



Freedom in the Poems of Bharathidasan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the ideological synthesis between the French Revolution's core tenets—Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity—and the literary works of the revolutionary Tamil poet Bharathidasan. It specifically examines the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's political philosophy on Bharathidasan's conceptualization of freedom as an inherent birth right.

Introduction

In the world of poetry created by the Tamil language, Bharathi and Bharathidasan are the two great poets who brought about a renaissance. During the period they lived, the Indian independence struggle was in its most intense phase. It was a time when countries enslaved across the globe had begun fighting for their freedom. Two major revolutions served as the fountainhead for these freedom struggles: the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789).

The impact of the French Revolution inspired people enslaved worldwide, not just in Europe, to fight. One of the three great slogans of this revolution was Liberty (Freedom). It was Rousseau who formulated these three slogans; his writings provided the revolutionary vocabulary for the freedom fighters.

In this context, the impact of that revolution was significant in Puducherry, which was under French rule. Bharathi, who traveled to Puducherry, and Bharathidasan, who lived there, were both deeply influenced by it. Consequently, their works carried the essence of the triple principles: liberty, equality, and fraternity.



The influence of the French Revolution is profound in the songs about liberation composed by Bharathi. He had a great passion for the French national anthem, "La Marseillaise," and would wander the streets of Puducherry singing it from memory. Regarding this, R. Kanakalingam notes:

"When Bharathiyar sang the 'La Marseillaise' alone, he would stomp his right foot on the ground with aggression and sing with overflowing bravery. At that moment, to those listening from outside, it would sound as if a European or a Frenchman were singing. His French pronunciation was that clear and pure."

Bharathiyar's devotion to the French anthem of freedom inspired him to compose the heroic song that begins: "Fear not, O heart, there is no doubt! / In this very birth, there is liberation and permanence."

Bharathiyar's desire to compose songs in Tamil similar to the French anthem shows how deeply it affected him. It was natural for Bharathidasan, who lived and associated with Bharathiyar, to also develop an affinity for French principles. Rousseau's three ideologies left a massive impact on Bharathidasan. This research paper explores how Rousseau's thoughts on 'Freedom' have influenced the works of Bharathidasan.

Definition of the Word 'Freedom' (Liberty)

The word "freedom" is associated with liberation from social and economic slavery and giving importance to individual rights. It has been included as a fundamental right in most of the world's constitutions. Regarding this, the Encyclopedia Britannica states the following:

'Liberty, as a state of freedom, is especially opposed to political subjection, imprisonment, or slavery. Its two most generally recognized divisions are civil and political liberty. Civil liberty is the absence of arbitrary restraint and the assurance of a body of rights. Such as those found in bills of rights, in statutes, and in judicial decisions. Such liberty, however, is not inconsistent with regulation and restrictions imposed by law for the common good. Political liberty. consists of the right of individuals to participate in government by voting and holding public office.

Because of the proletarian or socialist. Movement and the economic dislocations after World War I: Liberty has been increasingly defined in terms of economic opportunity and security. In Anglo-American countries, liberty has often been identified with constitutional government. Political democracy and the orderly administration of common law systems.



In a more particular sense, a liberty is the term for a franchise, a privilege, or a branch of the crown's prerogative granted to a subject, such as that of executing legal process; hence, the district over which the privilege extends.

These liberties are exempt from the jurisdiction of the sheriff, and they have separate commissions of the peace. In the U.S., a franchise is a privilege; the term "liberty" is not used in such cases. The concept of liberty as a body of specific rights found in English and U.S. constitutional law contrasts with the abstract or general liberty enunciated in the French Revolution and in the French Declaration of Rights. However, modern liberty involves, in theory, both the support of specific rights of the individuals, such as civil and political liberty, and the guarantee of the general welfare through democratically enacted social legislation" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 13, Pages 1029-1030)

Subhash Kashyap explains that "The word 'liberty,' derived from the Latin word 'liber,' refers to liberation from prison, from the state of being a captive, from slavery, and from oppression."

Rousseau's Thoughts on Freedom and Their Influence on Bharathidasan

The French Revolution was the first revolution led by the people to reshape the world. It was a revolution fought for human rights. Regarding this, Meenakshi Murugarathnam states:

"It cannot be said that slogans about human rights were only spoken loudly across the world during the French Revolution. It awakened a thirst to resist; the reason was that people of all races—including those who might be affected by the revolution—held a deep devotion to the concept of liberty."

This highlights that the yearning for freedom was the fundamental pulse of the French Revolution. Rousseau's role in awakening this thirst was monumental. His book, *The Social Contract*, was revered as the "Bible of the Revolutionaries." The ideas regarding freedom he proposed within it exerted immense influence among French revolutionaries. Specifically, Rousseau's thoughts were highly welcomed among the Jacobin radicals. In Tamil Nadu, Bharathidasan, who sang for social liberation, crafted his thoughts on 'freedom' centered around social, political, and economic platforms.

Freedom and Birthright

Rousseau asserts that freedom is something created the moment a human is born. Using power to suppress this birthright is comparable to a shepherd controlling a flock of sheep. That is, it is equivalent to sacrificing people for one's own selfishness. Rousseau states that this right to freedom is frequently



snatched away by powerful bureaucratic classes. No one has the right to take away such a birthright. Regarding this, Rousseau writes in his book *The Social Contract*:

"The spirit of freedom is something inherent in human nature. Man's first law is to provide for his own preservation. His first cares are those that he owes to himself. As soon as he reaches the age of reason, being the sole judge of the proper means to preserve himself, he becomes his own master."

Through this, Rousseau asserts that the meaning of freedom becomes significant only when everyone preserves their birthright of liberty. In his poem 'Paris Viduthalai Vizha' (Paris Liberation Festival), while speaking about France, Bharathidasan reflects on the birthright of freedom:

"You poured the squeezed sweet honey everywhere, saying, 'Freedom is indeed a birthright!'" In these lines, one can see the manifestation of Rousseau's thought, which sensitized the world to the fact that freedom is an inherent birthright.

The Right to Freedom and Property

Rousseau would say that "property arises only through the rights of freedom." Bharathidasan seconds this claim in his poem 'Thozhilalar Vinnappam' (The Laborers' Petition):

"Since the world's workers are many, do not regard us as mere ships or as slaves hereafter! Right now, so that communal joy may flourish, surrender your property—before the blood in our bodies reaches a boil!" This highlights his understanding of the link between social liberty and the equitable distribution of resources.

Conclusion

Bharathidasan acted as a bridge between Western democratic philosophy and Tamil social reform. His poems transformed abstract European political theories into a powerful, localized vernacular of resistance, asserting that true freedom is the mastery over one's own life and resources.



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