

Classic Poetry Series

Subramanya Bharathi

- poems -

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Subramanya Bharathi(11 December 1882 - 11 September 1921)

Chinnaswami Subramanya Bharathi (Tamil: சின்னாசுவாமி சுப்ரமணியா பாரதி) was a Tamil writer, poet, journalist, Indian independence activist and social reformer from Tamil Nadu, India. Popularly known as Mahakavi Bharathiyar (Tamil: மகாகவி பாரதியார்), he is a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry.

Born in Ettayapuram in 1882, Subramanya Bharathi studied in Tinnevely and worked as a journalist with many newspapers, notable among them being the Swadesamitran and India. Bharathi was also an active member of the Indian National Congress. In 1908, an arrest warrant was issued against Bharathi by the government of British India for his revolutionary activities forcing him to flee to Pondicherry where he lived until 1918.

Bharathi is considered to be one of the greatest Tamil poets of the modern era. Most of his works were on religious, political and social themes. Songs penned by Bharathi have been widely used in Tamil films and Carnatic Music concert platforms.

Early Life

Mahakavi Subramanya Bharathiyar was born to Chinnasami Subramanya Iyer and Lakshmiammaal as "Subbayya" on December 11, 1882 in the Tamil village of Ettayapuram. 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 11th, he learnt songs. It was here that he was conferred the title of "Bharathi" (one blessed by Saraswati, the goddess of learning).

Bharathi lost his mother at the age of 5 and his father at the age of 16. He was brought up by his disciplinarian father who wanted him to learn English, excel in arithmetic, become an engineer and lead a comfortable life. However, Bharathi was given to day dreaming and could not concentrate on his studies. In 1897, perhaps to instill a sense of responsibility in him, his father had the 14 year old Bharathi, married to his seven year younger cousin, Chellamal.

After this early marriage, Bharathi, curious to see the outside world, left for Benares in 1898. The next four years of his life served as a passage of discovery. During this time he discovered a country in tumult outside his small hamlet. Bharathi worked as a teacher in Madurai Sethupathy High School (now a higher

secondary school) and as a journal editor at various times in his was a freedom fighter of India. .

Middle Life and Glory

During his stay in Benares (also known as Kashi and Varanasi), Bharathi 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.

Soon, Bharathi saw beyond the social taboos and superstitions of orthodox South Indian society. 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 daughter. From her arose another of Bharathi's iconoclasm, his stand to recognise the privileges of women. The emancipation of women exercised Bharathi's mind greatly. He visualised the 'new woman' as an emanation of Shakti, a willing helpmate of man to build a new earth through co-operative endeavour.

During this period, Bharathi 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. Bharathi joined as Assistant Editor of the Swadeshamitran, a Tamil daily in 1904. 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 Bharathi's creativity, which began to peak during this period. Bharathi started to publish his poems regularly in these editions. From hymns to nationalistic writings, from contemplations on the relationship between God and Man to songs on the Russian and French revolutions, Bharathi's subjects were diverse.

He was simultaneously up against society for its mistreatment of the downtrodden people and the British for occupying India.

Bharathi participated in the historic Surat Congress in 1907, which deepened the divisions within the Indian National Congress between the militant wing led by Tilak and [Aurobindo](http://www.poemhunter.com/sri-aurobindo/) and the moderate wing. Bharathi supported Tilak and Aurobindo together with V. O. Chidambaram Pillai and Kanchi Varathaachariyar. Tilak openly supported armed resistance against the British.

In 1908, he 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, Bharathi 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 of Pondicherry. The British tried to suppress Bharathi's output by stopping remittances and letters to the papers. Both India and Vijaya were banned in British India in 1909.

During his exile, Bharathi had the opportunity to mix with many other leaders of the revolutionary wing of the Independence movement such as [Aurobindo](http://www.poemhunter.com/sri-aurobindo/), Lajpat Rai and V.V.S. Aiyar, who had also sought asylum under the French. Bharathi assisted [Aurobindo](http://www.poemhunter.com/sri-aurobindo/) in the Arya journal and later Karma Yogi in Pondicherry.

Bharathi 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. The following year Bharathi met with [Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi](http://www.poemhunter.com/mohandas-k-gandhi/).

Later Years and Death

he was badly affected by the imprisonments and by 1920, when a General Amnesty Order finally removed restrictions on his movements, Bharathi was already struggling. He was struck by an elephant 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 September 11, 1921 early morning around 1 am. Though Bharathi was a people's poet and a great nationalist, outstanding freedom fighter and social visionary, it is a recorded sad fact 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 Man is Immortal.

Bharathi's Poetry

His poetry expressed a progressive, reformist ideal. His imagery and the vigour of his verse were a forerunner to modern Tamil poetry in many respects. He was the forerunner of a forceful kind of poetry that combined classical and contemporary elements. He had a prodigious output penning thousands of verses on diverse topics like Indian Nationalism, the National Flag, the Mahabharat, love songs, children's songs, songs of nature, glory of the Tamil language, and odes to prominent freedom fighters of India like Tilak, [Aurobindo](http://www.poemhunter.com/sri-aurobindo/)

<http://www.poemhunter.com/mohandas-k-gandhi/>>Gandhi and Lajpat Rai. He even penned an ode to New Russia and Belgium. His poetry includes works on Allah and Jesus. His insightful similies have been read by millions of Tamil readers.

His poetry stands out for many facets of his love for his motherland. He berates his countrymen for many social evils. He chastises them for a fearful and pusillanimous attitude towards the rulers. He sound a clarion call for national unity, removal of casteism and the removal of oppression of women. He calls for the British to leave the motherland in forceful ways at one point saying "Even if Indians are divided, they are children of One Mother, where is the need for foreigners to interfere?".

Even in the period 1910–1920, when freedom was far away and with Mahatma Gandhi as just an emerging force, with a tremendous sense of positive expectation, he talks of a new and free India where there are no castes. He eloquently imagines all-round social and economic development. He talks of building up India's defence, her ships sailing the high seas, success in manufacturing and universal education. He calls for sharing amongst states with wonderful imagery like the diversion of excess water of the Bengal delta to needy regions. He talks of a bridge to Sri Lanka earlier Ceylon. He even desired greater co-operation between India and her neighbours a vision realised more than 60 years after his death through the SAARC agreement. Truly a visionary.

Bharathi on Women

Bharathiyar advocated greater rights for women. His verses called for emancipation for women and put a premium on their education. He visualised a modern Indian woman at the vanguard of society. He was of the strong opinion that the world will prosper in knowledge and intellect if both men and women are deemed equal.

Poetic extract - (The new age women will learn many intellectual texts. They will set the base for many scientific discoveries that facilitate human life. They will expunge all backward superstitions in the society. They will, all the same, be devoted to God and present all achievements of mankind as a tribute to God. They will earn good name from men.)

Bharathi on Caste System

Bharathi 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.

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(There is no caste system. It is a sin to divide people on caste basis. The ones who are really of a superior class are the ones excelling in being just, intelligent, educated and loving.)

About Bharathiar : Pondicherry Museum Notings

Pondicherry is a city of rich history which hosted many freedom fighters including Bharathiyar. He moved to Pondicherry in the year 1908 to escape his arrest. During his stay at Pondicherry he was involved with the following journals and magazines: India, Vijaya, Chakravarthini etc. The house he lived in has been turned into a Museum now. It was in this home that he composed the poem "Crows and Birds are our clan".

The front cover of the magazine Chakravarthini (the 1906 edition was displayed) which reads "A Tamil Monthly Devoted mainly to the Elevation of India Ladies"

The topics for that edition were interesting as well: 1. Women in Buddhism 2. Figures regarding female education in the Madras Presidency 3. Tulsi Rai 4. Infant marriage and female education.

The museum houses many of his letters - 1. He starts off a letter with the words "Om Shakthi" 2. He usually signed off the letter saying "May you gain immortality" There was a postage stamp released on Bharathiar which is framed in the museum. There are around 20 photographs collected of his family, friends and relatives. The house address is: No. 20, Easwaran Koil Street, Pondicherry - 3. The museum has a collection of his letters, family photographs and lot of books.

Bharathiar was an expert in many languages: Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Telugu and French. He had written a book in English titled "The fox and its golden tail". There is also a Tamil version of the phrase "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity" - "Swathanthiram, Sammathuvam, Sahoatharathuvam".

Bharathi in Popular Culture , Events Post His Death

- 1) A state university named Bharathiar University was established in 1982 at Coimbatore.
- 2) The last years of his life were spent in a house in Triplicane, Chennai. This house was bought and renovated by the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1993 and named 'Bharathiyar Illam' (Home of Bharathiyar).
- 3) There is a statue of Bharathiar at Chennai beach and also in the Indian Parliament.
- 4) A Tamil Movie titled Bharathi was made in the year 2000 on the life of the poet which won National Film Award. This classic film was directed by Gnana Rajasekeran. The main character of Subramanya Bharati is played by a Marathi actor, Sayaji Shinde.
- 5) The movie Kappalottiya Thamizhan (The TAMILIAN who sailed the high seas) chronicling the important struggles of mbaranar, Subramanya Siva and Bharathiar was an impactful movie which brought alive the patriotic fervour, sacrifices, tribulations and the beauty of Bharatiar's poetry. The movie starred Sivaji Ganesan as VOC and S.V Subbiah as Subramanya Barathi.

A Spark Of Fire

A spark of fire I did see
Which there , in a forest tree hole I'd stowed
Burned and ashed was the forest
For the flame's intensity, is there something like a spark or a blaze ?

[Translated by Suma V.S]

Subramanya Bharathi

Aazaadi

Subramanya Bharathi

Conch

After death, the world of Siva and the world of Vaikunta
We shall attain, who believe thus
Inane people are they who preach such words
Mindless are they, pronounce thus while you blow the conch!

In this world, in this day
In this moment, to reach liberation
With lucid intellect, who endeavor to strive
Pure are they, pronounce thus while you blow the conch!

Deceptive Illusion, who perceive to be deceptive,
Senses, slash and discard away
Yet, indisputably remain content
Aryans are they, pronounce thus while you blow the conch!

Kajal applied sword-like eyed ones, and also gold
Mire are they, who believe thus, unflustered
Work with ease, performing
Saints, are they akin to, pronounce thus while you blow the conch!

Subramanya Bharathi

Did You Think I Too Will

Did you think I too will
Spend my days in search of food,
Tell petty tales,
Worry myself with thoughts,
Hurt others by my acts,
Turn senile with grey hair
And end up as fodder to the
relentless march of time
As yet another faceless man?

Subramanya Bharathi

Drum Of Victory

Chorus

Beat the drum of victory! Beat it!
Beat the drum of victory!

Verses

1. The fear-demon we thrashed- The falsehood
serpent we hacked, and devoured its life
The entire world, is nectar we comprehend
A vedic life we've acquired. (Beat the drum of victory!)

2. In the sunshine we bathed - The luster's
nectar we relished and splurged
In the night came he, living beings to destroy
Yama trembled as we glared. (Beat the drum of victory!)

3. The crow and sparrow, are our caste - the extensive
oceans and mountains, our cluster
Seen in all directions is us and nobody else
And as you see it, dance along. (Beat the drum of victory!)

Subramanya Bharathi

Freedom

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?

Wasn't there another Bharat
Reared by our noble Aryan race?
Lead us, Aryan, to victory!
Is't right we remain slaves?

Are famine and disease alone our share?
For whom, then, are the laurels and fruits?
Will you abandon us, your suppliants?
Can the mother cast her child aside?

Brave warrior! Aryan Lord!
Thou destroyer of the demon-race,
Where is your dharma? Isn't yours the duty
To revive us, and chase Fear away?

[Translated into English By S. Prema]

Subramanya Bharathi

Indian Republic

Long live the Republic of Bharat!
Victory to the Republic of Bharat!

Thirty crores of people share
This commonwealth of ours;
A marvel Republic
Without an equal in the world.

Long live the Republic

Shall we see henceforth the greed
Of one man seizing another's bite?
Shall one see unmoved
The spectacle of another's pain?
Shall we revel in sensuality,
Or tolerate the selfish life?

Long live the Republic

Spacious fields and generous springs
Enrich this mighty land;
Plentiful is her gift of fruits,
Abundant the harvest of corn;
Numerous are the gifts,
Perennial the flow.

Long live the Republic

We shall now lay down the law
And die to preserve it-
We'll rather send the world up in flames
Than suffer one man to starve.

Long live the Republic

This is what Lord Krishna said:
'I live in all living things.'
Bharat will show the world the way
Of all attaining the Life Divine.

Long live the Republic

We are of the same caste and race,
We are children of Bharat all;

We are equal in law and stature,
And every one is Bharat's King!

Long Live the Republic

[Translated into English By S. Prema]

Subramanya Bharathi

Invocation To Freedom

Mother, those that hungering seek thy grace
And offer to thee their life and love,
Howbeit consigned to dungeons here,
They'd qualify for a place in Heaven.

Those unvisited by your grace, Mother,
Must exult in being slaves;
Albeit inhabiting palaces,
They breathe the air of prison cells.

Winning your grace through heroic deeds
Many Western peoples now live a new life;
They've achieved all, being always ready
To make the supreme sacrifice.

Alas, born in a hapless land
Which remembers not the glories lost,
Knowing the power of your grace, Mother,
How best may I propitiate thee?

I call these Light! Nectar of the brave!
Preserver of the righteous!
Destroyer of suffering and deceit!
I call for the descent of your grace.

[Translated into English By S. Prema]

Subramanya Bharathi

Order To The Mind

Satan residing little mind
Listen to my words from today
Don't you go searching alone
For Im your leader, you better know
Mother Sakthi's feet and
Righteousness, as what I proclaim to be
Without laziness you shall stand and work
I sermonize, abide and you will live high.

Subramanya Bharathi

The Eternal Himalaya Is Our Very Own Asset

The eternal Himalaya is our very own asset.
There's nothing else to equal it as yet !
The sweetly nourishing Ganges flows here dancing.
Is there a river on earth so entrancing ?
The expository Upanishads are our prized treasure
The entire world doesn't have any work of that measure.
Oh,the Golden Bharath is verily our own land
Hail our land,we are of a matchless brand!!

Subramanya Bharathi

The Jewel Of Stars

Moonlight, the stars and the wind,
By placing them in front
And drinking the honey thereof-
A poetic frenzy seizes us;
That atomic thing called Mind-
We shall let it roam free.
Should one wonder at the bee that sings
While imbedded in a tasty fruit?
Oh, Mind! Go hence to join
The jewel of stars.

Subramanya Bharathi

There Is No Fear

The people of this world, if against they stand,
There is no fear, there is no fear, nothing like fear.

Although, we are counted cheap and rebuked,
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

If to beg for food, would be a life attained,
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

Loveable possessions if, are lost,
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

2. If clothed bosomed damsels, cast their eyes
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

Poison in the mouth, if fed by friends
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

Shielded armies, if to attack approach
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

On the acme of my head, if the sky did crash and plummet down
There is no fear , there is no fear , nothing like fear.

Subramanya Bharathi