

## **Subramania Bharati: Poet, Patriot, and Visionary**

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### **Abstract:**

Subramania Bharati (1882–1921) occupies an unparalleled position in Indian literature and the history of India's independence movement. As a poet, journalist, and social reformer, Bharati's writings encapsulate the fusion of artistic brilliance with a fervent call for national liberation and social justice. His works in Tamil not only galvanized the masses but also heralded a literary and philosophical renaissance. This article delves into Bharati's contributions to literature, his role as a freedom fighter, his advocacy for social equality, and his lasting influence on subsequent generations.

**Keywords:** Subramania Bharati, Tamil literature, Indian nationalism, Swadeshi, women's empowerment, social reform, Mysticism, Shakti, Vedanta, Bharatiyar.

### **Introduction:**

Few figures in Indian history embody the convergence of art and activism as profoundly as Subramania Bharati. Revered as Mahakavi (The Great Poet), Bharati's life was a testament to the transformative power of literature and its capacity to ignite collective consciousness. His legacy is not confined to Tamil Nadu but resonates across India, inspiring movements for political freedom, social reform, and spiritual awakening.

This article explores Bharati's life and works, highlighting the intricate interplay between his poetry, journalism, and reformist ideals. Bharati's vision was not limited to political freedom; he envisioned a society emancipated from the shackles of caste, gender, and religious discrimination. His emphasis on women's empowerment, unity across communities, and spiritual enlightenment underscores the universality of his appeal. Bharati's poetry transcends the political realm, reflecting deep spiritual undercurrents. Drawing from the Vedantic tradition, Bharati articulated a vision of universal brotherhood, where divinity permeates all beings.

### **Early Life and Influences:**

Subramania Bharati was born on December 11, 1882, in Ettayapuram, a small town in Tamil Nadu. From an early age, Bharati demonstrated extraordinary intellectual and poetic abilities. At eleven, he composed intricate Tamil verses that earned him the title "Bharati" from the Maharaja of Ettayapuram, recognizing his poetic genius.

His education at Hindu College, Tirunelveli, was instrumental in shaping his worldview. Bharati's immersion in Tamil classics, particularly the works of Kamban and Tiruvalluvar, honed his literary sensibilities. Equally transformative was his exposure to English literature and Western political thought. The ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, espoused during

the French Revolution and echoed by poets like Shelley and Victor Hugo, found expression in Bharati's writings.

Bharati's formative years were marked by a synthesis of traditional Tamil ethos and modern revolutionary ideals. His encounter with the Vedantic texts in Varanasi between 1901 and 1904 deepened his philosophical outlook, influencing much of his later poetry. The period also marked his entry into the burgeoning nationalist movement.

### **Nationalism and the Call for Freedom:**

Bharati's nationalist sentiments crystallized during the early 20th century as India's struggle for independence gained momentum. Inspired by leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bharati became an ardent advocate for Swaraj (self-rule). He viewed political freedom as intertwined with cultural revival, emphasizing the need for Indians to reconnect with their heritage.

As the editor of *India* and *Vijaya*, Bharati used the press as a potent instrument against colonial oppression. His articles, infused with unrelenting zeal, denounced British exploitation and called for national unity. In one editorial, Bharati wrote:

"The British can imprison our bodies but never our spirit. The flame of freedom burns eternally in the heart of every Indian." (India, 1910).

His poetry became a rallying cry for the freedom struggle. The iconic lines, "Achamillai Achamillai, Acham Enbathu Illaye" (I have no fear, there is no such thing as fear), captured the spirit of defiance against colonial subjugation.

### **Bharati's Vision for Social Reform:**

Bharati's revolutionary zeal was not limited to political independence. He envisioned an India liberated from the oppressive structures of caste and gender discrimination. His writings called for the eradication of untouchability and the upliftment of marginalized communities.

In his poem "Panchali Sabatham" (The Vow of Panchali), Bharati draws parallels between Draupadi's humiliation in the Mahabharata and the plight of Indian women. He proclaimed:

"Women are not mere shadows; they are the light of our homes and the architects of the nation's future." (Panchali Sabatham, 1912).

Bharati's conception of the "New Woman" (Pudhumai Penn) was radical for his time. He envisioned women as equal participants in national development, educated, and unshackled from domestic confines: "She will walk tall on this earth, fearing none". *Collected Works of Bharati*, 243. Bharati's advocacy for gender equality and education reflects his belief that true progress lay in dismantling patriarchal norms. His wife, Chellamma, often stood by his side, reflecting the egalitarian spirit that permeated his personal life.

### **Spiritual and Philosophical Dimensions:**

Bharati's poetry transcends the political realm, reflecting deep spiritual undercurrents. Drawing from the Vedantic tradition, Bharati articulated a vision of universal brotherhood, where divinity permeates all beings.

In his hymns to Shakti (divine feminine), Bharati celebrated the transformative power of spiritual energy: "Om Sakthi,Om Sakthi,

Yuga Yugathin Kural Om Sakthi"

(Hail the Goddess, whose voice echoes through the ages). (Bharatiyar Kavithaigal,190).

Bharati's spiritual inclusiveness led him to advocate religious harmony. In an era marked by communal tensions, Bharati's call for unity was revolutionary:

"All religions are but different paths leading to the same truth." (Selected Essays of Bharati, 201)

At the heart of Bharati's mystic vision is his profound conception of the divine. His spirituality was shaped by a syncretic blend of Vedantic philosophy, the teachings of the Upanishads, and the practical mysticism of figures like Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo. Bharati believed in the immanence of the divine, meaning that God is not a distant, separate entity but a force that pervades the entire cosmos. In his poems, the divine is represented as both the origin and the sustaining power of the universe.

For example, in his famous poem "*Aadum Isai*" ("The Dancing Song"), Bharati depicts the divine not as a static, abstract entity but as a dynamic, ever-present force that moves and shapes the world (Bharati, 2006, p. 21). He writes, "The world is the dance of the divine; every movement of the universe, the turning of the stars, the flow of rivers, is the rhythm of the eternal" (Bharati, 2006, p. 23). This metaphor of dance reflects a deep vision of the universe as a living, ever-evolving manifestation of divine energy. Bharati's conception of God is rooted in a dynamic interaction with the world rather than a detached, distant creator.

Similarly, in "*Oru Dhanushkodi*" ("The Bow of the One God"), Bharati presents the divine as an omnipresent force that binds the universe together. He describes the divine as both transcendent and immanent, a concept central to Advaita Vedanta, which posits that all distinctions between God, the individual soul, and the material world are illusory (Bharati, 2006, p. 30). In the lines, "I bow before the One, who is both in the sea and in the sky, in the grain of sand and the breath of man" (Bharati, 2006, p. 32), Bharati encapsulates his belief in the oneness of all existence, emphasizing that divinity is not limited to temples or sacred spaces but is present in all aspects of life.

### **The Radical Nationalism of Bharati: Freedom as Spiritual Awakening**

Bharati's mystic vision is inextricably linked to his vision of Indian nationalism. For him, India's political freedom was not just a material necessity but a spiritual awakening. Bharati was deeply disillusioned with British colonialism, viewing it as a form of spiritual bondage that deprived the Indian soul of its true potential. He believed that India's liberation would lead to a broader cosmic transformation, and that this transformation could only happen through the recognition of India's spiritual and cultural heritage.

In his "*Vande Mataram*", which became a rallying cry for Indian independence, Bharati elevates the nation to the status of a divine mother. The poem is both a political and spiritual call to action, urging the people to honor and fight for their motherland. As Bharati wrote in his version of the poem: "O Mother, I bow to thee, for thy form is the sacred flame, the heart

of the world" (Bharati, 2006, p. 45). Here, Bharati invokes the metaphor of India as a mother goddess, embodying the divine force that sustains and nurtures the nation. This imagery aligns with Bharati's view that India's freedom would not only lead to political independence but to spiritual liberation, both for the nation and the individual.

In his writings on nationalism, Bharati emphasizes that true freedom comes from recognizing the divine within oneself and one's country. This idea is clearly expressed in his essay *"The Meaning of Swaraj"* where he argues that the fight for independence is a spiritual battle. He writes, "The struggle for Swaraj is the struggle for the awakening of the soul of India" (Bharati, 2010, p. 78). For Bharati, freedom from colonial rule was essential not only for India's material progress but for the reclamation of the nation's spiritual integrity, which had been suppressed under foreign domination.

His nationalism is not confined to the political realm alone. It is a call for a deeper, spiritual awakening in the Indian masses. In *"Swaraj"*, Bharati speaks of the importance of shedding mental and cultural shackles, emphasizing that liberation must begin with the individual before it can extend to the nation. "Only when each soul is free, can the nation be free" (Bharati, 2010, p. 85). This line encapsulates his belief that national liberation is an extension of personal spiritual growth.

### **The Vision of Unity: Divine Unity and Human Brotherhood**

A central tenet of Bharati's mysticism is his belief in the unity of all beings, human and divine. Bharati rejects the division of humanity along religious, caste, or national lines. His vision is one of universal brotherhood, where all people recognize the divine essence within themselves and others. His mysticism is not limited to personal or national identity but expands to a vision of global unity.

Bharati's reverence for deities reflects his broader view of unity. For instance, in his *"Kannan Paattu"* ("The Song of Krishna"), Bharati presents Krishna not merely as a figure in Hindu mythology but as a symbol of the universal divine that transcends all boundaries. He writes, "O Krishna, you are in every heart, you are the soul of every being. Your dance is the dance of the cosmos, and your flute sings the song of unity" (Bharati, 2006, p. 56). This portrayal of Krishna as a symbol of cosmic unity reflects Bharati's belief that the divine is not confined to one religion but is manifest in all faiths and cultures.

This vision of unity is also reflected in his writings on human relationships. In his poem *"Shakti"* ("The Divine Power"), Bharati describes Shakti not only as a goddess but as the very energy that drives the universe. "Shakti is in the earth, in the sky, in the sun, in the air, and in every heart. Her power is the power that binds us all" (Bharati, 2010, p. 92). Here, Bharati articulates his view of the interconnectedness of all beings through the divine power of Shakti, emphasizing that spiritual awakening comes when individuals recognize this unity.

Bharati's call for unity extends beyond India. In his essay *"The Future of India"*, he writes that India's spiritual awakening will lead to the awakening of the world. "When India rises, the world will rise with her, for the light that will shine on India will shine on the world" (Bharati, 2010, p. 105). This prophetic vision of India as a beacon of spiritual light reflects his belief that the nation's liberation would be a catalyst for global peace and harmony.

### **Bharati's Prophetic Vision for the Future**

Bharati's mysticism was not merely about personal or national liberation; it also encompassed a prophetic vision for the future of humanity. He saw India as playing a key role in the spiritual evolution of the world. In his poem "*Yugantar*" ("The Dawn of a New Age"), Bharati envisions the coming of a new age where spiritual wisdom will unite humanity in peace and harmony. "The dawn of a new age is coming; the world will be united in love and wisdom" (Bharati, 2010, p. 120).

Bharati believed that the trials and struggles of the present were part of a cosmic process that would eventually lead to the enlightenment of the world. He writes, "Every tear shed by India will lead to the awakening of the world, for the suffering of the earth is the birth-pang of a new age" (Bharati, 2010, p. 128). His vision of a new world is one where spiritual truth, justice, and unity prevail over division and hatred.

Bharati's future vision is not just an idealistic dream but a call to action. He urges his readers to work toward this future, to recognize the divine in themselves and others, and to actively participate in the spiritual and political struggles of their time. His work remains a timeless call for spiritual awakening, national liberation, and global unity.

### **The Mystic Vision of Subramania Bharati**

Subramania Bharati's mystic vision is a powerful blend of spirituality, nationalism, and prophetic insight. His belief in the immanence of the divine, his radical call for India's liberation, and his vision of global unity continue to resonate today. For Bharati, the struggle for freedom—whether individual, national, or global—is not just political but deeply spiritual. His works are a reminder that true freedom can only be achieved when we recognize the divine within ourselves and each other. As Bharati himself wrote, "Freedom is the awakening of the soul, and the soul is free when it recognizes the unity of all" (Bharati, 2010, p. 135). This call to recognize the unity of all beings, and the divinity within all, remains one of the most enduring aspects of Bharati's mysticism and vision for the future.

### **Bharati's Journalism and Intellectual Contributions:**

Bharati's role as a journalist amplified his influence, providing a platform for his nationalist and social ideals. His essays tackled a range of issues—from education and economic policy to governance and ethics.

He foresaw the role of industrialization and scientific advancement in national progress, emphasizing the need for modern education rooted in indigenous values. Bharati's editorials often targeted colonial economic policies, decrying their exploitative nature: "India's wealth flows into British coffers while her children starve. This plunder must end." (India, June 1911).

Despite his untimely death at 39, Bharati's influence endures. His poems are recited across Tamil Nadu, and his legacy permeates educational curricula. Bharati's birth anniversary is celebrated as Bharati Day, underscoring his place as a cultural icon. His ideas continue to inspire contemporary movements for social justice and equality. Bharati's blend of literary brilliance, social commitment, and spiritual insight makes him a timeless figure in India's intellectual landscape.



### **Conclusion:**

Subramania Bharati's life and works epitomize the transformative power of literature. As a poet, journalist, and reformer, Bharati galvanized a generation and left behind a corpus of writings that continue to shape India's socio-cultural fabric. His unwavering belief in freedom, equality, and spiritual unity serves as a guiding light for future generations.

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