



Nationalism in Bharathiyar's poem

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Abstract

Subramania Bharati stands as one of the foremost nationalist poets of twentieth-century India. His songs embody a dynamic and transformative vision of nationalism that integrates political freedom, social reform, linguistic pride, and spiritual awakening. This study explores how Bharathiyar employs poetry as a powerful instrument to awaken patriotic consciousness and inspire collective action against colonial rule. Bharathiyar conceptualizes the nation as a divine mother (Bharata Mata), thereby transforming devotion into patriotism. Through hymns to freedom, impassioned calls for liberation, and celebratory tributes to national leaders and revolutionaries, he kindles an intense desire for independence. His poems not only glorify freedom but also portray the sufferings of the enslaved, the sacrifices of freedom fighters, and the moral urgency of unity among the people. Nationalism in Bharathiyar's Poem extends beyond political emancipation. He envisions a progressive and egalitarian society free from caste discrimination, gender inequality, and social ignorance. His advocacy of women's liberation, social unity, and education underscores his holistic understanding of national regeneration. Linguistic pride, particularly his reverence for Tamil as a mother figure, further strengthens his patriotic ideology by linking language, identity, and nationhood. Stylistically, Bharathiyar revitalizes classical Tamil literary forms while adapting them to modern nationalist purposes. By blending devotional modes, folk elements, and popular musical tunes, he ensures that his message reaches the masses. His innovative use of traditional genres such as Tiruppalli Ezhuchi, Navarathina Maalai, and Dasangam demonstrates his creative fusion of heritage and modern political thought. In essence, Bharathiyar's Poem articulates a comprehensive vision of nationalism—one that harmonizes freedom, equality, cultural pride, and spiritual strength. His poetry not only contributed significantly to India's freedom movement but also continues to inspire generations with its enduring call for unity, courage, and social justice.

Keywords: Subramania Bharathi, nationalism, patriotism, Indian Freedom Movement, Bharata Mata, liberation (Viduthalai), social reform, women's emancipation, caste equality, linguistic pride, Tamil devotion, unity, revolutionary poetry, cultural renaissance, political awakening

Introduction

Through the classifications of *Tinai* (landscape/context) and *Turai* (situation), Sangam poets adhered to a systematic tradition in selecting their poetic themes. Later poets broke through these boundaries, projecting their own creative desires onto their subject matter and crafting new literary genres.

The modern poet Bharathiyar stands peerless in the literary world by handling innovative themes. The core subject, the essence, and the foundation of a poem can be termed its "Poruṇmai" (thematic content). Known as the "Poet for the Song," Bharathi explored diverse themes such as nationalism, devotion, Vedanta, wisdom, biography, and mythology.

Among these, the expressive state and form of his nationalistic themes are presented here. Approximately 65 poems fall under this category.

"The concepts of nation, patriotism, nationalism, nationality, and the nation-state are interconnected, with one serving as the foundation for the other. A sense of brotherhood, pride in heritage and culture, and an awareness of common goals are considered the fundamental elements of nationalism."

When these elements are integrated into poetry as the subject matter, they blossom as nationalistic themes. Within these poems of Bharathi, one finds a yearning for freedom, devotion to the country, the cultivation of patriotism, social progress, and the nation's glory, tributes to freedom fighters, their recorded words, and prayers for the nation, elegies, and the abolition of caste, unity, and linguistic pride.

Except for linguistic pride, all other themes are rooted in patriotism. Since the yearning for freedom (*Viduthalai Vetkai*) acts as the very lifebreath and primary focus of Bharathi's songs, it is highlighted here as a distinct entity.

Expression

Expression may be understood as the manner and means by which a poet conveys the idea he wishes to communicate. Bharati reveals his longing for freedom in several ways: by worshipping freedom as a deity (Hymn to the Goddess of Liberty), by yearning intensely for liberation (*Thirst for Freedom*), by praying to God for it (*The Crop of Freedom*), and by presenting it as though it has already been attained through unwavering faith (*The Song of Freedom*). To make others experience his emotions as deeply as he does, he employs various literary strategies. He directly arouses the desire for freedom by explaining its greatness (*The Greatness of Freedom*), emphasizing its importance (the statement of the Englishman *Winch Durai* and the reply of patriot *Chidambaram Pillai*), and by stirring leaders with impassioned speeches like the heroic address delivered by the Pandyan king *Seevagan* to his armies in *Manonmaniam* (as in *Chatrapati Shivaji*).

He also kindles this desire indirectly by depicting the sufferings and miserable condition endured by the noble for the nation's freedom (*The Crop of Freedom*), by voicing the sorrows of freedom fighters in their own words (*Lajpat's Lament*), by exposing how the oppressor looks down upon us (*The Servile Slave*), by highlighting the good deeds of

leaders of the freedom movement and stressing the need to support them (Dadabhai Naoroji), by instilling hope through the legends of India (Bharata Mata), and by congratulating nations that suffered under slavery and later attained freedom (A Tribute to Belgium).

Patriotism

Bharati expresses his deep and abiding love for the nation in many powerful ways. He transforms devotion to the divine into devotion to the motherland by personifying the nation in multiple forms—as the valiant daughter of the lofty Himalayas and as the beloved of the ash-smearing ascetic who bears the blazing fire (Engal Thaa). He expands Ilango's praise of the city in "Poompuhar Potrudhum" into a Grand National benediction that stretches as far as the Himalayas (Naattu Vanakkam). He celebrates the prosperity of the land (Engal Naadu), honors the noble deeds of great leaders who labored for freedom (Vaazhga Nee Emmaane), and criticizes those who merely speak heroically without acting (Nadippu Sudhesigal). He also translates patriotic songs from other languages (Jatheeya Geetham), thereby revealing his unwavering love for the nation.

He laments the suffering of his people in foreign lands (Karumbuth Thottathile), portrays the ignorance and misery of the masses (The Present Condition of the People of India), and envisions the ideal society he longs to see (Bharata Samudayam). He calls for a society free from distinctions of caste, economic status, and gender (Viduthalai, Viduthalai, Viduthalai), and emphasizes the essentials for social progress through symbolic means (Kuyil Paatu). He stresses the importance of unity—essential for both social progress and freedom—through direct counsel (Vande Mataram) as well as indirect suggestion (Viduthalai, Viduthalai, Viduthalai). He highlights the prosperity and greatness of a united India (Bharata Desam).

Further, he seeks to remove one of the greatest obstacles to social progress—the subjugation of women—by celebrating the dignity of womanhood (Penmai), portraying the awakening of women (Pen Viduthalai), and proclaiming their equality with men (Pengal Viduthalai Kummi).

Language Devotion

Bharati presents love for language as a force that strengthens patriotism. He personifies Tamil as a mother (Tamil Thaa), offers benedictions to the language (Tamil Mozhi Vaazhthu), prays for its progress and development (Tamil), and praises Tamil poets (Tamil). He also expands love for language into love for one's race and, ultimately, into love for the nation (Vaazhiya Senthamizh). Thus, linguistic pride becomes the foundation for ethnic pride and national consciousness.

Structure

Form may be understood as the structure a poet gives to his thoughts. Bharati employs several classical literary forms, such as Tiruppalli Ezhuchi, Navarathina Maalai, Dasangam, and Vaazhthu Vanchinakkaanchi. In ancient Tamil grammar, particularly in the Paadaan Thina of the Tolkappiyam, the "Thuyiledai Nilai" (awakening theme) was used to rouse a king. Later, the Nayanmars and Alvars adapted this form to awaken God. Bharati, who personified

the nation as a divine mother (Bharata Mata), composed a Tiruppalli Ezhuchi in five songs to awaken Mother India.

Similarly, the traditional Navamani Maalai—a garland of nine gems composed in linked venba verses—was reshaped by Bharati into a Navarathina Maalai. He creatively incorporated the names of the nine gems, sometimes in their literal sense and sometimes metaphorically, into his Bharata Mata Navarathina Maalai.

The classical Dasangam describes ten royal attributes—mountain, river, country, city, garland, horse, elephant, flag, drum, and sceptre—traditionally composed in nerisai venba metre. Bharati adapted this structure in his Bharata Devi's Sacred Dasangam, modifying the elements: he included name, country, city, river, mountain, vehicle, army, drum, garland, and flag. Instead of the horse and elephant, he introduced the vehicle; instead of the scepter, he included the army as one of the ten components. Notably, he also composed separate songs centered exclusively on elements like the drum and the flag, which are parts of the Dasangam. Through these adaptations, Bharati demonstrates both his mastery of classical Tamil forms and his innovative spirit in reshaping them to express nationalist ideals. The Iyanmozhi Vaazhthu, a subdivision of the Paadaan Thina, traditionally praises the victories and virtues of kings. Bharati adapted this genre to celebrate political leaders who stirred the desire for freedom among the people. This can be seen in poems such as "Vaazhga Nee Emmaane" and "V. O. C. Vaazhthu," where he extols leaders who worked for national liberation. Similarly, the Vanchina Kaanchi subdivision of the Kaanchi Thina—which involves a solemn vow declaring, "If I fail to act thus, let me become unworthy"—is reflected in "Mazziniy Prathignai" (Mazzini's Pledge). At the end of Mazzini's vow, Bharati adds a devotional appeal:

"May the great vow we have uttered be fulfilled without blemish?"

Bless me, O Lord, who abides in my heart!"

This prayerful conclusion represents Bharati's creative expansion of the traditional form. In addition to these classical adaptations, Bharati composed works in later devotional genres such as Vanakkam (salutation) and Thuthi (hymn), including Naattu Vanakkam, Suthanthira Deviyin Thuthi, and Lajpat Rai Thuthi. To ensure that patriotic feeling would resonate deeply among the people, he often set his lyrics to popular and widely familiar tunes of the time, as seen in Suthanthira Perumai and Gokhale Saamiyaar Paadal. He structured Kuyil Paattu in a question-and-answer format combined with a hymn to the Goddess. He also contributed to the evolution of folk literary forms by creating works like Puthiya Konangi, reflecting the style and spirit of folk traditions. Bharati, celebrated as one of the foremost poets of the twentieth century, thus made nationalism his central theme and became a guiding light for later writers. At the same time, he also treated nationalism as a subsidiary theme within devotional and philosophical contexts. In devotional works such as Nallathor Veenai and Velvi Thee, and in philosophical poems like Urudhi Vendum, as well as in individual songs such as Puthiya Aathichudi, Paappa Paattu, and Kaalai Pozhuthu, national consciousness subtly underlies the primary theme. The poem Velvi Thee (The Sacrificial Fire), for instance, may be interpreted as a metaphor for India's burning desire for

freedom and as symbolically representing the struggle between Indians and the British.

Conclusion

Subramania Bharati emerges as a pioneering voice who transformed poetry into a powerful vehicle of nationalism. His songs did not merely echo patriotic sentiment; they actively shaped and intensified it. By personifying the nation as a divine mother, glorifying freedom as sacred, and celebrating the sacrifices of national leaders, he awakened a deep emotional and moral commitment to liberation. Bharathiyar's nationalism was not confined to political independence alone. He envisioned a regenerated India founded on social equality, women's emancipation, eradication of caste discrimination, and educational advancement. His love for the Tamil language and culture further strengthened his conception of national identity, linking linguistic pride with patriotic consciousness. Through his creative adaptation of classical forms, use of folk traditions, and employment of popular musical tunes, Bharathiyar ensured that his message reached the common people. His poetry combined intensity of emotion, clarity of purpose, and artistic innovation, making nationalism both a literary and social movement. In sum, Bharathiyar's songs articulate a comprehensive and progressive vision of nationalism—rooted in freedom, unity, justice, and cultural pride. His works continue to inspire generations, standing as timeless expressions of courage, reform, and unwavering devotion to the nation.

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