

Subramania Bharathi's Poetry: The Sparkling Ink on the Petals of Lotus

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Abstract

Subramania Bharathi is one of the most enchanting personalities of Tamil literature whose pen pierced the black clouds of pessimism and slavery and created an open atmosphere of hope for man and woman. He painted the beautiful picture of Indian natural phenomena and synthesized its culture and civilization. From a common parrot to the high peaked Himalayas and from the Himalayas to the Almighty are the subjects of his concern. As a patriotic poet, he was not blind to his own nation's features; he appreciated the virtues of other creeds, cultures and civilizations. To awake the nations against the tyranny of the British, to sing the glory of Mother India, to emancipate women and adore her as the *Adi-Shakti*, to connect glorious past with dire present and to envision a glorious future are the subjects of his concern. He demands political, social, ethical and cultural freedom to one and all without any discrimination of sex, gender, caste, creed or religion. Though he was an extremist, his approach to society is deeply rooted in the Vedas. His poetry is true reflective of his life as he did not dictate only Freedom but rubbed shoulders with the titans for the liberation of Mother India. The present study is introspection into his superb writings and his patriotic and revolutionary poetry

Keywords: Nation, patriotism, Deity, Culture, Optimism.

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It is not difficult to be a patriotic and revolutionary poet but it is not the child's play to compose immortal poetry on hard chest of Time when nothing was favourable to a person but his strong will of seeing his liberated nation. Subramania Bharathi's pen is dipped in fire; he wrote on the petals of lotus with his fiery ink.

When there were the clouds of humiliation and dejection; when India and Indianness were considered abusive subject and when each eye was soaked in tears under the tyranny of the British Empire, revolutionary ideas and activities were prevalent in all parts of nations. The Writers, artists and poets, from all corners of India, were singing the glory of

India and awaking the long slumbered nation to stand against the tyranny and made nation free. Subramania Bharathi, whom we hailed among the highest poets of the Tamil literature and 'People's poet', was one of highly remarkable signatures of nationalistic poetry in the last decades of slavery from the British.

A reformist fighting for the cause of women and child marriage, a journalist writing against the tyrannous policies of the government, a master of various Indian and foreign languages and a poet of the first rank holding his place among the immortal poets during Indian struggle for freedom, Subramania Bharathi was born as born C. Subramaniyan in the courtyard of Lakshmi Ammal and Chinnaswami Subramania Iyer. Before he reached to his teenage, he was conferred the title of 'Bharathi', by the Raja of Ettayapuram for his excellent compositions. Under the impact of Sister Nivetida, the discipline of Swami Vivekananda, he stood for the liberation of women. With the demand of Swaraj and negation of the foreign goods, he witnessed Calcutta Indian National Congress session, presided by Dadabhai Naoroji, for the demand of 'Swaraj' and boycott of British goods and supported B. G. Tilak in the Surat Session (1907). As a writer, he translated the speeches of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Bal Gangadhar Tilak in Tamil and composed various poems of patriotic as well as social concerns

In the model of 'Vande Matram' from the Anand Math by B. C. Chatterjee, there were flourished many applauses from the revolutionary pens and 'Vande Matram' and 'Jay Bharat' skipped from Bharathi's creativity. In the 'Vande Matram', the poet celebrates India, free from caste, creed or religion but he is not rigid; if he is to choose between caste and foreigners, he strongly prefers caste because 'The Mother's children may quarrel/ Yet they are brother' (p. 47). He is sure that thirty crores would drag the British out and sing the glory of the nation together. In the 'Jay Bharat', he says that not only men and women but the deities also sing the glory of *Aryavarta*:

Jai Hind! Jai Hind!
Victory to Bharat!
Victory to Bharat!
Victory! Victory! (p. 50).

When the British were hoarding the wealth of the nation and glorifying the tiara of their Majesty with the Kohinoor of India, when Indians were degraded and uprooted from their bases and it was the custom of the elites to mock at the ancient culture and civilization, Bharathi sang Indian glory full throated. He reminded 'the mighty Himalayas', 'the generous Ganga', 'the sacred Upanishads', 'the sunny golden lands', 'gallant warriors', 'the divinest music' and 'hoary antiquity' of India. How positively surcharged is his tone when he says,

Danger shall not scare us any longer
And poverty shall not sear our souls.
Self- interest shan't drive us to meanness,
And cowardly indifference shall cease forever. (p. 48)

Proclamation to stand against the tyranny was contemporary in each nook and corner of India; the poets were singing the songs of awakening the nation and so did our poet in his universally acclaimed poem, 'Bharati, Mother Bharat, Rise'. India was the running blood in his veins and he saluted the nation with various nouns and adjectives. He referred India, in many of his poems, as 'Life of my life', 'Nectarean essence', 'Golden hued Mother', 'Darling daughter of snow-crested Himavants', 'Great Bharat's queen'. What was India to him, is noted in the fact that in 'Bharati, Mother Bharat, Rise', he calls the nation 'Life of my life' twice; this salutation was applied by Gurudev R. N. Tagore for God in his the 'Gitanjali'.

After Swami Vivekananda's fiery introduction of India on the dais of Chicago Religious Assembly and the efforts of many living souls, India was resurging into its glorious past and optimistic future but it was not possible with yoked shoulders. Bharathi realized it; therefore, he scolded the weakness of Indians' 'shrunken heart', 'listless face', 'lack-lustre eyes' and 'frightened chicken heart' in 'Phoenix'. The resurgence of India was possible with honest mind, acted hands and unmingled mind. He inspired people to render their thoughts into actions, to unite nation into a thread, to believe in the glory of the holy ancient scripture and foster virtues honestly.

He knew it very well that the tree of freedom could not be planted on the fertile land; it needed blood, not water. It was the lamp, lit by the oil of thoughts for him. Many leaders passed away behind the deaf walls of the prisons and departed from their lives with the beautiful dream of free India. He was sure that in a slave nation, there could be no nationality possible, there could be neither knowledge nor prosperity of art and industry. He presented the restlessness of a common man for freedom in 'Thirst for Freedom' and says,

When will this thirst for freedom slake?

When will our love of slavery die?

When will our Mother's fetters break?

When will our tribulations cease?(p. 57)

Freedom for Bharathi is not one-sided; it's not the political freedom that he wanted to win for his nation. It's multi-faced; it is social, literary, cultural and linguistic freedom too. The richness of culture and civilization is useless if the nation is in chains of any foreign sovereignty and this suffering and cry of India is perfectly expressed in 'Ode to Freedom'; he says that a nation divided cannot be a nation indeed. No prosperity of soul or individuality, no treasure of wisdom and science, no reward for industry can be expected in a slave nation;

Can it harbor a soul? Can knowledge prosper?/ Can industry thrive?

What hope for poetry, the learned arts or scripture? (Ode to Freedom, p.58)

His was the time when licking the boots of the masters and wagging tails at their behest was considered glorious; it was the time when speaking in mother tongue was primitive and parroting English was the sign of elaterin tendency, he raised his voice for his mother-tongue. It was the enthusiastic tone of all the prominent nationalistic figures to pay reverence to their mother-tongues and even before the Vardha education plan of Gandhi ji

who emphasized the roots of education in mother-tongue, Bharathi focused on his mother tongue- Tamil. He is so confident in 'Tamil' that he calls it 'deathless' in 'Taymanava'. He wants to invoke the deities like Brahma and Saraswati in his Tamil tongue and is sure that their blessings be of him. He invokes Devi Saraswati to enable him in singing the story of the Mahabharat, especially of Draupadi in Tamil. He was polyglot but no language is sweeter to him than 'Honey-sweet Tamil' (In Praise of Tamil, p. 54) as he is sure that "the taste of Tamil / can give on earth/the joy divine (In Praise of Tamil, p. 55). Even the Tamil poets are unsurpassable to any modern poet to him. His 'The Word' is perfect commentary on the application of mother tongue. The poet says confidently that expression in mother tongue is always surcharged with *mantric* effect. He asks ironically if the gods will not ascend to him if he speaks in his mother tongue rather than English. He comments on the statements of the statesmen and says if all his ills will come to an end if he prays to Him in the languages of the foreigners. He says,

We'll worship the Fire daily
And invoke ambrosia;
We'll chant the scriptures in Tamil
And confidently claim
The guerdon of glory. (p.89)

Besides singing the glory of Indian past and natural scenario, he celebrated Indian heroes and paid his homage enthusiastically. He considered the way, presented by them, the way of salvation and freedom from physical and political pains. Through the pen-pictures of our heroes, he joined the corners of India. As he was a Tamil, the Tamil poets and authors were the subject of his concern, but he composed on Guru Govind Singh from Punjab, Bal Gangadhar Tilak from Maharashtra and Gandhi Ji who was both national and international figure at a time. He reminded Guru Govind Singh Ji as 'nectar of the brave/ Teacher, lord of Hosts/ Warrior-source of Punjab's lions/ Ocean of knowledge, melodious-poet/ magic craftsman' in his poem 'Guru Govind' (p. 60). He says that the ancient India was not out of manliness and shows us how *Khalsawas* formed against the tyrannous attack of disharmonious, dividing and dusty ideas of Aurangzeb.

When he emerged on the political scenario; he came in the contact of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, the famous radical leader and praised his works in one of his poems. He calls Tilak. 'the love-fed honey-dripping bud of our Renaissance' and 'the symbol and security of our reviving nationhood' (p. 66). When the glory of Lal-Bal-Pal was on decline and M. K. Gandhi was like a meteor to Indians; everywhere hearts were carpeted for his welcome. Like other poets of the age, he was also fascinated towards Gandhi ji and sang his glory. He composed a complete poem on him entitled 'To Mahatma Gandhi'. He says that the coming of Gandhi is for the liberation of 'miserable and poor' nation. Gandhi's new weapon of non-violence and truth, against 'the violent terrorist's ways', were the 'choicest herbs' for the bite of the British- cobra; he found his plans, new and definite targeted 'to end this raging fever/ of dire and dark subjection. (p. 59). He appreciated the religious philosophy of Gandhi ji; it was the potent of Gandhi that he controlled 'the murderous, strife-ridden/

political fray'. His confidence is on the pinnacle of realization that freedom to India was possible only with *satyagraha* of Gandhi ji. He came in the contact of Sister Nivedita, whom he met in 1905 and accepted her as his 'Guru' and Swami Abedhananda, two important persons of the Ramkrishna Mission after Swami Vivekananda; he sees the motherly touch in the former and was attracted to her 'rare vigour, force of love and strength of wisdom' as S. Vijaya Bharti reads and welcomed the later as the light-bringer in the land where even the Noon is darkened. It was Sister Nivedita's impact on him that he considered the role of woman in the struggle for freedom; he gave ten commandants for the liberation of woman in which the marriage of girls after puberty, uncompelled marriage, equal right in ancestral property, widow-remarriage, freedom of higher education and job were predominant.

Even his Devotional poetry is sparkling with the flame of patriotism. He worships Lord Murugan in his poem, 'Muruga My Lord', and asks for 'merit, worth, fame, penance/ ability, wealth, firmness' (p. 69) as they can liberate his devotees. Mother Shakti or Kali dances to create good out of bad; She kills the demons of negativity and gives birth to positivity. He consoles himself in 'Victory' that Freedom is at arm's length and soon the nation will see the glorified sun of liberation, red with the blood of martyrs; he says, "Freedom shall be ours here and now/ The Mighty Mother lodges in my heart/ and *bhakti* shall bear nectarean fruit. (p.75)

Bharathi's nationalism is not bound within the boundaries of nation; it is on the wings and touches the tops of love, shelter, sacrifice and sounding thoughts. His nation is free from caste, creed or religion; there is room for one and all that have their heads on their palms to serve Mother India. In 'Sound the Tocsin', he says;

No more terrors of caste
The world thrives on love.
Let's help one another, and
Raise the commonwealth. (p.83)

With the advent of First World War, Belgium was attacked by Russia; this unfortunate event was criticized everywhere and our poet protested it in his poetic manner. He composed a poem 'Greetings to Belgium' and called Belgium 'a gipsy-girl facing tiger with tray in hand' (p. 67). He said that Belgium is facing the tyranny with heroic heart, knowing the result and its sacrifice would not go waste because sacrifice for a good cause returns back to us abundantly. He predicts that Belgium would raise up like phoenix and the attackers would perish. He pays his homage to Jesus Christ and calls him 'the soul'. For him, Mary Magdalene is fundamental femininity and Jesus Christ is 'deathless *Dharma*' as both of them enlighten the way of humanity and message us that the sense and sensibility should be sacrificed on the altar of goodness, generosity and humanity; salvation is safe in such a way.

Finally, we see the multi-faced layers of the patriotic strains in his poetry. His nationalism is not blind; he gives respect to other culture, civilization and nations too. He attacks the attackers of any sovereignty. He loves nature- flora and fauna, including the

inanimate objects of nature. The pinnacles of the Himalayas inspires him to touch the high goals in life; the Ganges and other rivers sooth his burning heart and the birds like parrot and crow remind him of the Almighty. His patriotic poetry reveals his life philosophy as he wants to follow righteousness in all his behavior. Like a true poet of the pre-independence era, he sings the glory and deeds of our leaders and is jubilant in following the ways of them. He is a visionary poet as he envisions to live in a country where distinguished vision, determined actions, emancipated female predominant and attempts are acted to perfect the nation. His vision seems true in the present condition when the World is hopefully waiting for us to resolve the knots of problems.

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