness of the congress plenty of time to die out if we could get realities recognised."

Only in one particular have we been disappointed and that is the President's address. But even here the closing address with which Mr. Naoroji dissolved

the Congress, has made amends for the deficiencies of his opening speech. He once more declared Self-Government, Swaraj, as in an inspired moment he termed it, to be our one ideal and called upon the young men to achieve it. The work of the older men had been done in preparing a generation which were determined to have this great ideal and nothing else; the work of making the ideal a reality lies with us. We accept Mr.

Naoroji's call and to carry out his last injunctions will devote our lives and, if necessary, sacrifice them. " (Bande Mataram, 31 December 1906) Many Tamils will see the parallels with the Vaddukoddai Resolution of 1976 which proclaimed independence for the Tamils of Eelam - the work of older men determined to have 'this great ideal and nothing else' and the later determination of Tamil youth to devote their lives, and 'if necessary sacrifice them' to make that ideal a reality. In April 1907, he became the editor of the Tamil weekly 'India'. At the same time he also edited the English newspaper 'Bala Bharatham'.

He participated in the historic Surat Congress in 1907, which saw a sharpening of the divisions within the Indian National Congress between the militant wing led by Tilak and Aurobindo and the 'moderates'. Subramanya Bharathi supported Tilak and Aurobindo together with 'Kapal Otiya Thamilan' V. O. Chidambarampillai and Kanchi Varathaachariyar. Tilak openly supported armed resistance and the Swadeshi movement. These were the years when Bharathi immersed himself in writing and in political activity. In Madras, in 1908, he organised a mammoth public meeting to celebrate 'Swaraj Day'.

His poems 'Vanthé Matharam', 'Enthayum Thayum', 'Jaya Bharath' were printed and distributed free to the Tamil people. In 1908, he gave evidence in the case which had been instituted by the British against 'Kappal Otiya Thamizhan', V. O. Chidambarampillai. In the same year, the proprietor of the 'India' was arrested in Madras. Faced with the prospect of arrest, Bharathi escaped to Pondicherry which was under French rule. From there Bharathi edited and published the 'India' weekly. He also edited and published 'Vijaya', a Tamil daily, Bala Bharatha, an English monthly, and 'Suryothayam' a local weekly of Pondicherry.

Under his leadership the Bala Bharatha Sangam was also started. The British waylaid and stopped remittances and letters to the papers. Both 'India' and 'Vijaya' were banned in British India in 1909. The British suppression of the militancy was systematic and thorough. Tilak was exiled to Burma.

Aurobindo escaped to Pondicherry in 1910. Bharathi met with Aurobindo in Pondicherry and the discussions often turned to religion and philosophy. He assisted Aurobindo in the 'Arya' journal and later 'Karma Yogi' in Pondicherry. In November 1910, Bharathi released an 'Anthology of Poems' which included 'Kanavu'. V. V. S.

Aiyar also arrived in Pondicherry in 1910 and the British Indian patriots, who were called 'Swadeshis' would meet often. They included Bharathi, Aurobindo and V. V. S. Aiyar. R. S. Padmanabhan in his Biography of V. V. S. Aiyar writes: " All of them, whether there was any warrant against them or not, were constantly being watched by British agents in Pondicherry. Bharathi was a convinced believer in constitutional agitation. Aurobindo had

given up politics altogether... and Aiyar had arrived in their midst with all the halo of a dedicated revolutionary who believed in the cult of the bomb and in individual terrorism. In 1912, Bharathy published his Commentaries on the Bhavad Gita in Tamil as well as Kannan Paatu, Kuyil Paatu and Panjali Sabatham. After the end of World War I, Bharathi entered British India near Cuddalore in November 1918. He was arrested and imprisoned in the Central prison in Cuddalore in custody for three weeks - from 20 November 20 to 14 December. He was released after he was prevailed upon to give an undertaking to the British India government that he would eschew all political activities. These were years of hardship and poverty. Eventually, the General Amnesty Order of 1920 removed all restrictions on his movement. Bharathy met with Mahatma Gandhi in 1919 and in 1920, Bharathy resumed editorship of the Swadeshamitran in Madras. That was one year before his death in 1921. Today, more than 80 years later, Subaramanya Bharathy stands as an undying symbol of Indian freedom and a vibrant Tamil nationalism. P. S. Sundaram in his biographical sketch of Subramania Bharathy concludes: " Though Bharathi died so young, he cannot be reckoned with Chatterton and Keats among the inheritors of 'unfulfilled renown'.

His was a name to conjure with, at any rate in South India, while he was still alive. But his fame was not so much as a poet as of a patriot and a writer of patriotic songs. His loudly expressed admiration for Tilak, his fiery denunciations in the Swadeshamitran, and the fact that he had to seek refuge in French territory to escape the probing attentions of the Government of Madras, made him a hero and a 'freedom fighter'. His lilting

songs were on numerous lips, and no procession or public meeting in a Tamil district in the days of 'non-cooperation' could begin, carry on or end without singing a few of them...

Bharathi's love of Tamil, both the language as it was in his own day and the rich literature left as a heritage, was no less than his love of India... When he claims for Valluvan, Ilango and Kamban, Bharathy does so not as an ignorant chauvinist but as one who has savoured both the sweetness of these writers and the strength and richness of others in Sanskrit and English... "(in Poems of Subramania Bharathy - A Selection Translated by P. S. Sundaram, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd, 1982)

Mahakavi Subramania Bharathiar was one of the greatest Tamil poets, a prolific writer, philosopher and a great visionary of immense genius. He was also one of the most prominent leaders of the Indian independence movement. His national integration songs earned him the title " Desiya Kavi" (National Poet). His patriotic songs emphasize nationalism, unity of India, equality of men and the greatness of Tamil language. Bharathiar was born on December 11, 1882 in Ettayapuram, which is now part of Thoothukudi District. Bharathiar was educated at a local high school where his talents as a poet were recognized even at the age of 11.

He had voracious appetite for learning ancient and contemporary Tamil literature and had gifted intellect to derive astonishing truths from ancient poems. At the age of 22, he became a Tamil teacher at Setupati High School in Madurai and the same year he was appointed as Assistant Editor of a daily newspaper called " Swadesamitran". In 1906, he was editor of a weekly

magazine called " India". By 1912, Bharathiar was already a legend in South India and his political meetings were attracting multitudes of young patriots, ready to join the non-violent movement for attaining freedom from the British rule.

Bharathiar died on September 11, 1921, at the young age of 39. The legacy of the poet however endures forever

Literary Works

The following collections published by Bharathi piracuralayam, Triplicane, 1949 contains shorter pieces:

- thEciya keethangal - 57 poems
- thoththirap pAdalkal - devotional songs, 66 pieces
- vinayakar nanmanimalai, kannanpattu -23 pieces
- pirapadalkal - 30 pieces
- autobiography in verse form: svacarithai (49 st.), bharathi arupathu (66 st), cinnacankaran kathai puthiya aaththiccudi, paappapattu (1914, 16 quatrains)
- pancali capatham - narrative poem in 1548 lines
- rose - gnana ratham, 1910 short narrative pieces
- aaril oru pangku, 1911-12

Cheeezzzz: The Tamil poet, Maha Kavi Subramaniam

Bharathiar, familiarly referred to as Bharathi, has been a real life hero. His extraordinary power was his poetry, his weapon of choice- his pen. He wrote at a time when his country was crying out for reform. Though many may remember him for inspiring his people to seek freedom from alien rule, he also spoke out for the freedom and equality of the Indian woman - his damsel in distress - in a time when they were barely acknowledged for their existence.

The mid 19th century was a time when the Indian woman had absolutely no rights and their relationship with their husbands were close to that of Master and Slave. Women were not thought important enough to pursue studies, as

their role was more as the dutiful wife at home. Bharathi was first among the growing school of Renaissance poets during this period who insisted that the only way for a country to grow was through empowering its women. " Aanum Pennum nigarrenak kolvathaal

Ariviloanki ivvagayakam thalaikumaam" Taken from his poem Puthumai Penn (New Woman) the line evokes that " When we realize that man and woman are equal, this world will flourish with knowledge". From religious hymns to inspiring nationalist anthems and poems shattering without hesitation every social taboo that was held close by conventional South Indians, Bharathi voiced his opinion without hesitation in a lyrical style that has not even been surpassed by literature that followed his period.

Among his well-known poetry is Oadi vilayaadu paapaa. While a poem of instruction for children it also hints to all ages on accepting people as human beings and not on their caste or creed. Jaadhigal illaiyadi paaapaa, Kulath thaalchi uyarchi sollal paavam paapaa Neethi uyarnta mathi kalvi Anbu niraiya udayavargal meloar paapaa " There is no caste little one. It is a sin to categorise people as high and low caste. Only those who possess justice, intelligence and education and great love are of a high caste"

Thus he included the Tamil woman in his fight for freedom who, in one of his essays he called " Slaves who remain conservative and orthodox" as they were " not permitted to make their own choices". Woman as a mother was Bharathi's favourite theme and the book 'Woman in Modern Tamil Literature' by Loganayagi Nannithamby says that " Bharathi who envisages women as the incarnation of Sakti [Parasakti - the great Goddess or the Mother-

Goddess] says in one of his essays on philosophy: As a man, all the female deities you pray to, represent the latent powers of Parasakti hidden in women like your mother, wife, sister and daughter. Bharati's idealist views later turned to more down-to-earth, reformist views with the seeping in of Northern influences like the coming of the Brahmins and Puranas, which was slowly deteriorating the status of the woman of the South. He argued that if women's freedom were to be deprived, man would perish along with it and that men were not to monopolize freedom. Aettayum pengal thoduvadhu theemaiyendren niyirunthavar Maaynthuvittar Veetukkullay pennaip pooti vaippoam endra vindai manithar thalai Kavilnthaaar " Those who thought that women should not touch books and learn have died!

Those surprising people who said that we have to lock women in homes to do their duties, have put their heads down in shame. " His hope for women included a liberated free woman who thought independently and used her knowledge, like men, for the betterment of the country. His wife Chellamal Bharati, in her biography of her husband related incidents when she says how her husband put all social barriers to the wind and clung to her arms while walking boldly next to her (Brahmin women were required to walk a few steps behind her husband). Nimirntha nannenjum naer konda paarvaiyum Nilathinil yaarukkum anjaatha nerigalum Thimirntha gnanach cherukkum iruppadhaal Semmai maadhargal thirambuvathillaiyaam" " With upright heart and steadfast look and ideas that are not afraid of anyone in the world- the woman does not falter as she has the delight of wisdom. " This great poet died on September 11, 1921 after being trampled by an Elephant

when he went seeking blessings at the temple. He was thought of as such an outcast at the time that only seven people attended his funeral.

But his poetry, which belied his time, caused the birth of new ideas and the emancipation of the status of the woman in India today and remains as inspiration to millions of people around the world.