Theme Note on

Subramania Bharathi: The National Poet, Prose-writer, Social Revolutionary and Feminist

There are few nations which can boast of a culture which is ancient, rich and timeless. What sustains India is its culture. Without being rigid, it is flexible, adapting itself to the changes of various kinds that are taking place in society. At the same time, it retains its core, which passes through the manifold changes. It is necessary to point out that, while the core remains the same changes take place only in the periphery. The Tamil culture is one of the ancient cultures of the world. It antiquity, depth and comprehensives cannot be measure by time. Scholars are of the view that the beginning of the culture of the Tamils may be assigned to the 5th BC. It has three important periods: the Sangham Period, the Bhakti period and the Contemporary period. Tamil language has three important components: Iyail (literature), Isai (music) and Natakam (dance). Sage Valmiki declares: “The Mother and the Motherland are superior to the heaven”. The Tamil poet Subramania Bharathi, echoed it in his inimitable way. The Indian poets have equated their mother tongue with the mother and the motherland and Bharathi is not an exception to this.

The poet has always been a witness reflector of man’s political, social and economic history. The poet is truly a drasta, the seer. Mahakavi Subramania Bharathi is a poet, prose writer, nationalist, reformer and a feminist. He was born on 11th December 1882 in Tirunelveli. He was honoured by the title “Bharathi” when he was young. He joined the Tamil Daily, *Swadesamithran* as sub-editor in the year 1904. He was inspired by thinkers like Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gandhi. He has translated many of their writings in Tamil. He became the editor of the Nationalist paper, *India* in 1906. Like Sri Aurobindo, he became a self-exile in Pondicherry till 1919. Bharathi made effective use of *India* and other journals and dailies to publish number of essays, which reflected the social and political life of the people, thus contributing to the field of knowledge as well as the Tamil language and literature. His writings encompass a vast domain, viz. philosophy, arts, society, and women. His love for journalism is evident in his prose writings. Though he is basically committed to poetry, his prose-style and elegant expressions in his essays inspire the younger generation. Thus he is not only a revolutionary poet, but also a revolutionary prose writer.

His poems reflect patriotism and love for Mother India. His encounter with sister Nivedita made him to realize the significance of women and their freedom. He considered women as Sakti. He saw India an image of Parasakti and personified the state of freedom as a Mother-Goddess. He sings:

Alas, born in a hapless land

That remembers not the glories lost

Knowing the power of your grace, Mother,

How best may I propitiate thee?

His *Kannan* *Pattu* (Krishna’s Songs), *Panchali* *Sabadham* (the vow of Panchali) and *Kuil* *Pattu* (the Song of the Kukoo) are classics and remembered by all as they show the poet’s ability to make poem as a symbol of love and attachment. He could see Lord Krishna as mother, father, friend, servant and friend. Similarly his *Pachali* *Sabadham* reflect his political protest against the British. The *Kuyil* *Pattu* shows his free verse skill.

Bharathi’s poems were recited everywhere during the freedom struggle and it gave inspiration for the people to participate in the freedom movement. No doubt, he was a patriotic poet, a devotional lyricist and a social activist. Many of his thoughts were revolutionary. He never aspired for money. He says: “My work is poetry, service to the Motherland, and eternal vigilance”. He was not worried about the troubles that surrounded him:

No fear, no withdrawal;

No shame, no body’s trembling;

No sin, no hiding.

He worshipped Kali which is reflected in many of his poems. The Kali form is dear to him at all times, and he sees the divine as the visible creation.

You manifest as all, O Kali,

Everywhere you

The bad and the good

Aren’t they the divine’s play?

The five elements, O Kali,

And the senses, all yourself;

O Kali, you are knowledge

Beyond the mind.

Subramania Bharati passed away in 1921. But his poems were recited and sung almost everywhere with the coming of Gandhi to Indian politics. His poetry was torrential river. There was none who came after him who subsumed so many facets of life. He was unequivocal in his denunciation of casteism and suppression of women.

The following sub-themes will be discussed:

1. Nationalism of Subrmania Bharathi
2. Subrmania Bharathi as a Journalist
3. The impact of Goddess Kali on Subrmania Bharathi
4. His stay at Varanasi: How did it shaped the Poet?
5. Subrmania Bharathi’s encounter with Gandhi
6. His views against casteism
7. Subrmania Bharathi’s Krishna (Kannan)
8. How did Panchali Sabadham reflect Freedom movement
9. The significance of Kuyil Pattu in Subrmania Bharathi
10. Subrmania Bharathi as a Vedantin
11. Evaluation of Subrmania Bharathi’s essays
12. Contextualizing Subrmania Bharathi in the contemporary age
13. Subrmania Bharathi as a feminist
14. Subrmania Bharathi’s cartoons in the Journals in the context of Freedom Movement.
15. Subrmania Bharathi and the renaissance of the Tamil Society

The last date for submission of well researched papers is 20th November 2017. The Venue of the Seminar is Chennai. The papers may be sent by email to seminar.icpr@gmail.com and sipasel@rediffmail.com