

SUBRAMANIA BHARATI



Chinnaswami Subramania Bharatiyar (11 December 1882 – 11 September 1921) was an Indian writer, poet, journalist, Indian independence activist and social reformer from Tamil Nadu, India. Popularly known as "Mahakavi Bharatiyar", he is a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry and is considered one among the greatest of Tamil literary figures of all time. His numerous works were fiery songs kindling patriotism and nationalism during Indian Independence movement. Born in Ettayapuram of the then Tirunelveli district (presently Tuticorin district) in 1882, Subramania Bharati had his early education in Tirunelveli and Benares and worked as a journalist with many newspapers, notable among them being the Swadesamitran and India. Bharati was also an active member of the Indian National Congress. In 1908, an arrest warrant was issued against Bharati by the government of British India for his revolutionary activities forcing him to flee to Pondicherry where he lived until 1918. Bharati's works were on varied themes covering religious, political and social aspects. He was badly affected by the imprisonments and by 1920, when a General Amnesty Order finally removed restrictions on his movements, Bharati was already struggling. He was struck by an elephant named Lavanya at Parthasarathy temple, Triplicane, Chennai, whom he used to feed regularly. Although he survived the incident, a few months later his health deteriorated and he died on 12 September 1921 early morning around 1 am. Though Bharati was considered a people's poet, a great nationalist, outstanding freedom fighter and social visionary, it was recorded that there were only 14 people to attend his funeral. He delivered his last speech at Karungalpalayam Library in Erode, which was about the topic of Man is Immortal. The last years of his life were spent in a house in Triplicane, Chennai. The house was bought and renovated by the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1993 and named Bharatiyar Illam (Home of Bharatiar). Songs penned by Bharati are widely used in Tamil films and Carnatic Music concerts.

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Where & when born

Bharatiyar was born to Chinnasami Subramanya Iyer and Lakshmiamma as Subbaya on 11 December 1882 in the village of Ettayapuram.

Brief history of the person -personal

He was educated at a local high school called The M.D.T. Hindu College in Tirunelveli. From a very young age he learnt music and at eleven, he learnt poetry. It was during this time that he was conferred the title of "Bharati", the one blessed by Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Bharati lost his mother at the age of five and his father at the age of sixteen. He married Chellama who was seven years old when he was fourteen years old. He was brought up by his father who wanted him to learn English, excel in arithmetic, and become an engineer. Through his great efforts he learnt 32 languages (29 Indian languages and 3 foreign languages).

During his stay in Benaras (also known as Kashi and Varanasi), Bharati was exposed to Hindu spirituality and nationalism. This broadened his outlook and he learned Sanskrit, Hindi and English. In addition, he changed his outward appearance. He also grew a beard and wore a turban. Though he passed an entrance exam for a job, he returned to Ettayapuram during 1901 and started as the court poet of Raja of Ettayapuram for a couple of years. He was a Tamil teacher from August to November 1904 in Sethupathy High School in Madurai. During this period, Bharati understood the need to be well-informed of the world outside and took interest in the world of journalism and the print media of the West. Bharati joined as Assistant Editor of the Swadeshamitran, a Tamil daily in 1904. In December 1905, he attended the All India Congress session held in Benaras. On his journey back home, he met Sister Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda's spiritual heir. She inspired Bharati to recognise the privileges of women and the emancipation of women exercised Bharati's mind. He visualised the new woman as an emanation of Shakti, a willing helpmate of man to build a new earth through co-operative endeavour. He considered Nivedita as his Guru and penned a couple of lyrics praising her. He attended the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta under Dadabai Naoroji, which demanded Swaraj and boycott of British goods.

By April 1907, he started editing the Tamil weekly India and the English newspaper Bala Bharatham with M.P.T. Acharya. These newspapers were also a means of expressing Bharati's creativity, which began to peak during this period. Bharati started to publish his poems regularly in these editions.



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From hymns to nationalistic writings, from contemplations on the relationship between God and Man to songs on the Russian and French revolutions, Bharati's subjects were diverse.

In 1908, Bharati gave evidence in the case which had been instituted by the British against V.O. Chidambaram Pillai. In the same year, the proprietor of the journal India was arrested in Madras. Faced with the prospect of arrest, Bharati escaped to Pondicherry which was under French rule.

From there he edited and published the weekly journal India, Vijaya, a Tamil daily, Bala Bharatha, an English monthly, and Suryothayam, a local weekly in Pondicherry. The British tried to suppress Bharati's output by stopping remittances and letters to the papers. Both India and Vijaya were banned in British India in 1909.

Bharati assisted Aurobindo in the Arya journal and later Karma Yogi in Pondicherry. This was also the period when he started learning Vedic literature. Three of his greatest works namely, Kuyil Pattu, Panchali Sabatham and Kannan Pattu were composed during 1912. He also translated Vedic hymns, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and Bhagavat Gita to Tamil. He resumed editing Swadesimeitran from 1920 in Madras (modern day Chennai)

Career in political

Bharati participated in the historic Surat Congress in 1907 along with V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and Mandayam Srinivachariar. During that time the divisions deepened within the Indian National Congress between the militant wing led by Tilak and Aurobindo and the moderate wing. Bharati supported Tilak and Aurobindo together with V. O. Chidambaram Pillai and Kanchi Varathaachariyar. Tilak openly supported armed resistance against the British.

During Bharati's exile, he had the opportunity to meet many other leaders of the revolutionary wing of the Independence movement like Aurobindo, Lajpat Rai and V.V.S. Aiyar, who had also sought asylum under the French.

When Bharati entered British India near Cuddalore in November 1918 and was promptly arrested. He was imprisoned in the Central prison in Cuddalore in custody for three weeks from 20 November to 14 December and was released after the intervention of Annie Besant and C.P. Ramaswamy Aiyar. He was stricken by poverty during this period, resulting in his ill health. The following year, 1919, Bharati met Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Bharati and the Mahatma met once; it was an exceptional and memorable incident. Gandhiji visited Chennai and stayed in Rajaji's house to discuss the Rowlett Committee's Report.

Critical moments of independence, struggle, war etc.

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 Swadeshmitran, and the fact that he had to seek refuge



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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.

Principles & Practices

Bharatiyar was considered the first to have advocated and campaigned for women's participation in politics. He advocated greater rights for women and their education. He visualised a modern Indian woman at the vanguard of society. He condemned the Shashtras, the procedures formulated by some orthodox Hindus and weren't held as holy by most Hindus, that suppressed women's rights. Most of his views are considered contemporary even in modern times.

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. Bharati also fought against the caste system in Hindu society. Although born into an orthodox Brahmin family, he gave up his own caste identity. He considered all living beings as equal and to illustrate this he even performed upanayanam to a young Harijan man and made him a Brahmin. He also scorned the divisive tendencies being imparted into the younger generations by their elderly tutors during his time. He openly criticised the preachers for mixing their individual thoughts while teaching the Vedas and the Gita. He strongly advocated bringing the Harijans to the Hindu mainstream.

Awards and achievements

At the age of eleven he composed poems on lines given by various Tamil scholars in an assembly of learned men, he was then awarded the title of 'Bharati' by the admiring scholars. He contributed tremendously to the political emancipation of India, social reformation of the community and literary rejuvenation of Thamizh.

Bharatiyar did appear to have had the vision of a prophet, the religious equanimity of a saint, the dreams of a patriot and the noble aspirations of a social reformer. Most of his predictions regarding his country and community and all his warnings regarding the malaise afflicting his society have materialized already.

Bharati is considered the initiator of modern Tamil literature. Bharati used simple words and rhythms, unlike his previous century works in Tamil, which had complex vocabulary. He also employed novel ideas and techniques in his devotional poems. He used a metre called Nondi Chindu in most of his works, which was earlier used by Gopalakrishna Bharathiya. Bharati's poetry expressed a progressive, reformist ideal. His imagery and the vigour of his verse were a forerunner to modern Tamil poetry in different aspects. He was the forerunner of a forceful kind of poetry that combined classical and contemporary elements.

Under the guidance of Bharatiyar and others, Thamizh literature has served as a tool to mobilize our energy to achieve political freedom.



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Literary Works

His insightful similies have been read by millions of Tamil readers. He was well-versed in various languages and translated speeches of Indian National reform leaders like Aurabindo, Bala Gangadar Tilak and Swami Vivekananda. He had a prodigious output penning thousands of verses on diverse topics like Indian Nationalism, love songs, children's songs, songs of nature, glory of the Tamil language, and odes to prominent freedom fighters of India like Tilak, Gandhi and Lajpat Rai. He even penned an ode to New Russia and Belgium.

Bharathiyar's literary works include nationalistic poems, prayer songs, philosophical poems, didactic songs and minor poems related to social issues. His didactic poems are Murasu , Puthiya Atthichudi and Pappa Pattu . He was the originator of the short and crisp style of poems which has now become very popular.

Sources

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