



SUBRAMANIA BHARATI AND BHARATIDASAN: TWO PROMINENT NATIONALISTS OF SOUTH INDIA

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[Bharatiyar is famous not only for his scholarship but also for his patriotism. Through his writings and poetry, he contributed for the national awakening not only in Tamil Nadu but also in Pondicherry.

Kanagasabai Subburathnam one of the leading Tamil literary figures, was immensely influenced by Bharatiyar and changed his name to Bharatidasan, i.e. Servant of Bharati as a mark of respect towards this towering personality of Tamil literature. Later Bharatidasan was influenced by EVR also known as Periyar and was an active participant in the Self-Respect Movement propagated by EVR.]

Bharatiyar's childhood

Subramania Bharatiyar was a genius and multifaceted personality and is revered as one of the greatest figures of Tamil literature. He excelled in journalism, poetry and in Tamil literary writings.

Chinnaswami Subramania Bharati was born in Ettayapuram of Tirunelveli District on December 11, 1882. Also popular as Subramania Bharati or C. Subramania Bharati. His childhood name was Subbaiah. Chinnaswamy Iyer and Lakshmi Ammal were his parents. He had great passion for writing poetry and started exhibiting his poetical skills as early as a 7-year-old boy. Impressed by his poetical skills, locals honoured him with the title of “*Bharathi*”. People of Tamil Nadu, respectfully refer to him as Bharatiyar. Bharatiyar stayed in Benaras for two years, and spent the time there fruitfully by acquiring a fair knowledge of Hindi, Sanskrit and English and started wearing turban like the Sikhs.

Bharatiyar as a journalist

He worked as a journalist for leading newspapers of the day such as The Hindu, Bala Bharata, Swadeshimitran and India. British government issued an arrest warrant against him in 1908, and this forced him to take shelter in French India, that is Pondicherry and he lived there till 1918. Upon entering British India in 1919 he was briefly imprisoned and later re-joined *Swadesamitran*.

Swadesamitran was the first Tamil Language newspaper in Madras Presidency. It was a leading newspaper from 1882 to 1985 that was period of 103 years which is a greatest achievement for any newspaper. It was founded by G. Subramanya Aiyar who was also the founder the famous newspaper ‘The Hindu’, which is still a leading English news daily in India. *Swadesamitran* was the second vernacular newspaper in India, the first being the *Samachar Darpan*, a Bengali newspaper first published in 1818 by Serampore Mission Press. G. Subramania Iyer founded the Hindu newspaper on 20 September 1878.

Bharatiyar's contribution to Tamil literature:

Famous literary works of Subramania Bharathi are Kannan Pattu (Songs of Lord Krishna), Panchali Sapatham (Panchali's Vow) and Kuyil Paattu (Kuyil's Song).



The emancipation of women exercised Bharathi's mind greatly. His epic poem 'Panchali Sapatham' (1912) expressed his ideas on social reform and anxiety to rid India of the foreign yoke. Subramania Bharathi, though a Brahmin, had rejected the practices of his people and gave up his own sacred thread. He spent much of his time in the company of untouchables of Pondicherry.

The influence of some of the Indian revolutionaries who took refuge in Pondicherry deserves consideration in the awakening of anti-colonial consciousness in French colony of Pondicherry. Subramania Bharathi, the famous Tamil poet, sought refuge in Pondicherry in 1908. Here he spent his time writing brilliant poetry and prose. He caught the attention of the Tamil people with his powerful lyrics, the bulk of which are found in the *Swadesa Gitangal* (1908) and *Janma Bhoomi* (1909).

Bharatiyar was not only a leading literary figure of the day, but a social reformer as well. He scorned the caste system. He said that the only two castes that exist are men and women. He did not attach any significance to the Yagnopavita and discarded it. He was a strong supporter of the temple entry movement for Dalits. He even used to attend the prayers in the church. He advocated gender equality, supported widow remarriage and vehemently opposed dowry system and child marriage. Bharatiyar spent about ten years in Pondicherry. Being in exile he interacted with prominent extremist leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai, Shri Aurobindo and V.V.S. Aiyar.

He was a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry and is considered one of the greatest Tamil literary figures of all time. He died on September 12, 1921 in Madras. He is popular in Tamilnadu and Pondicherry as "Mahakavi Bharati", and also as Bharatiyar.

Bharathidasan

Bharathidasan was influenced by the two leading personalities of the day in Tamilnadu, one was Subramanya Bharati and the other was E.V.Ramasamy. Until the death of Subramania Bharathi in 1921 he was under his influence but after 1921 he slowly drifted towards the ideology of EVR.

Kanakasabai Subburathinam (29 April 1891 – 21 April 1964) was born in Pondicherry. He was a great admirer of Subramania Bharathi and changed his name to Bharathidasan (Servant of Subramania Bharathi).

E.V. Ramaswami Naicker AKA Periyar

Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy, popularly known in Tamilnadu as Periyar and also as Thanthai Periyar and also by his initials as EVR was born on 17th September 1879 at Erode. E.V. Ramaswami Naicker was a prominent social reformer of India in the twentieth century. He belonged to Balija Naidu caste, a prominent caste in Andhra Pradesh. He was famous for the Self – Respect Movement and is hailed as the 'Father of Modern Tamilnadu'. His agitations were directed against domination of the higher castes in political and economic fields and exploitation of the fellow human beings in the name of caste and ill treatment of the women in the society.

Both Subramania Bharati and EVR supported Khaddar, prohibition, nonviolence and Satyagraha concepts of Mahatma Gandhi and drifted away from him as they got the feeling that Gandhi was favoring the high caste people over the lower castes. They felt that Gandhiji supported Varnashrama Dharma.



Self-Respect Movement

Self-Respect Movement was started by EVR in 1925. Kudi Arasu (Peoples Government) was the official Tamil weekly started by Ramaswamy Naiker in which he opposed the Brahmin dominance and propagated his ideology. He urged the people not to donate money for the construction of the temples and popularized “Self Respect Weddings”. These weddings had nothing to do with Vedic rituals and Brahmin priests. Many a time the followers of EVR burnt Manusmriti to express their opposition to the discriminatory caste system. EVR used the term “Brahmanocracy” to describe the domination of Brahmins in politics. EVR believed that social reform should precede political reform. Self-Respect Movement opposed Brahmin supremacy and caste system. In 1929 EVR visited Pondicherry and spoke against untouchability, child marriage and caste inequality. Bharatidasan felt that real man should not be changed to a religious man. Bharatidasan praised Lenin for the success of Communism in Russia. He felt that Socialism is the cure for the evils of Casteism.

Bharatidasan felt that the welfare of the workers is possible only with a socialist state. He felt that a poor man on the death bed would spring back to life if the government announces that the assets of the earth belong to everyone. Bharatidasan spent most part of his life in French India and was influenced by the French ideals of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Earlier some of the hotels had a notice board which read “only for Brahmins”. Justice Party fought against it. Bharatidasan felt that ignorance, superstition and blind faith crept into Tamil society because of Aryan influence.

Dravidian Association of Pondicherry

In 1942 Bharatidasan was actively involved in the formation of Dravidian Association of Pondicherry. Dravidian Association Conference was held in Pondicherry and was attended by EVR and Annadurai. On 27.5.44, Bharathidasan presided over the second anniversary conference of the Thiruvarur Self Respect Association. Gandhiji felt that Varna prescribed only duties and it did not confer any privileges to any Varna and untouchability was not sanctioned by the Vedas and it was not part of the original Varna system, but in reality it was not so. Gandhi did not condemn the Varna system but pleaded for the dignity of labour. Each Varna should be given equal importance. In Caste system the main means of production, land and capital are concentrated in the hands of the three higher castes. It was a socio economic problem but Gandhiji suggested a spiritual and moral solution which was not practical with the intense exploitation of the lower castes.

Bharatidasan and EVR felt that Caste system and untouchability are inseparable and if caste is wiped out then untouchability too would vanish. Gandhi wrote, "It is as wrong to destroy caste because of the out-caste, as it would be to destroy a body because of an ugly growth on it, or of a crop because of the weeds. The outcaste-ness, in the sense we understand it, has, therefore, to be destroyed altogether”.

Further Bharathidasan discussed Socialism and Communism elaborately and differentiated them as follows: “If you own two cows and generous enough to donate it to your neighbour then it is Socialism, instead of the two cows you sell one and buy a bull that is capitalism as you are greedy to increase the number of cattle and to earn more profits there by, and if you hand over the cows to the government and just take only that much milk as you require then it is communism”.

Similarly, his balled Kadalmel Kumizhigal (Bubbles on the Sea) compares the people who call themselves the born rulers to water bubbles. He makes it clear that the people are the real rulers:



Those who claim to have born to rule
and the so called other superior folk
They are not even broken pieces of straw?
They are mere bubbles on the surface of the sea!
The people are like the eternal mighty ocean!

It was in 1931 that E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker (Periyar) the leader of Self – Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu visited Pondicherry. His radical ideas on social reform found followers in Bharatidasan and Noel. Noel was then the editor for journal, the Pudukkottai Murasu, to which Bharathi Dasan contributed regularly. Through his poems he propagated the need for a change in the social structure; Noel wrote a series of articles condemning the church and clergy for upholding caste distinctions in churches. For this he was sued in the Court. He was sentenced and a fine was imposed in the lower court. The Tribunal Superieur's Appel in Pondicherry confirmed the decision, but the Supreme Court in Paris set aside the judgments.

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