They Thought Differently
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To My Parents...
This volume is a collection of articles written, or addresses presented on different occasions, mostly in the last 15 years. They deal with persons drawn from vastly different fields of interest and involvement comprising philosophy, bohemia-nism, rationalism, spiritualism, humanism, nationalism and literature. Although they represent a wide spectrum of faiths and beliefs, they have one thing in common, viz, they differed in varying degrees from the prevailing practices and customs. Conformism may contribute to stability and consolidation, but it is non-conformism that brings about change and development. Every society throws up periodically men and women who seek to sweep the floor of life and remove dirt and debris and bring about cleanliness and health.

Valluvar perhaps is the earliest dissenter in Tamil society. He is looked upon as a poet and a philosopher who laid down norms for the ‘art of living’. He has looked at, with a penetrating insight, every role that humans play on the stage of life, and has laid down a grammar of conduct that combines in an admirable way both the laws and exceptions. But this is not all: he was a refined censurer who disapproved of many practices, some long established and some the result of cultural invasion. His denunciation of the roots of caste system, condemning animal sacrifices, prescribing chastity as a virtue common to both – karpu in one case and peranmai (சப்தந்து) in the other – are a few of the instances of his reform effort.

Vivekananda, by his own life and demeanour, has established a new order of Hindu sanyasins, marking a definite
departure from the conventional monastic life that was confined to the ashram and concerned with one's own salvation. Vivekananda walked out of the hermit, stormed into the wide world, calling upon his countrymen and women 'to arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached'. It is around the middle of the 20th century that even the enlightened members of the society realized the intimate relationship between literacy and development. Vivekananda denounced the Indian vested interests that kept education to themselves, denying it to the masses in general. Vivekananda's definition of education as the manifestation of perfection already in man is a treatise on education in one sentence that will lend itself to be expanded into volumes by way of explanation. While he is immensely proud of the vedas and upanishads of this land, he has not even a trace of hesitation or a grain of reservation in accepting and acknowledging the monumental contributions made by the West in science and technology. He stands like a colossus of a spiritual leader providing a role model for the saint in a monastery and citizen in the society.

Bharathi is widely and rightly acknowledged as the architect of modern Tamil poetry. That needs no further treatment. But there are other dimensions of Bharathi that the Tamil society must know in greater detail. He was perhaps the most radical of reformers of his time and held highly progressive and relatively revolutionary views whether it be women's liberation and empowerment, economic and social justice, or customs and traditions. He looked at them with an amazing degree of objectivity and open-mindedness uninfluenced by any unquestioning faith in any doctrine or dogma. He was a great worshipper of Shakti, proud about his vedic heritage, conscious of the contents of upanishads, but was at the same time endowed with a
scientific streak in his outlook and approach and was
guided by the lamp of reason to discern the direction, 
whether the journey was in a thick forest or on the vast seas 
or across an unending expanse of desert.

More than any of the active nationalists of his days, 
Bharathi was fully aware of the pluralism of India, its 
languages, religions, customs and habits. He looked at 
them as sources of pride and fountain of strength and not 
as factors of division and detraction. His knowledge of the 
social, economic and political forces operating during his 
days at the international level was amazing. He was like 
other nationalists pleading for the freedom of India, but 
unlike many of them, was fiercely advocating the urgent 
need for universal education in India when literacy stood 
at a mere 7.5%; widow remarriage, a reform so blasphe-
amous for the orthodox Hindu leaders as to make even 
Gandhiji gloss over it, avoiding direct advocacy; end of 
caste system, and industrial development as in the West.

Rationalism and social reform are nothing new to 
a society. But in the case of Periyar E.V.R. they acquired 
some unique dimensions. Rationalism remained a subject 
of discussion and debate within the four walls of elitist 
forums. Even social reform efforts of many in India did not 
percolate below the members of the middle class. But the 
movement of Periyar swept through the length and breadth 
of Tamil Nadu like a sustaining hurricane. He approached 
the masses in villages and hamlets, addressed them in 
their language, illustrated his message through demonstra-
tions that were intelligible to them, though to the refined 
and respectable members, they might have appeared 
crude. Periyar's target, unmistakably, was the people at 
large. It is a unique record in human history that his followers
advocating rationalism bordering on agnosticism; if not atheism, organised themselves into a political party and captured power in his lifetime.

Periyar was a man of many dimensions and he waged his war on many fronts. He has not been fully understood. He was termed a linguistic chauvinist; communitarian and a brahmin hater. Far from these accusations, he was a consummate humanist, transcending boundaries of creed and caste, doctrines and dogmas, orthodoxy and even land and language. He was a devoted champion of the disadvantaged, an uncompromising and aggressive fighter against caste system and its manifestations, and an advocate of equal status for, and empowerment of, women. He lived really a life of legendary hard work, simplicity, thrift and strict adherence to a discipline of practising what he preached. The social and political environment he left behind is vastly different from the one that he entered in, and bears the unmistakable stamp of more than half a century of his relentless crusade.

Anna started his career as a disciple of Periyar, but he outgrew certain limitations of Periyar's movement which unwaveringly avoided contesting elections and meticulously confined itself to fighting for social reform and social justice. Anna was intrinsically an artist, born to be an Ibsen or a Shaw, but strayed into politics, ennobling it and aesthetically enriching it. He was a consummate orator, adding to public speaking the adroitness of a sculptor and the melody of a musician. Anna was, within the Indian Federation, a Tamil Nationalist and was proud of the heritage of the Tamils. He understood fully and articulated effectively the sub-conscious dissatisfaction among the Tamils that in independent India, the contribution made by the Tamils to
the culture and civilization of India and the status of Tamil as an ancient language comparable to Sanskrit have not been given their due and the federal concept has been so diluted that the states have been reduced to the position of a major panchayat.

He was one of the most refined of political leaders; endeared himself to all, including strong political opponents; recognized and magnanimously acknowledged merit wherever there was evidence of it: groomed his followers to positions of responsibility and leadership. He could polish pebbles, add some dazzle to them and ungrudgingly give full credit to their performance. He never felt threatened or insecure and was ever willing to step down and transfer the mantle to his junior colleagues. In his scheme of things, all praise was for others and he would claim none for himself. That his chief ministership was cut short by the cruel hand of nature was one of the greatest tragedies that befell Tamil Nadu in the 20th century. Had he lived longer, he would have healed many wounds, closed many breaches, forged many reconciliations and brought about to the social and political movements in Tamil Nadu a new culture of tolerance, mutual respect and magnanimity.

Bharathidasan combines in him the confluence of two great impacts, namely, the spell of the personality of Bharathi and the appeal of Periyar’s movement. He was the crown poet of the self-respect and Dravidian movement and enjoyed a reputation and popularity which very few poets in history could have claimed during their lifetime. His contributions cover a wide spectrum of subjects. The Tamil literary world is fragmented and prejudice-ridden. The national honour of Sahitya Akademi award and Jnanpith award eluded him during his lifetime; he was
posthumously given Sahitya Akademi award. His poems in praise of and in defence of Tamil would keep echoing through the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu almost eternally.

Jeevanandam – Jeeva as he was endearingly referred to by his party workers and popularly known among the public – was a phenomenon in political life. His brief career in the native village might make one conclude that he was genetically endowed with an inclination to fight against inequalities and discrimination. His unorthodox and rebellious behaviour ignoring caste practices and established customs, when he was still in the school, incurred the wrath of the inhabitants in his small village and consequently the displeasure of his parents. He moved out on his own to a wider world where, for the rest of his life, he continued to be an agitator and a crusader. He was a nationalist, a congressman, a follower of Mahatma Gandhi; a member of the Self-Respect Movement, an ardent supporter of Periyar E.V.R., a socialist in Self-Respect movement and later a regular member of the Congress Socialist Party and ultimately he settled down as a communist to continue his life of struggle. In his final incarnation, he spent a major part of his life either in prison, police custody or underground or on the agitation field. While he had adequate mastery of the philosophy of communism and Marxism-Leninism as any other leader of the party, he had in addition an intimate knowledge of Tamil literature, ancient, medieval and modern. He was, besides being an extremely enchanting speaker on party platforms, was a star performer in any Tamil literary forum. This additional dimension and his innate love for Tamil and the people of Tamil Nadu enabled him to have an intimate knowledge of their ambitions and aspirations. The complexities of their problem comprised more than class struggle and Jeeva’s antenna was sensitive
enough to capture their expectations in their entirety. He could feel the warmth of their breath and the rhythm of their heartbeat. However, it would appear that his services were mostly utilized as a prominent party worker, speaker, journalist and fighter. A view that might increasingly gain ground seems to be that if only he had had the opportunity to lead and mould the Communist Party in Tamil Nadu, he might have developed it as a formidable competitor to the Dravidian movement and secured it a place next to Congress. The tragic fact about developing countries is that they fail to harness, not only the treasure of natural resources in the country but also the treasure of human resources within the community, more so when it comes to identifying the peaks.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was the father of science and technology development in India. He had implicit and immense faith in the potential of science and technology for lifting the people of India from their abysmal illiteracy and impoverishment. With a view to making an effective use of this tool for the development of India, he introduced the science policy resolution in the Parliament in 1958. The success of any policy depends on its implementation. C. Subramaniam, popularly referred to as C.S., was the one who carried, more than anyone else, the message of Nehru to the field. The green revolution, of which he was the father, is not merely a national event, but it represents an extremely successful experiment in the application of science and technology for development conducted on a massive scale in the third world country, covering millions and millions of farmers over the length and breadth of the country. If Nehru was the Buddha of the philosophy of science and technology, C.S. was the Ashoka who took the message to the people at large and demonstrated its usefulness.
C.S. was a pioneer in many ways; an innovator, an experimenter, a builder of institutions and builder of leaders and above all a person who represented the confluence of the scientific temper of the West and the spiritual values of the East. He is a person in whom one sees the influence of Nehru's scientific temper and the impact of Rajaji's spiritual values, both blended harmoniously. The nation has honoured itself by honouring C.S. with Bharat Ratna.

An important aspect of Tamil literature is that it carries either subtle or explicit criticism against caste system, rituals, shibboleths and superstitions either native or the result of alien influence. It runs through like a thread in a bead necklace, sometimes subtle, and sometimes explicit. It makes an interesting study to survey this element from Valluvar through Vallalar and Bharathi.

The Tamils have since ancient days a glorious record of city building, irrigation, ship building and seafaring. We see references to them in literature and also remains in the form of ruins. But we do not come across any technical literature in Tamil. There is here a big gap and a fertile field for research.

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Prof. V.C. Kulandaiswamy obtained M.Tech., from I.I.T., Kharagpur, and Ph.D., in Hydrology and Water Resources, from the University of Illinois, U.S.A. Starting as an academic, he was Assistant Professor, Professor and Dean in the College of Engineering, now Anna University. He has made outstanding contributions to Hydrology; a model developed by him for Rainfall Runoff Studies is known as 'Kulandaiswamy Model'. He was a member of the UNESCO Planning Group (1978) for the preparation of the Second VI Year Plan (1981-86) of the International Hydrological Programme. He was also UNESCO Adviser / Expert (1979-81) in Hydraulics and Hydrology.

He was Director of Technical Education, Tamil Nadu (1974-78), and successively Vice-Chancellor, Madurai Kamaraj University (1978-79), Anna University (1981-90), and Indira Gandhi National Open University (1990-94). Currently, he is the Chairman of the Tamil Virtual University Society.

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His interests also centre around modernising Tamil to serve as a medium for science and technology, and script reform in Tamil for easy learning. He was the Chairman of a committee set up by the Government of Tamil Nadu for script reform.
He is a recipient of many distinctions: was awarded D.Litt (h.c.) / D.Sc. (h.c) by seven Universities; received the Indira Gandhi National Integration Award (1988), the UGC Pranavananda Award for Education (1990), and the Central Board of Irrigation and Power, "Diamond Jubilee Award" (1991). The Institution of Engineers (India) conferred the recognition of one of the eminent "Engineering Personalities of India" (1991).

He was made an Hon. Fellow of the Commonwealth of Learning, Vancouver, Canada (1999) in appreciation of his services to Distance Education. He was one of the first two, chosen by the Senate of IIT Kharagpur from the 35,000 odd Alumni for the Distinguished Alumnus Award, instituted in 2003 and conferred in its 49th Convocation. He was the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award (1988) for his contribution to Tamil literature. He was conferred the national honour of Padma Shri (1992) and Padma Bhushan (2002) for Science, Engineering and Education by the President of India.
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1. Introduction

A few observations by way of introductory remarks on Thirukkural may be in order. It is not a scripture like the Bible or Koran; not even a sacred book like the Bhagavat Gita. It is not an epic or a piece of literary work like the Ramayana or Mahabharatha. It is a book of 1330 couplets dealing with the ‘art of life’, laying down guidelines for what may be called ‘right living’ or ‘living the right way’ in this life. As regards its merit, one may quote the assessment by two great men, Albert Schweitzer and M.Ariel.

There hardly exists in the literature of the world a collection of maxims in which one finds so much lofty wisdom – Albert Schweitzer.

* Paper presented at the research session, VIII Conference, International Association for Tamil Research; Tamil University, Thanjavur, January 1995.
... that which above all is wonderful in the Kural* is the fact that its author addresses himself without regard to castes, peoples or beliefs, to the whole community of mankind; the fact that he formulates sovereign morality and absolute reason; that he proclaims in their very essence, in their eternal abstractedness, virtue and truth; that it presents, as it were, in one group, the highest laws of domestic and social life; that he is equally perfect in thought, in language, and in poetry; in the austere metaphysical contemplation of the great mysteries of the Divine nature as in the easy and graceful analysis of the tenderest emotions of the heart.- M. Ariel.

These are representative of the kind of assessment the book has received from many scholars during this century and the last; i.e. over some 1800 years or more after the book was written.

The very first observation about the Kural is the fact that it is a secular book. During the days of Valluvar many religions existed in India. There were Buddhists, Jains, Hindus as well as Agnostics and Atheists. But secularism as a concept was unknown. Valluvar himself was a believer; he has devoted one chapter to praise of God. He must have observed a particular religion. But in his book he advocates no religion; he does not even refer to any religion. What is more, there is no indication by which one can identify the religion to which he belonged – notwithstanding the fact that there is a full chapter in praise of God. This he does in a book that deals with the art of living or a treatise on the way of life. One could hardly imagine that a book written two millennia ago, dealing with three aspects of life i.e. வாழ்வு. 

* Thirukkural is also referred to as Kural which is a popular practice.
(aram, porul, inbam) will so completely steer
clear of any advocacy of or even reference to, any religion. It is therefore a work whose appeal is for followers of all
religions – a truly secular book.

The ancient Indian law-giver *Manu* and the ancient
Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle maintained with
absolute certainty that human beings were not born equal.
This view prevailed in all civilizations over centuries. But
Valluvar held a radically different view. He stated categori-
cally, nearly 2000 years ago, that all were equal at
birth and distinctions arose only by virtue of the jobs they
performed.

All (men and women) are born equal
Distinctions arise only on the basis
Of their occupation

(972)

It was an extraordinarily revolutionary statement at
the time Valluvar lived and worked.

In Sangam age and post-Sangam age also, brothels
existed and prostitution was a socially accepted institution.
Chastity, denoted by a more comprehensive term in Tamil, *karpu*, was considered only as a virtue to be guarded and
preserved by women. It was not demanded of men with
any degree of severity in any ancient societies. But Valluvar
condemned prostitution and deprecated adultery on the
part of men also. At a time when chastity or *karpu* was
considered solely a feminine virtue, Valluvar introduced a
new expression *peranmai* to indicate chastity among men.
It is totally a new term and corresponds to the demand
of Bharathi’s modern women who declare:

* These three terms are translated as Righteous Living, Wealth,
Pleasure: but these equivalents are grossly inadequate to convey
the full import of these words.
They talk of the virtue of chastity
We agree, but let it be common
for both the parties

Valluvar has introduced a whole chapter against
adultery and another chapter against the practice of
visiting brothels.

It was customary in the past for the *rishis* or *sadhus*
to grow beard, and monks to shave their heads. This practice
continues even today. Valluvar deemed this external
manifestation an unwanted display and stated that what
was really needed was eschewing all that the wise
disapproved of. Valluvar differed decisively from the
contemporary society in many respects and held what
would be considered progressive views even by modern
standards.

2. Relevance to Contemporary World

Secondly, we come to the relevance of the book
in terms of time and space. It was said earlier that it is not
a scripture. The *Bible* will live as long as Christianity is
practised and the *Koran* as long as Islam lives. So is the case
with any other scripture. The *Kural*, being a secular work,
has no followers as such based on faith. The great epics
of the world last because of the beauty of poetry and the
grandeur of the characters. The *Kural* has no such advantage.
It deals with such a mundane topic as the art of living and
concerns day-to-day living.

The *Kural* was written two millennia ago. Society as
it existed then, in what is now Tamil Nadu was different;
perhaps beyond any comparison with the one we now
have. Most of the modern concepts and practices,
considered simple and self-evident today, did not exist at
that time. Democracy, socialism, welfare state, social justice, equity, equality, dignity of the human individual and many other concepts were unknown. Valluvar lived and wrote in an age whose problems, challenges, ambitions, aspirations and even values were very different; vastly different from those of the present. How can a book written so long ago, in so different an environment, dealing with so earthly a subject as the art of living, be relevant to the modern society, that has seen so many changes, so many revolutions?

Valluvar lived at a time when mobility was so poor; one's knowledge of other societies and the world was so meagre: one's contact with people of different climes and cultures was so limited. He could have observed life and understood it from the narrow world of his ancestors and his contemporaries. How can a work circumscribed by all these institutions have a universal appeal? The aim here is to try to find answers to these questions.

Bharathidasan says that a 'a book is good for the age it was written'. Bharathi goes further and declares:

To suit all the needs of time
To meet the changing concepts
of every age
Acceptable to the wide world and enduring for ever— such a book does not exist.

To what extent can the Kural defy these categorical statements? If it is universal and immortal, what are the characteristics that lend immortality to it? One may identify five aspects of the Kural that seem to contribute to its (i) universality, and (ii) immortality
They are:

i. dealing with issues concerning wisdom in preference to knowledge
ii. generalization
iii. scientific outlook
iv. extolling human effort
v. presenting a possible ideal world.

In dealing with these aspects, Valluvar excludes all those that are peripheral to life, and transient in human society. He reaches for his treatment the relatively unshifting foundations of human life and wherever certain changes in practice with variation in space and time have to be taken into account, he makes suitable accommodation for them by incorporating exceptions and adopting unique strategies that contribute to universalizing a maxim.

3. Words of Wisdom

If we look at our day-to-day life, we come across things that we refer to as information, knowledge and wisdom. Information is rather of transient importance, sometimes even trivial. Knowledge and wisdom are those that matter for our discussion.

When we talk of research and development, and the phenomenal progress, we talk about the invention of new knowledge, the rapid growth of knowledge in every field; we are not talking about wisdom. We are talking about becoming more knowledgeable, not necessarily more wise.

If we take Valluvar, he may not have been as knowledgeable as a high school student of today, either in
mathematics or other sciences or even social sciences. The modern society is 2000 years ahead of Valluvar; it is more knowledgeable than Valluvar; but not necessarily wiser than Valluvar. A school boy may be more informed than his father; but not necessarily wiser than his father.

We can consider our knowledge of the world under four broad systems:

i. Physical systems  
ii. Biological systems  
iii. Social systems  
iv. Metaphysical systems

Valluvar stays away from dealing with physical systems and biological systems. These are systems where knowledge grows rapidly: obsolescence sets in very soon. If we take social systems, we know less about the psychology of a society than about the psychology of individuals. If you are an expert in the psychology of individuals, you become a professor of psychology; but if you become an expert in the psychology of a crowd, you may become the Prime Minister of the country.

Valluvar deals with the individual, as a citizen, as a husband, as a wife, as a son or daughter, as a family man, as an ascetic, as minister, as king or one in any position of power and authority, as a friend, as a lover and so on. In all these, he will only touch upon things that have universal appeal. He goes down to the unshifting foundations of human existence and living and from there lays down maxims. We may see a few examples.

In a society we help people; we receive help from people. How do you measure the magnitude of the help? the value of the help? Valluvar says that
The value of an act of help is not in the help itself;
It is in the greatness and worth of the person who receives it. (105)*

Some will value highly even a modest help; some others will ignore even if you sacrifice your life for them. The value is not in the help itself. It is in the magnanimity or the worth of the individual to whom the help has been given. This assessment will remain valid for ever.

Similarly, he raises a question: how do you determine the greatness of an individual? His answer is:

Whether a person is great or small will be decided by what he leaves behind him. (114)

It may be at the end of one's term in an office or at the end of one's career. You may judge a person by the tradition he leaves behind or the kind of successors he prepares. That one's greatness must be judged not by what one is but by what one leaves behind is an extraordinary touchstone and will remain valid for ever.

Talking about friendship, Valluvar would say that a friend is not just for fun and laughter but for administering a rebuke when one tends to become guilty of excesses:

Friendship is not for fun and laughter;
it is for administering a rebuke beforehand
when one tends to become guilty of excesses. (784)

While dealing with kings, he lists out certain qualities. Among them, he makes a particular reference to the capability

* The number refers to the order of arrangement of verses of the Kural in the text from 1 to 1330
on the part of the king to listen to unfavourable criticism. Valluvar says:

The whole world will come under the umbrella of the king who is capable of listening with tolerance to words that are critical of him and therefore bitter. (389)

While this is meant for kings, one can substitute in the place of the king either a minister, chairman, manager, director or any one in any comparable position of power and authority. One could quote a number of instances. Perhaps we may refer to one more in the field of management. Valluvar is not a person interested in theorizing. He is one who would always advocate action and would declare that one would be judged as small or great only on the basis of one's deeds.

He devotes one full chapter to selection and employment of persons. He provides the following guidelines:

After having considered that this man can accomplish this (task) by (employing) this means, choose that man and leave that (task) to him. (517)

He would advocate that the choice of a person for a task must be based on an assessment of the capacity of the individual, taking into account the means he may be capable of employing or the tools that he can use. One should also take into account the nature of the task. Such observations as those quoted above will remain valid, transcending time and space.
4. Generalization

Another important aspect of Valluvar’s words is his capacity for abstraction and generalization. Generalization, by and large, indicates an advanced stage of knowledge in any field. For instance, men identified individual objects first. Then only they classified them under common families. If we take the case of trees, initially it is a palm, a plantain or a pine. Only later they found that they all belong to the family of trees. Similarly, men identified the tiger, the lion, the elephant, and later they found they come under the class of animals.

Whatever subject Valluvar touches, he generalizes and makes it applicable to the human society almost irrespective of the place, time, the nature of government and the type of economic structure. We may possibly cite an example of another author who explicitly states having adopted this kind of approach in order to make his writing applicable to a wider population. Francis Bacon who lived at least 1500 years after Valluvar says that when he translated his book ‘Advancement of Learning’ from English into Latin, he made specific efforts to ensure that when he tried to free his writing from the limitations of English by translating into Latin, he did not like to perpetuate the limitations by keeping the matter particularly applicable to the people of one language.

Valluvar would often speak of scholarly books and advise his readers that they should “do as stated in authoritative treatises or as suggested by acknowledged authors”. He would leave it as a general statement that would not mention either the name of a book or that of an author so that one may substitute any author, any book depending on the time, place and the circumstances. It is with a design and determination that he avoids particularization and
makes it possible for us to substitute that book or that author relevant to that subject at that place and at that point of time. This is the approach that Valluvar employs to make his observations enjoy continued relevance, and one sees that this design pervades every chapter. In the section on wealth, Valluvar deals with the choice of the right time and the right tool for doing a job:

Is there an impossible task
for the one who chooses
the right moment and the (right) tool? (483)

The tool for a job will change with time, with place. One must do today's job with today's tool. If you do today's job with yesterday's tool, it is said that tomorrow you would be out of business. Obviously, we cannot do today's job with the tool of Valluvar's time. Consequently, Valluvar would stress on more than one occasion the need to use the right tool, but would never mention or give a list of tools. Consequently, we may use in the place of tools either the 8000 year old plough or the most modern tool, the personal computer. He makes room for both.

There is perhaps no book dealing with human virtues that does not stress the need for good conduct or the importance of good conduct. Valluvar devotes two chapters, one to propriety of good conduct and the other to 'inconsistent conduct' and the consequences accompanying them. But he does not state what constitutes good conduct or what would be termed the opposite of it. One may wonder: 'of what use is it, if one does not specify what is good conduct and what is bad conduct, but makes a general statement in favour of good conduct which perhaps everyone could say?' He realizes the difficulty in identifying good conduct in view of its changes from place to place and from time to time. While all would accept that good
conduct is desirable, considerable difficulty will arise in defining good conduct. Take for instance, such a common virtue as chastity. It is exalted as a great virtue over the ages and in modern times too. But at no time was there a universally accepted interpretation of chastity. Among the ancient Tamils, the poets declared that a truly chaste woman would not be coveted by another man; it is not enough if she does not allow any weak thought about a man other than her husband to enter her mind. It is no doubt a tall order; impractical; but that was the limit to which the definition of this particular virtue has been carried. We have at the other end, societies that permit a woman to marry more than once and consider her chaste as long as she is faithful to the man she is married to at a given time. Polyandry is still not a matter of the past. Valluvar was able to consider the local and ephemeral nature of the accepted norms of behaviour in a given society and avoided categorizing good conduct in detail; but not to define good conduct could also mean that the book is of no help. Consequently, after emphasizing and reiterating the importance of good decorum he says:

Those who know not
how to act agreeably to the world
are truly ignorant
Though much learned they are. (140)

In Tamil tradition, the term 'world' means a body of wise men. Therefore, according to Valluvar, good conduct is what the wise men of the society lay down from time to time. Thus, by a simple definition, Valluvar takes care of, and accounts for, all possible incarnations that the concept of 'good decorum' may take in every part of the world and in every age or period of time.
Valluvar emphasizes education and he has 3 chapters pertaining to it under the headings: education, absence of learning and importance of listening. In all the 30 couplets in these 3 chapters, he extols the virtues of education, the power of knowledge and baseness of illiteracy. But in none of these 30 couplets, he makes any mention of the subject to be learnt or the book to be studied, though he mentions more than once the need to study scholarly books. If the chapter was meant for monarchs, he could have referred to the 64 arts that were recommended in those days for kings to attain proficiency. If it was meant for others, he could have referred to grammar, language, literature, medicine, logic and many other subjects that were then normally learnt. But he does not mention them. He says quite precisely 'learn what is to be learnt'.

What is to be learnt varies from time to time, from profession to profession. If the list of what is to be learnt was prepared in detail in the period of Valluvar, it may have very little significance today. By laying down the criterion 'learn what is to be learnt', Valluvar transcends individual professions and specific periods. While he chooses to stress with all the force at his command the need to learn, he would not specify what is to be learnt. It is a matter of unending wonder that in 3 full chapters that are relevant to learning, he would not refer to any subject, any book, any author.

We may take up another example; he has a chapter on the glory of defence. The defence forces and protective devices were given the topmost place in the scheme of things. In those days, four components of the defence forces were well recognized: the soldiers on foot; those on chariots; the fighters on horses; and those on elephants. Valluvar, while describing the defence forces, says that
The defence force which is complete in its components and conquers without fear of being hurt is foremost among the possessions of a ruler.  (761)

He would say that the forces should have all the components; must not be afraid of the sufferings of war; and must have the ability to win the war. But he would only say that the forces should have all the components of the defence, but would not specify one or more of the well recognized components that were in use at that time. He would only say 'complete in its components'. Today we may introduce under components army, navy and airforce. While Valluvar knew that the defence forces will always have components, he must have realized that the details of the components might vary from country to country and even in the same country from time to time. By restricting his statement to relevant components, he has rendered his observations universal in time and space.

We may take another example from medicine in order to appreciate the degree of abstraction and generalization:

The man who learnt medicine must assess the condition of the sick person, the nature of the disease and the season and then decide on treatment.  (949)

He would only say 'a person who has learnt medicine' but would refer to neither the system of medicine nor the acknowledged treatises on medicine, nor the names of the authors of such books, even though at least two systems, namely, Siddha and Ayurveda existed at that time, and books had been written and followed during his days.
He has a full chapter on the importance of power of speech. But he would not mention the name of any language including his own mother tongue, Tamil. He has a chapter on state and the characteristics of a prosperous country, but does not mention the name of any country or place or city or the kingdoms that existed then in the Tamil land or elsewhere on the sub-continent. He talks about the need for having perennial rivers, but does not refer to any river, viz. the Ganges or Cauvery or Vaigai. He talks about rulers and governance of a country. He does not refer to any dynasty, any king; the great Tamil royal dynasties of the Cholas, Pandiyas and Cheras do not find mention. He has scrupulously avoided any mention or reference that might circumscribe the applicability of this observation to a country or race.

In any topic that he has dealt with, he has endeavoured to abstract the core of the subject and succeeded in making his observations so general that they lend themselves to interpretation in terms of contemporary developments, thus accounting for all the changes that may take place in human progress. It is this approach, this refined strategy, that has substantially contributed to the Kural transcending the limitations of space and time enabling it to be relevant, centuries after it was written.

5. Scientific Outlook

A reference has been made earlier to scientific outlook in Valluvar’s work. The ultimate objective of human endeavour is finding truth. It is in this pursuit that humanity has involved itself for generations from ancient times. The procedure we use in the modern world in the pursuit of truth has often been based on methods of science. This helps us develop an approach that promotes objectivity and freedom from possible bias and prejudices.
The 'scientific method', as we know of it today, took shape mainly in the 17th century. Among the ancient thinkers, there were many who were endowed with a scientific outlook and used, almost unconsciously, a scientific approach in their pursuit of knowledge. They were capable of rising above the limitations of their age; they could cast aside the prevailing traditions, wherever necessary, penetrate into the possible developments of the future and analyse the problems on hand against this background. They exhibited an extraordinary perception and a combination of reasoning and intuition for understanding reality. One finds these characteristics in Valluvar.

We normally believe that 'dharma' triumphs in the world. If so, the righteous ones must be happy and prosperous and the situation must be reversed in the case of the unjust. But we do see from the dawn of civilization instances where the just ones suffer and the unjust live in plenty and prosperity. Valluvar sees this contradiction. He says:

The prosperity of individuals who are envious and jealous and the poverty of the righteous need to be pondered over. (169)

Valluvar raises a question: "why is it that we find that some among the envious and the jealous are very well off and the righteous ones suffer?" He does not give an answer, but concedes that this requires investigation. It could have been easy for Valluvar to find an answer in the framework of the faiths and beliefs that existed in his days. The believers are never short of answers to such questions. They have a ready answer to every question. In this case, they would have said, 'it is god's will or it is fate'.
Valluvar believes in god; he believes in previous birth and in rebirth. He speaks about heaven and hell. He also believes that the consequences of one’s actions in the previous birth follow in the present and the actions in this birth will have their effects in the next birth. Within this framework, he could have easily found an answer. He could conclude that if a righteous person suffers in this birth, it might be because of his evil deeds in the previous birth; if an envious person is prosperous, he is perhaps enjoying the benefits of his good actions in his previous birth.

Valluvar does not resort to finding such a simple answer. He has an open mind, an enquiring mind. He concedes that neither our faith nor our wisdom nor our knowledge can provide all the answers. There are things that lie beyond all the systems, human or divine, that we have on hand. This *kural* above demonstrates the resilience and openness of Valluvar’s mind and the streak of scientific approach in his outlook. Surprisingly, not many have highlighted this aspect or taken a close look at this couplet. The following two couplets almost lay down a definition of scientific approach:

True knowledge or wisdom is the perception of the truth in everything, whatever be the nature of the thing.  
(355)

Knowledge or wisdom is the discerning of the truth in everything said, no matter by whomsoever it was said.  
(423)

In the first case, he demands that whatever be the nature of a thing investigated, our aim must be to find the truth, and
our attachment to it or aversion to it or regard for it should not influence our approach. In the second case, in any statement made, the personality or the relationship or the standing of the person who made the statement should not influence our judgement. Whoever the author of the statement may be, we must look for the truth in it.

The Indian culture consists of 4 components, namely, dharma, artha, kama and moksha. The first three concern this world; the last one concerns the world beyond. The first three are open to liberal investigations. But the moment you enter the world beyond, be it heaven or hell, religion enters the scene; faith follows and objectivity becomes alien. Valluvar chooses only the first three and does not speak about salvation explicitly. By this single step, he keeps religion outside his discussion; removes all obstacles to objectivity; removes all factors that may inhibit or exclude the enquiry into the contents; keeps all problems of unquestioning faith outside the purview of the discussion and presents to the world a secular treatise or a secular veda.

It does not mean that Valluvar has totally ignored salvation or has not thought of the possibility of the concept of heaven or life thereafter. He declares:

He who on the earth lives in the conjugal state as he should live, will be placed among the Gods who dwell in Heaven. (50)*

According to him, all that is needed for one is to live in this world in a manner that one should live; such people need

* Translation : Drew and John Lazurus
not go to heaven. They may become devas on this earth, and should there be a heaven after this life, they will become naturally entitled to it. Valluvar's approach is, "we live in this world; life in this world is what we have in our hands. It is within our power to regulate it and make it meaningful and satisfying. It must be our aim to strive to make what is available, rich and whole". If we live the life of a family man, in a manner that is proper and what is made known as right living, that should ensure salvation. It is a consequence of our own living in this world and not a separate objective to be pursued. This is an extremely revolutionary and radical statement. It was Bharathi who imagined that the devas from the heavens would descend on the earth and become our friends, companions and relatives.

Bharathi talks about an island:

...... Where
The devas of the Heavens
become our friends and drink
nectar in our company.
The devas acknowledge our success
and marry our women:
We embrace the sweet
ladies of the devas and jump in joy.

About 2000 years ago, Valluvar has made the same declaration in a more general way.

6. Human Effort

The modern world exhibits the power of knowledge. We realize today that knowledge is a resource by itself. We have come to take this almost for granted in the latter half of this century. But this was neither the tradition nor the pervasive thinking of the people in the days of Valluvar. But Valluvar, while speaking of knowledge, declares:
Those who possess wisdom / knowledge possess everything; those who have not wisdom / knowledge whatever they may possess, have nothing. (430)

What is important here, is the statement that those who have knowledge possess everything. While commenting on this kural, Parimelalalahar explains as follows:

Since all wealth is created and protected by knowledge, Valluvar says that one who has it, has everything. If one has wealth, one need knowledge to protect it from loss and destruction, and if due to divine ‘will’ it is lost or destroyed, one who is without knowledge does not have the tool to create it again and, therefore, Valluvar says that those that do not possess knowledge, whatever they may have, have nothing.

The observation that those who have knowledge are capable of creating wealth even if it is not there, is astounding. We are aware today of the fact that materials are created by research out of matter. Countries have become rich and prosperous irrespective of their size or natural resources or population on the basis of the level of science and technology that could be made use of in the process of creating resources. But a statement reflecting the capacity of knowledge, made two millennia ago, is certainly something remarkable.

Valluvar is not interested in those who preach and philosophize but pursue no action. For him, the great are those that perform deeds that are uncommon and admirable.

One’s deeds are the touchstone of one’s greatness or smallness. (505)
The high and the low are determined by their performances. He exhorts:

Yield not to the feebleness which says “this task is too difficult and far above my competence”. The attempt to do the task itself will give the greatness (of mind) necessary. (611)

Valluvar enters into an inquiry about the relative strength of fate and human effort. Notwithstanding many of the statements where he emphasizes the strength of fate in no uncertain language, he ultimately concludes:

Those who continue to work hard on right lines and without any decline in commitment will vanquish even fate. (620)

This statement is categorical and unequivocal. It is remarkable since Valluvar lived in a society which believed that

Other than in accordance with His will even an atom will not move.

Valluvar is a bard who sings the glory of action; a poet who makes performance the criterion for greatness; a philosopher who assures a heaven on earth for the endeavouring and persevering. No one of his age that we know of has acclaimed action as unreservedly and in as favourable a light as Valluvar did. The person who is settled in conjugal life conducts himself in conformity with the world as conceived by great men: thinks high, is not awed by the difficulties of a task; learns whatever is required to be learnt and leads his life the way it should be led—he does not have to go in search of heaven: he would enjoy
the status of divinity on this earth itself. This is the message of Valluvar. This book will remain relevant and will inspire generations of humanity as long as humanity has faith and confidence in itself.

7. A Possible Ideal World

Lastly, we come to Valluvar's concept of the possible ideal world. From the beginning of civilization, man has been motivated by aspiration to strive for and achieve something higher, something beyond the constraints and limitations of this world. The angels, the devas and the heavens are in a way the manifestations of this ambition which is deeply rooted in the human psyche. It reflects a desire for achieving a state higher than the one he is in. There may exist devas or may not: but we should entertain an ambition to become like them.

It is with a view to creating an ideal society that intellectuals develop many models. The Republic of Plato, the Utopia of Thomas More, the New Atlantis of Francis Bacon are examples of these efforts. All our epics depict an ideal world, an ideal hero and an ideal heroine. An example is Kamban's description of the Khosala land:

There was no philanthropy since
no one was poor;
There was no great strength (of army)
since there was no enemy;
There was no truth since
falsehood was unknown;
There was no one to be considered as
enlightened, since education flourished
among all.

Obviously, Kamban is describing an ideal country. We have Kannagi for chastity, Savithri for dedication to her
husband, Rama for loyalty to his wife. These heroes and heroines were our ideals. We do not think of them as those whom a common person could follow. Valluvar endeavours to visualize a society that is ideal and that is also possible from the point of view of implementation.

In science and technology, we imagine ideal situations in order to find a classical or analytical solution. We idealize, simplify and find a situation under conditions which are not true to nature. Having found a solution on the basis of certain assumptions, we apply corrections to bring a solution closer to the real world. Valluvar follows a similar approach. He gives predominance to two virtues:

i. Non-killing, and
ii. Avoidance of falsehood.

He says:

Not to destroy life is an incomparably great good:
Next to it in goodness ranks freedom from falsehood. \[(323)\]

Valluvar has devoted a whole chapter to truth, stressing in many ways the avoidance of falsehood.

But there are situations which present genuine problems in real life in avoiding falsehood, and those pose challenges. Imagine that a drunkard in a mood of mad anger is chasing a person to strike and kill him. The victim is on the run to escape from the danger. Assume that you know the place that he has gone to and found an asylum in. The drunkard comes and asks whether you have seen a person running in this direction and whether you know as to where he is? Your answer is to be ‘yes’, if you decide not to utter
only of the Tamil land but the country as a whole. The book in a way also bears evidence of the height of civilization and culture as well as intellectual attainments that humanity has reached nearly 2000 years ago. Perhaps the discussion may be concluded with the following observations of K.M. Munshi:

In its essence, *Tirukkural* is a treatise par excellence on the art of living. Thiruvalluvar, the author, diagnoses the intricacies of human nature with such penetrating insight, perfect mastery and consummate skill absorbing the most subtle concepts of modern psychology, that one is left wondering at his sweep and depth. His prescriptions, leavened by godliness, ethics, morality and humaneness are sagacious and practical to the core. They cut across castes, creeds, climes and ages and have a freshness which make one feel as if they are meant for the present times.
Vivekananda, a Saint and a Change Agent*

1. Introduction

I am thankful to the organisers of the Multi-Religious Conference for the kind invitation extended to me to participate in this great event and have the privilege and pleasure of sharing some of my thoughts with you.

As I stand on the platform and survey the enlightened audience in front of me, I feel a sense of diffidence. I do realise that to feel diffident while undertaking a task is not in tune with the spirit of Swami Vivekananda's teachings; but in my case it arises out of a realization of my limitations. When you are in a congregation of scholars, a little diffidence is a desirable virtue. To be aware of your weakness is also your strength.

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*Inaugural address at the Multi-Religious Conference held at the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa on 11.9.93 to commemorate the centenary of Swami Vivekananda’s address at the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago.*
I am not a student of philosophy; much less of religion and metaphysics. I cannot also claim intimate knowledge of Swami Vivekananda’s teachings. I am by education an engineer and technologist, accustomed to dealing with the mundane problems of the material world; concerned more with the concrete than with the abstract; more with action than with contemplation; more with the world outside than with the world within. However, it so happens that I have also been all through my life a teacher and an educator: it is in the domain of education that I draw my inspiration from Swami Vivekananda. I shall therefore try to discuss broadly, Swamiji’s concept of education.

2. Focus on Education

As we move towards the end of the 20th century and review globally the progress of human society, we find that transcending religion, language, race and forms of government, the world has moved to a stage where it stands divided into two distinct groups - the rich and the poor, the latter being euphemistically referred to as the developing nations. In the distant past, we had rich and poor people in every country. We have that difference even now; but such a clear division as a whole country being designated as rich or poor is a new phenomenon. We see today the unhappy spectacle where the advanced countries consisting of about 23 per cent of world’s population have access to 80 per cent of world’s resources and the balance of 77 per cent has to be content with the remaining 20 per cent of the resources. This is a disturbing situation both for the rich and the poor.

We may raise the question as to what exactly are the causes for the iniquitous situation stated above. There may be many, but in the main, the cause in one word is
'Education' - its pervasive prevalence in the advanced countries and the absence of it in the developing countries. What makes the difference is the ability of a nation to master the disciplines of knowledge, create new knowledge and apply knowledge generated for social and economic development.

If we review the events in the 20th century, we will find that the most significant development is the emergence of knowledge as a major resource - a resource that can be created, augmented and can compensate for the absence of other resources - and consequently, the focus on education as the major tool for upward mobility in the social, cultural and economic life of the people. Some 8000 years ago or even earlier, the world entered the age of agriculture; later in the 18th century was ushered in the industrial age; the 20th century saw the dawn of the information age or the knowledge era. We realize now that education has moved from social service to investment and the most important investment that we can make is in education. Development today essentially means human resource development. It is unfortunate that the developing countries failed to pay adequate attention to mass education as well as higher education.

3. **Mass Education**

Swami Vivekananda clearly recognized the paramount importance of mass education, one full century in advance: he advocated it with his characteristic forcefulness, calling it 'one magic solution' to all our problems, and in doing so, he emphasized the education of the masses in general and women in particular.

It was only in 1990 that the UNESCO in its Jomtien Conference in Thailand adopted the resolution of 'Education
for all by 2000 A.D. Swami Vivekananda addressed himself to this problem a century earlier and declared:

A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolising of its whole education and intelligence of the land among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it by spreading education among the masses. The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education to develop their individuality.

4. Medium of Learning

In taking education and knowledge to people at large, language becomes a problem. In India, Sanskrit was for long the language of knowledge and scholarship. It was a language of the elites, the language of the few and not of the masses. Consequently, the common man had no access to the world of learning. Swami Vivekananda recognizes this denial and states:

The great difficulty in the way is the Sanskrit language, this glorious language of ours, and this difficulty cannot be removed until, if it is possible, the whole of our nation are good Sanskrit scholars. You will understand the difficulty when I tell you that I have been studying this language all my life and every new book is new to me. How much more difficult would it be for the people who never had the time to study it thoroughly; therefore the idea must be taught in the language of the people.

5. Not Just Literacy

He does not mean just literacy, he means much more. He observes:
Give them ideas: they will get information; but something more will be necessary. Give them culture. Until you can give them that, there can be no permanence in the raised condition of the masses.

Even today, in many countries the choice between English and mother tongue as the language of education is a problem. Swami Vivekananda is very clear in his mind. Knowledge must be made available in the language of the people. Lord Buddha discarded Sanskrit and preached in Pali. When Martin Luther wanted to take the message of Christ to his people, he chose to do it by translating the Bible into German.

6. Women's Education

While we have failed to educate the masses in general, we have failed even more miserably in the case of women. Today we are placing great emphasis on women's education. Initially, we thought of the issue of women as a matter of social service. We then moved to the concept of women's development. Now we have come to the empowerment of women and we have recognized that this has to be done through education and education only. A full hundred years ago, Swami Vivekananda declared:

Women have many grave problems but none that cannot be solved by that magic word, education. All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future.
He wanted that from among the women must come scholars like Maitreyi and Gardi; heroines like the Queen of Jhansi; wives like Sita and mothers of heroes like Jeeja Bai.

7. Education to Go to People

But how to educate these poor people? Their Children go to the field to help the parents in earning the daily bread and many may not be able to go to school during the regular school hours. Here Swami Vivekananda declares:

If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him.

He does not suggest preaching religion and spiritual values only, though he values them. He commends:

Teach them history, geography, science, literature and along with these, the profound truths of religion through these.

At the time when Swami Vivekananda said that ‘if the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him,’ it was not that easy to take education to people. However, Swamiji saw the need. Today Distance Education precisely does that job.

The educational process is organic in nature. It does not remain static. It changes to meet the new demands and to suit the new environment. It keeps evolving, and we clearly see the identifiable stages in the evolution of education.

We had in the first stage the guru-sishya relationship where the student learnt at the feet of his master. It
was a matter of close interaction and intimate association with the guru to acquire scholarship. As the world moved towards the industrial age, education became an important tool for development. The manpower requirement increased; the knowledge and skill needed became varied and diverse and the teacher-disciple system became inadequate. Then came on the scene, in large numbers, the classroom system. New colleges and universities came up and the old ones transformed themselves to meet the new needs.

8. Distance Education

After the Second World War and particularly in the later part of this century, science and technology made tremendous advances and it revolutionized learning and research in every area of knowledge. Creation of new knowledge and application of knowledge to development became part of the functions of a society. The rate of generation of knowledge increased and along with that was the increase in the rate of obsolescence of knowledge acquired. The avenues of education thrown open to the masses to take advantage of the innovations and benefit themselves socially and economically also increased. Demands of universal education, equity in educational opportunities and continuing education were made on the educational system. The conventional system was not designed to meet these challenges. It became inadequate and therefore came on the scene the Distance Education system. We are convinced that in many situations, it is more advantageous to take knowledge to people than to take people to the place of knowledge.

We see a rapid development in the establishment of distance education institutions all over the world. Students from developing countries have been and are going to the universities in advanced countries for education. We
now see a reversal – the universities from advanced countries are going to the students by setting up centres in developing countries. We shall soon see the emergence of multinational universities on the educational horizon.

We considered so far the view of Swamiji on the need for spreading education, taking it to the masses and educating women in particular. Let us consider the kind of education that he advocates.

9. Content of Education

A few of his observations epitomize his concept of education:

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out.

It is man making theories that we want. It is man making education all round that we want.

The gift of knowledge is a far higher gift than that of food and clothes; it is even higher than giving life to a man because the real life of man consists in knowledge. Ignorance is death; knowledge is life.

Worship your Guru as God: but do not obey him blindly. Love him all you will, but think for yourself.

10. Two Universes

We live in two universes: one, the universe outside the human frame and the other, the universe within. Education must help development to occur in both these universes. As far as India is concerned, our ancients
concentrated on the universe within: they tried to understand it; they endeavoured to develop it. On the other hand, the Western societies concentrated mainly on the universe outside: considered its physical and biological aspects; the social, political, economic and cultural aspects and have achieved remarkable success in whatever they have undertaken. To achieve whatever be our ultimate goal, to reach whatever be our final destination, we need to pursue the development of the universe outside and the universe within in parallel. One does not exist without the other; one cannot be exalted to the exclusion of the other.

When it comes to the affairs of this world, Swamiji would insist on a system of education that will allow full liberty to the student and allow him to learn and develop himself according to his inclination. One central theme emphasized by Swamiji again and again deserves deep consideration and research. Education does not add anything from 'without'. All knowledge is already 'within', in the same way that the tiny banyan seed contains 'within' it the huge banyan that covers a vast area of land. The task of education is to loosen the soil a bit so that it may sprout easily: water it, manure it, hedge it for protection; remove impediments if any and facilitate its growth. The growth should necessarily be according to the natural inclination; education should ensure growth in conformity with one's natural inclinations. He warns that if you do not allow a lion's cub to become a lion, it will become a fox. Take the student wherever he stands and help him move forward in the direction in which he is poised to advance. The approach of a teacher must be positive.

In language and literature, in poetry and arts, in everything we must point out not the mistakes that people are making in their thoughts, but the way in which they will be able to do these things better.
11. A New Generation Sannyasin

Swami Vivekananda heralds a new generation of sannyasins in the Indian tradition. He is not a sannyasin who would ignore this world, close his eyes to the realities of life on earth and concentrate on the life hereafter and seek salvation for himself. His heart was full of the problems of the people of India. He was obsessed with their poverty, their sufferings, the miseries that afflicted them, the squalor in which they live and die. With a heart that was bleeding for them, he wept with tears of blood. His great master Ramakrishna declared: ‘Religion is not for empty bellies’. Swami Vivekananda carried this declaration further and pleaded for action. ‘If you want to find god, serve man’ was his command.

12. Concern for the Poor

For him religion is not just a matter of ritual, meditation and worship. It must also be a mission of human service. It was Rabindranath Tagore who said:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads!
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner
of a temple with doors all shut? Open thy eyes and
see thy God is not before thee!
He is there where
the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the
path maker is breaking stones.
He is with them in
sun and in shower, and his garment is covered
with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him
come down on the dusty soil!

Swami Vivekananda sounds more a crusader against poverty, hunger and sufferings of the poor. Whether it is religion or philosophy or education, that which does not address itself to the sobs, sighs and sufferings of the
common man has no use for him. He believed in, and preached for, a religion which gives us faith in ourselves, a national self-respect and the power to feed and educate the poor and relieve the misery around. He totally identified himself with the poor; the appalling conditions of the poor choked him, overwhelmed him. When he heard that a man died of hunger in Calcutta, he beat his breast and asked:

What have we done, we so called men of God, the sannyasins, what have we done for the masses...?

On another occasion, he declared:

Let the study of vedanta and the practice of meditation be left over to the future of life. Let this body be dedicated to the service of others.

Swami Vivekananda is for action; his call is for fight against poverty; war against any form of deprivation, any trace of hunger. Man, the highest of all creations, cannot and should not be allowed to suffer from primitive wants. Education must help man rise above these infirmities. Consequently, he wanted man-making education:

The end of all education, all training should be man-making... it is man-making theories that we want: It is man-making education all round that we want.

13. The Contribution of the West

He wanted that we study different branches of the knowledge that is our own, and with it the English language and Western science. We need technical education and all sciences that will develop industries so that men instead of searching for service may earn enough to provide for themselves and save for a rainy day.
Swami Vivekananda, notwithstanding his reservation about the Western civilisation, admired the West for all that they have done to understand the secrets and laws of the physical world and the efforts that they have made to make use of the knowledge gained for the creation of wealth and promotion of the welfare of the people. While he was convinced of the spiritual heritage of India, the greatness of the Vedas and Upanishads, he was fully alive to the weaknesses of the contemporary India and was also appreciative of the progress that the West has made. He certainly valued their concept of democracy, their stress on human dignity, their emphasis on self-help, the liberation of women, their spirit of enquiry and above all, the confidence they had in themselves. Swami Vivekananda was for education contributing to the development of these virtues; he would plead for the kind of education that would liberate the people from all their miseries.

14. Detachment

The men and women of religion preach in India that attachment is the source of all problems; that we must lead a life of detachment. Swami Vivekananda gives an extremely interesting interpretation of detached life. Detachment does not mean that we become disinterested in the world; that we ignore the problems of the people and the society.

Can we think in terms of a life where we are not attached to our friends, to our relatives, to our intellectual and spiritual works, to our land, to our people? Can life go on if everyone follows this path? The answer is an emphatic ‘no’. There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. Swami Vivekananda compares them to a wall:
It never feels any misery; it never loves; never feels hurt. It is not the kind of detachment that is advocated. The one who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life escapes all its joys. We are not for a heart that never responds to misery; never feels happiness.

According to Swamiji, that man alone will be able to get the best of nature who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so.

15. Concentration on Excellence

Swamiji is no lover of mediocrity in any field of activity. He is an apostle who pleads for and preaches excellence. In order to achieve excellence, his suggestion or advice is 'concentration'. He would say that the very essence of education is concentration of mind. Many think that this (concentration) is what is needed for a 'yogi'. No, this is a method to attain knowledge "from the lowest man to the highest yogi".

Concentration will help a shoe-polisher to do the polishing better; an ordinary cook to do his cooking better. He makes reference to a great 'sannyasin', whom he saw cleaning his brass cooking utensils, making them shine like gold with as much care and attention as he bestowed on his worship and meditation. The lesson that Swamiji wants to draw is that whatever one does, one must do it with one's whole mind, heart and soul to it. No work is unimportant. Swamiji declares: the scavenger in the street is quite as great and glorious as the king on his throne. Whatever you undertake, do it to the level of perfection. Concentration is needed not only for worshipping God, but also for the one engaged in learning, teaching or making
money, polishing shoes or cooking food. One of the aims of education is to train the mind to develop the capacity to converge all its potential on an activity in which it is engaged.

The modern scientist tells us that the human brain consists of millions and millions of neurons and we hardly use even a small fraction of them. In other words, the potential of human mind is immense; almost infinite. It should be the aim of education to develop this potential to achieve the objectives.

16. Relevance of Education

Swami Vivekananda recognizes that what we have on hand is our life on earth. The earth is where we are born and where we die. It is this life that we need to perfect. It is standing on this earth and stretching our hands towards the heavens; directing our minds towards the gods. Education should prepare us for improving the quality of this life materially and spiritually.

What good will it (education) do you or the country at large? Open your eyes and see what a piteous cry for food is rising in the land of Bharata, proverbial for its food. Will your education fulfil this want?

It is a call for relevant education. One cannot plead more forcefully for education being relevant to the economic needs of the country. His eyes are always on the common man.

The education that does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle of life... is it worth the name?
He will stress again and again that education that
forms character, that expands intellect, should eventually
help one to stand on one's own feet. He is a sannyasin who
abandoned the worldly pleasures for himself, but has not
abandoned the world as such. He is not the sannyasin who
would withdraw into a shell and spend his life in prayer
and meditation seeking salvation. His concern is the world
at large; his effort is to find salvation for the people. Since
according to his Master, an empty belly has no use for
religion, he is convinced that education or training or
even religion should address itself to this need.

17. Salvation in this Life

It is obvious that human beings are born not just to
eat, sleep, procreate, grow old, die and perish. Such a state
is common even for the worm in the gutter. Human life is
not merely a cycle of birth and death. Individuals may be
born, may live and die: but humanity as such is continuously
evolving to a better state. It is an unending march upward;
a pilgrimage to a state of perfection. There is no denying
that the human race as such is better evolved than its
ancestors a million years ago. The son is one generation
higher in the evolution ladder than his father. It is a process
of refinement. From the beginning of the civilization, man
has been motivated by an aspiration to strive and achieve
something higher; something beyond the constraints and
limitations of this world. The angels, the devas and the
heaven are in a way the manifestations of this ambition
which is deeply rooted in his psyche. It reflects a desire
to achieve a state higher than the one he is in. Angels
and devas may or may not exist; there may or may not
be a heaven. But we need to create these, since they
represent the goals in the upward march of humanity.
18. Family Man: Great as Sannyasin

Many think, or it is usually believed, that human beings, if they lead a virtuous life, attain heaven or reach the state of devas after death. But poets like Valluvar in the ancient days and Subramania Bharathi of this century have a different perception. Valluvar declares that it is a state that the human beings can achieve in this very life on earth. According to him:

He who has lived in the conjugal state as he should live will be placed among the gods who dwell in the Heaven.

The world of religion has many prescriptions and many practices. The priestly order in every religion has its own dress, its own discipline. There are many rituals; many taboos. Individuals are expected to suffer penance, offer prayers; a greater rigour and a life of asceticism are stipulated. Celibacy, renunciation and other practices are prescribed as paths to the heaven. Valluvar brushes aside all these demands in one sweep. The most desirable is the life of a citizen in a society: the life of a family man with all the happiness that the company of a loving wife and loved children can offer. He may have all the affections and attachment that are appropriate to a family man, an ordinary citizen. Living in this world, one may attain a heavenly bliss or a divine state. In the same strain, Swami Vivekananda declares:

The life of the married man is quite as great as that of the celibate... It is useless to say that the man who lives out of the world is a greater man than he who lives in the world; it is much more difficult to live in the world and worship God than to give it up and live a free and easy life.
In general, we talk about salvation for the individuals. It is something that an individual aspires and attains for himself. It is not thought of as a mass effort like a mass movement; but Subramania Bharathi is not satisfied with that kind of approach. For him, whatever is advocated must be for all. He declares:

India will show the way to the world for all to achieve the state of the devas.

He is not content with reaching there himself; the whole human race must reach there. Bharathi again does not think that one must wait for several births and attain it after this life. It must be feasible here and now in our own state of living. He imagines an island where

The devas come, mingle with us and eat with us and enjoy our company.

For Bharathi, this is not enough; he goes one step further:

The devas marry our girls and we fall in love with their beautiful damsels and find happiness in their embrace.

In general, all these indicate a faith in the possibility that what one calls salvation or Moksha is a state realizable in this very life and on this earth. Now let us get back to Swami Vivekananda. He provides an extremely convincing explanation to this concept.

10. Movement towards Perfection

Swami Vivekananda postulates as follows:

There is an end towards which the whole is moving. Let us call it perfection. Some men and women are born who anticipate the whole progress of mankind.
Instead of waiting and being reborn over and over again for ages until the whole human race has attained that perfection, they, as it were, rush through them in a few short years of their life. And we know we can hasten these processes.

We help the growth of trees, do we not? Left to nature, they would have grown; only they would have taken a longer time; we help them to grow in a shorter time than they would have taken. We are doing all the time something, hastening the growth of things by artificial means. Why cannot we hasten the growth of man? We can do that as a race.

Now can we hasten the growth of individuals? We can. Can we put a limit to this hastening? We cannot say how much a man can grow in one life. You have no reason to say that this much a man can do and no more. Circumstances can hasten him wonderfully. What comes of it? That a perfect man, that is to say the type that is to come of this race perhaps millions of years hence, the man can come today.

Even this hastening of the growth must be under laws. Suppose we can investigate these laws and understand their secrets and apply them to our own needs, it follows that we grow. We hasten our growth; we hasten our development and we become perfect even in this life.

Here we move away from the physical world, the material world. We enter the abstract, we enter the domain of the mind and its powers. The instrument, the means through which we approach this problem is religion. It is not
the aim of religion to concentrate only on life hereafter; it must also be the aim of religion to ensure a way of life that brings peace of mind and happiness. Science and technology has no way of making any great impact on this domain.

While science and technology deals substantially with growth and development of the universe outside, religion deals mainly with the universe inside.

The ultimate aim of science also is truth, but the method has its limitations; it can go very far, but the problems of the mind - the powers of a human being - lie much further. The method here is concentration of the mind and contemplation. It is search inside; what one achieves is not a result as in science but a realization which cannot be just handed over to another as an object.

We apply many methods in science to solve the same problem. For any problem the accurate solution is one, but appropriate solutions which take you very near to truth are many. Scientists discuss, debate, prove or disprove; but do not wage a war over theories.

20. Many Paths: Same Destination

When it comes to establishing the laws to attain perfection or the path to reach perfection, many prophets have suggested many paths and these have become the religions. While scientists and the practitioners of science do not fight, unfortunately in the field of religion that approach has been missing. The pages of history are full of gory incidents and devastating wars. Swami Vivekananda comes down heavily on those who divide humanity. He does not even find tolerance adequate. He questions:
Tolerance means that I think you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live?

He declares:

Let our watchword then be acceptance and not exclusion. I accept all religions that were in the past and worship them all. I worship God with every one of them in whatever form they worship Him.

He does not think that with the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bible, the Koran and other scriptures God’s message is finished. So he says:

I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God’s work finished? The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain to be unfolded.

He exhorts, “Let us await all that are to come in the future and we shall benefit by them”. These observations are extremely significant. He means to say that these are not the final words. God’s message is not a matter of one incarnation, one prophet, one messiah. The world of gods and the world of the humans both are dynamic. Understanding different paths shown by great minds, acceptance of different faiths and living in harmony - is Swami Vivekananda’s consistent exhortation, his unfailing message. Education must give this insight, and this dimension to men and women. If there was one message that he conveyed to the world in his first address at the Parliament of religions, it is this:

I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.
We believe not only in universal tolerance but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth.

While these were the words in his first address on the opening day, he concluded his address on the final day saying:

Help and not Fight, Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and Not Dissension.

1. Steps to Perfection

If the ultimate aim is attainment of perfection there must be steps; there must be stages to reach that state and education must help in providing the steps and guiding the upward motion. Among the things that he advocated are:

- Faith in oneself
- Strength
- Fearlessness
- Truthfulness
- Service

In general, Swami Vivekananda speaks about character-building education. What is character? It is the sum total of certain attributes that go to make one’s personality. Swami Vivekananda would say that character is repeated habits and repeated habits alone can form character. If we choose certain virtues and endeavour to practise them and if we succeed in that effort, they go to mark our character.
Among the many things that Swamiji would advocate, the foremost is faith in oneself. That is the hallmark of success. The great Tamil poet Valluvar said that “those who have the strength of mind would achieve whatever they will”

22. Faith in Oneself

Whatever Swamiji wants to say, he is clear and forthright. He reserves the strongest of expressions to emphasize the need for faith in oneself. He declares:

The old religions said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

If human history has any lesson to teach us, it is the fact that all those men and women who left an indelible mark on its pages were those who had great confidence, great faith in themselves. The confidence that ‘I could achieve it’ is the first step in beginning an enterprise. If one pitches one’s ambitions high and believes that he/she could achieve it, one grows up to the challenge. We are or we become as great as our objectives. Great dreams are not possible for small minds. We are aware that in the modern world, psychologists talk about auto-suggestion which is certainly based on building confidence in oneself. Concentrating on an objective and constantly convincing oneself that one can achieve it is the sure way to achieve it. The sum and substance of Swamiji’s message is that man has everything within; nothing need come from outside. He must succeed in manifesting what is in him. He will declare time and again in many ways and in many forms:

Whatever you think, ‘that’ you will be. You can do anything and everything. You are almighty.
If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological Gods and in all the Gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you.

23. Strength

Next to faith in oneself, he will advocate 'strength'. Swamiji believed not only in the strength of mind, but also in the strength of muscle. His exhortation is:

Be strong, my young friends, that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita.

He would say:

What our country now wants are muscles of Iron and nerves of Steel.

Swamiji categorically declares:

Physical weakness is the cause of at least one third of our miseries. We are lazy;....We speak of many things parrot-like; but never do them. Speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause? Physical weakness.

It is action, continuous struggle, unremitting perseverance that he wants. It is infinite energy, infinite zeal, utmost exertion that he advocates. All these need a healthy body, a strong physique. The youth must be trained to achieve it.

In one's journey towards a goal, one must be able to climb if a mountain intervenes; swim across if it is a river in floods; walk through if it is a dark dense forest. A frail and failing body will become a constraint on the will of the mind.
Faith in oneself is needed; but it cannot take one very far unless it is combined with strength. Again Valluvar would say:

Strength in action is one’s strength of mind: all others are secondary.

Education must develop this characteristic, this virtue. Swamiji is a warrior sannyasin; only his war is of a different kind. He asks:

Are not drums made in the country? Are not trumpets and kettle-drums available in India? Make the boys hear the deep-toned sound of these instruments.

Swamiji desires that we rear and train our boys as men of action: arouse in them the spirit of becoming heroes.

24. Fearlessness

From faith and strength, Swamiji will move to fearlessness. What avail is of faith, what avail is of strength if one fears to face a challenge, if one is afraid of defeat, afraid of failure, if one suffers from cowardice? Generally, Indians are considered fatalists. Hinduism believes in fate. But Swami Vivekananda would not bow before any limiting force, even fate. He says:

It is the coward and the fool who says, ‘this is fate’ so says the Sanskrit proverb, but it is the strong man who stands up and says “I will make my fate”. It is people who are getting old who talk of fate. Young men generally do not come to astrology.
26. Truth

Whether it is science, or philosophy or religion, the ultimate goal of the pursuit is ‘truth’. One must believe in truth, search for truth, practise truth fearlessly in all that we do and say.

Valluvar said, 2000 years ago:

If you ask me for one single virtue I would say ‘avoid killing’ and for the next, ‘avoid falsehood’.

Nearly eighteen centuries later, Ramalinga Adigalar proclaimed “non-killing of life” and “truthfulness” as the two great virtues to be practised for salvation. Again in the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi advocated Ahimsa and Satya i.e., ‘Non-violence and truthfulness’.

One could see that non-violence and truthfulness run through the Indian heritage like a thread in a chain of pearls, like the nerves in the human system. Swami Vivekananda carried the message of truthfulness far and wide and advocated it forcefully, effectively and with all the strength of his language and personality.

26. Epilogue

As we stand towards the end of the 20th century and survey the world scene, we find that every society, every nation is in a state of ferment. What we see is a spectacle of struggle. There is no world war; but one finds worldwide mini-wars, even medium wars and struggles going on. Many divisive forces are in action - language, religion, race, problems of equity; economic interests as well as ambitions of individuals, institutions and nations to dominate. The spread of education, the principles of democracy, the pervasive influence of science and technology notwithstanding, religion still plays a divisive
role. Fundamentalism is really a phenomenon of the 20th century. Swami Vivekananda’s definition of religion is astonishingly simple and at the same time grand and perceptive. In Swamiji’s own words ‘the greatest truths are the simplest things in the world’. His definition of religion is as follows:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal, this either by work; or worship; or psychic control or philosophy – by one or more or all of these and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas or rituals or books or temples or forms are but secondary details.

With this view of religion, hardly anyone - no sensible person - need quarrel over religion.

He combined in him the concern for the universe surrounding man and the universe subsisting in him. His concept of education consists in the development of both. We need all the science and technology to free men and women from the perennial and primitive problems of the basic wants of food, shelter and clothing. A hungry man moves on his stomach. He cannot fly; cannot soar high. Swamiji would welcome the concepts of liberty, equality and the democratic rights of individuals that emanated from the West.

He would welcome all efforts to break the chains that the kings on one side and the clergy on the other have forced on the masses. He would like to see the women liberated, and enjoy equal status. But all these are not enough. This ensures an honourable living; a comfortable living in this world; but human beings have higher levels to
reach; have greater aims to pursue. Education must address itself to realize both these objectives.

Swami Vivekananda’s message is both unique and universal in appeal. The human beings are the highest of God’s creations. Every individual has in him/her infinite potential. The human species as a race is on an upward march and is evolving continuously. The ultimate stage may be called a state of perfection.
Scientific Vein in Bharathi's Outlook*

1. Scientific Temper

Throughout his life, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had been advocating the need for a scientific outlook, on all possible occasions, whether it was a gathering of intellectuals or illiterate masses. He came to this theme believing that, in our country, it is relevant and necessary to both India, since independence, has made tremendous advancements in science and technology. We may be low in ranking, even among the developing nations, in the indexes that indicate economic progress, quality of life or human resource development, but we are in the company of some of the advanced nations in our achievements in science and technology. We have institutions for science education that are comparable to those in Europe; research laboratories as good as many in advanced countries; scientists and

technologists with international reputation; but still, as a nation, we lack scientific temper, scientific outlook.

Scientific temper is a matter of approach and not one of knowledge or expertise in science and technology. There are scientists who are scarcely or least scientific in dealing with problems outside their laboratories and learning. We do come across persons from the fields of arts and humanities, even theology, who use, consciously or unconsciously, the methods of science in analyzing and seeking solutions to the problems and issues they face in day-to-day life. The measure of scientific temper is the extent to which one allows logical reasoning and evidence available to influence his/her decision making. This trait need not necessarily be the exclusive possession of any group, but can be common to every thinking individual.

2. No Book Forever

Whatever problem Bharathi analyzed, whatever task he undertook, whether his journey was through a dark forest, or in the depths of the sea, there always was in his vision a flash of scientific temper or a streak of scientific outlook that showed in dazzling brightness and for a long distance, the path ahead. Among the things that engaged the mightiest of human minds and still defy solution is the problem of creation and the creator if there was one; the subtlest in this labyrinth is the Hindu concept of Brahman. After having pondered over it and reaching nowhere and seeing no light, Bharathi declares in his brief autobiography:

I know the illusory cannot be real;
But I have not been blessed with the skill
To explore the nature of reality
And what I cannot know for myself
I lack the simple faith to take on trust
Depending on what others say
Perhaps in a short while I shall know. (1)

He declares in unequivocal terms that what is not convincing to him, he would not take, for it is blind faith that accepts without any application of mind what someone might say. He terms it harmful. Since he has said so in his autobiography, it is an authentic version of his value system.

Bharathi has been reasonably well researched when it comes to his patriotic poems, spiritual poems, literary contributions, views on social and economic issues, approach to problems of women in society, love for Tamil and suggestions for its development. In all these, one sees invariably, a pervasive vein of scientific approach, like the nerve system in the human body or the string in a garland or lightning in a cloud. He is endowed with an unfailing faculty for observing evidences that present themselves, analyzing them objectively and arriving at conclusions that follow from the reasoning, with due regard to his own intuition.

Bharathi is mightily proud of his motherland, his ancestors, the great legacies that this sacred soil has bequeathed to humanity and its immense contribution to human understanding and wisdom. He would proudly declare that Bharat is an ancient soil; it is the one from where human wisdom blossomed and reached a level of fullness and perfection; it is the land that gave birth to a Buddha and a Mahavira. He feels overwhelmed with pride when he recollects the long and continuous gift of talents that emerged from this land and enlightened humanity: it is a galaxy of poets like Valmiki, Vyasa, Valluvar, Kalidas, Ilango and Kamban; it is the gift of spiritual leaders like Azhwars, Nayanmars, Shankara, Ramanuja and others; it
is a leader like Mahatma Gandhi who could combine effortlessly the best from a culture that has nearly 30 centuries of evolution and refinement with the values of the 20th century in every area of our activity. He approaches the Vedas and Upanishads with reverence and devotion:

Ours is the unequalled scripture  
The Upanishad ineffable  
Ours is the golden land, this Bharat,  
Proudly, loudly let us praise it.  
Here mighty heroes and great seers,  
Narada's music, wisdom perfect,  
All glories auspicious flourished here.  
Here overflowed Lord Buddha's grace.  
Let us proudly sing the praise  
Of this great, ancient land of ours.  

Granting all that, he does not identify himself fully with any of them in a manner that he would uncritically follow and fear, or fail to discard any tradition or ritual, if it had outlived its usefulness and has turned to be a burden instead of being a blessing. Speaking about Smritis, he says:

They made Smritis later too;  
But there are none who follow them  
They are by their nature, not enduring  
But are inherently inclined to change.  

He goes a step further and declares:

For the universe as a whole,  
To suit the needs of the times and  
The demands of propriety of conduct of each age  
There could be no book;  
None can, for ever, endure.
Time and space limit the validity and usefulness of any book, sacred or otherwise. There can be no book of codes that could be universally applicable and eternally valid. He has not even exempted the Vedas, Upanishads or any of the scriptures from this radical and revolutionary statement. No text ever is a declaration of such import that when you ponder over it, it expands and envelops and brings under its scrutiny all areas of faiths and beliefs.

3. Keeping the Windows Open

Bharathi values traditions because they are a record of social evolution; they are a hallmark of culture. A primitive society does not have many traditions. He believes that tradition is an organic entity which grows with the time and changes as time demands and is given up when it has outlived its purpose. Any tradition that is continued beyond this point becomes a drag on progress. Bharathi recognized that change alone is constant, and everything in this world obeys this law. He talks not only about accepting change but also bringing about changes to make the world new. He would declare:

Let us change the world,
make it new and modern
And transform human beings into Devas. (5)

These traits are, beyond question, the attributes of a scientific mind.

While his pride in his ancestry finds expression in the most eloquent language as we saw before, he addresses the following questions to those who indiscriminately and uncritically worship everything that belongs to the past:
Simply because a thing existed
In the past, oh fools! Can the false be termed True? Can there be a limit
To what is called the past, oh fools!
The past may mean yesterday's past,
May also millennium's past
Countless who swarmed on earth
Before you, were they all saints?
Do you think that fools never existed
On earth before you were born?
Believing untrue conduct as true,

Taking ridicule of the fraudulent
As ordained law, crores of people
In our Bharat, bound in duty,
Yet wanting in wisdom, have fallen.

Everyone in the ancient period was not a sage; even those who were sages were not the avatars of God; there is nothing of the past that is so sacred as to be believed blindly and followed unreservedly. Every aphorism, every doctrine needs a review in the context of the modern world and the progress in knowledge and our understanding.

When Bharathi lived and worked, India was still predominantly an agricultural civilization; but the Western countries had long back entered the industrial age. In the path of progress, they were one full era ahead of us. They were affluent and were also ruling over us. Consequently, our language, art, culture, all of them, experienced the impact of the West. Our men and women of learning and wisdom were divided into two camps: those who continued to worship the past and those who were all praise for the modern. The common man was caught between the two. Whom would he follow? How would he choose his path
for the journey? Here Bharathi raises a few questions which can only arise from a scientific mind.

You talk of your ancestors: Who are they?
Are they those who lived some few decades back or,
Are they, those that lived some centuries ago?
Have they lived a thousand years before or much earlier; some five millennia ago:
Do they belong to the period when Buddhism was widespread in this country or
Do they belong to the period when most of the puranas were written?
Were they Saivites or Vaishnavites or do they belong to the vedic period, when our forefathers believed that
Lord Indira was the principal God?
Who do these people unthinkingly keep hailing as our ancestors?

Bharathi does not stop with asking a series of questions; he renders a word of advice for the Tamils to follow, one that is general enough for any people:

Goodness and knowledge
Whatever direction they come from,
Whosoever may show them to us
If you adopt them in your life
You have nothing to fear.

We may reflect for a moment at this point over Bharathi’s own background, his knowledge, scholarship and his values. He is fully informed about the glories of this land: he knows its traditions; is acquainted with its three thousand and more years of cultural evolution: this to him is the land of the vedas and the upanishads, sages and
for the journey? Here Bharathi raises a few questions which can only arise from a scientific mind.

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Are they, those that lived some centuries ago?
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Do they belong to the period when Buddhism was widespread in this country or
Do they belong to the period when most of the puranas were written?
Were they Saivites or Vaishnavites or do they belong to the vedic period, when our forefathers believed that Lord Indira was the principal God?
Who do these people unthinkingly keep hailing as our ancestors? (8)

Bharathi does not stop with asking a series of questions; he renders a word of advice for the Tamils to follow, one that is general enough for any people:

Goodness and knowledge
Whatever direction they come from,
Whosoever may show them to us
If you adopt them in your life
You have nothing to fear. (9)

We may reflect for a moment at this point over Bharathi's own background, his knowledge, scholarship and his values. He is fully informed about the glories of this land: he knows its traditions; is acquainted with its three thousand and more years of cultural evolution: this to him is the land of the vedas and the upanishads, sages and
saints, great poets, men of wisdom and philosophy. Bharathi knows the depth and breadth of the arts, music, epics, spiritual heritage, many many schools of philosophy and paths of bhakthi of this soil. He believed that ours is a culture that would be among the immortals in the world, but still, that is not everything; life has more to offer. Every moment sees the blossoming of new talent, new values and every moment experiences the obsolescence of certain things old. It is not our exclusive privilege to discover all that is good, to create all that is new. These may come from any direction, any land; we must not close our windows and doors, we must accept all that is good.

He declares after Rig Veda: “Let noble thoughts come to us from everywhere”. Goodness and knowledge, from wherever they come, we shall adopt them. It will not endanger our culture; it will not destroy some of the basic values of this land; they will only get modernized; we need not feel insecure even for a moment. This is the essence of Bharathi’s poem referred to earlier. Religious leaders will never go this far: they might at the most concede that their path is good for them and our path is good for us; no political leader will risk advocating an approach like this. It is only a mature scientific mind that can make bold to say:

Goodness and knowledge, from wherever they come, adopt them.

4. An Unending Ascent

Bharathi does not believe, as many do, that life is an endless cycle; one is born, grows, matures, marries, mates, brings forth children, grows old and dies. For Bharathi human life is an onward march of progress and development; every generation is more refined than its predecessor:
the son is higher evolved than his father and the grandson higher still in the evolution scale. Development is change, progress is change. Bharathi declares as mentioned earlier:

Let us change the world; make it new
And transform the human beings into Devas.

He believes that
India will show the path for
All human beings to become Devas. (10)

In a society when many have been looking up for a heaven which they were hoping to enter after they ceased to live, Bharathi promises that here in this land, as we are, we will attain the state of devas. In a brief introduction to the poem entitled ‘False or Real’, Bharathi says:

All gods are one. See the light divine in
dharma (responsible behaviour); artha (worldly
behaviour); and kama (desire/enjoyment). Once
you see this light, the fourth state of moksha
(freedom from bonds) will
come of its own accord.

In other words, what is divine is the state that human beings can achieve when their development reaches a stage of perfection. This in brief is an extension of the theory of evolution linking the physical and spiritual.

5. Puranas, the Woven Stories

Bharathi refers to some of the characters in itihasas and puranas in glorious terms. He says:

This is the golden land of safety and security
where the might of Bhima and
that of the younger
Vijaya did shine in radiant brightness. (11)
Bhagavad Gita, the sacred book, contains the message of Lord Krishna to Arjuna, conveyed in the Kurukshetra battlefield. Referring to that, Bharathi would ask and answer a question:

Whose mouth is it that gave out in the battlefield, Gita the book of spiritual wisdom? It is the mouth of ‘Bharatha Devi’ Who gives all the might needed to vanquish the enemy. (12)

After having drawn so much inspiration from Mahabharata, Bharathi declares in another place:

We realize that Bhima, Who dived into the river, Went to the Naga world and Married the daughter of a snake king Is only a fiction. (13)

The puranas, according to him, are mostly woven stories; the work of imagination; or long stories built on the basis of certain nuclei of events that might have taken place in the remote past. If that be so, what do we learn from the puranas? Bharathi answers:

They have made puranas and in them they have produced for us excellent poetry. Though the poems are very good, we know well that the stories are fiction. They are imaginary, meant to teach us the good and to show us the path of righteous life. (14)

Bharathi has assigned an appropriate place and value to each one of our legacies; in so doing, one sees a
mind that is modern, analytical, objective and in one word, scientific in its approach.

6. S & T, the Development Tool

Science and technology have become the most dominant force in the second half of this century. There is hardly any area of life or activity that has not been influenced by science and technology. As religion in the past, and economic, political and social concepts in the recent centuries, science and technology have come to occupy a position of tremendous influence in world affairs today; social, political and economic policies are influenced by inventions and innovations that science and technology offer.

As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Bharathi had a vision of the role that technology would play in future and he desired fervently that India should be prepared for availing itself of the new potential for growth and development. He states in an article written in 1916 as follows:

We must send our children to Japan and make them learn all kinds of sciences and technologies. In industry and in sciences of the world, we must become equal to other countries. This is urgent among the most urgent of things. The members of the Congress demand power in our hands. That is necessary; but we must also survive and prosper. It is not only those who fight for freedom who are patriots. Those who work for industrial development are also patriots.

Bharathi was not the one who would seek a calm place, sit quietly and ponder over problems in a state of inaction. He was not the one who would devote his time to
philosophise and preach. There was in his mind all the time a sense of urgency, and patience was not his virtue. He was in a state of urgency to achieve, to march forward and attain the goal. He resembled in his fervour and intensity of emotions a fuming volcano, a gathering storm, a Ganges in great floods. Nevertheless, he was clear about the direction, the path of travel and the place to reach. His mind was alert and his vision was clear. In his poems, ideas and objectives have equal importance as imagery. One sees an astonishing mastery in the use of the language, not for its own beauty but for communicating an enduring thought. Whether he talked about the liberty of his land or the rights of women or the importance of education or even if it be about religion, the tenor of thinking is scientific which combines in itself curiosity and sense of wonder and analytical reason. His capacity for scientific approach stood by him constantly as his own shadow; it has been to him an unseen but unfailing companion.

In any of his travels, whether it be on a road or under a sea or through a forest, he had in his hand the lamp of scientific temper which blazed a trail in front of him and lighted the path ahead.
Textual quotations in Roman script

1. மாசும் பந்தன்றுன்று மூழ்கும் காண்களும்
   மூழ்கும் சுட்டு பிரிந்து கைப்பற்றைத்த
   அடுத்த கோயில்கள்: குள்ளியல்
   அவளாறைகள் பார்ப்பால் குறிஏனம்,
   ஒடு சிதம்பரி தோற்று விளக்கமில்லைத்
   ஆனேல்களை எந்த கோயிலினைக்
   நெற்கறி சிரங்கள் அமைந்திருக்காமல்
   தீர்மான புரோஜேக்சனம் காண்பாணமே.
   - கப்ளிகே (கவன)

māyai poyyenal murrilum kaṇṭaṇaṅ
marrum intap piramat tiyalpiṇai
āya nallarul perrilāṇ; tanṭutai
arivinukkup pulappattai inriye,
tēya mitevarō colum collinaic
cemmaiyenru maṇattitaik kolvatām
tiyanpakti iyarkaiyum vāyntilēn;
ciritu kālam poruttinum kānpamē.
   - cuyacaritai (kaṇavu)

2. புலவீதும் பொருளே முன்றுகளே நாமே
   பார்க்க வேண்டிருந்து நடை மீண்டும்?
   புலவீதீயப் பார்க்க காண்களும் நாமே
   பார்க்கவும் மிகவும் உயிரியைத் தற்க

மாறுக நில்ம மீரதோணவுக காணு
மாறுக செய்தோணவும் மீற்று பலனனைத்
மாறுக காணு மீரதோணவுக காணு
முதலை பரமேசுவரும் முதலை பேர்
பந்தரம், பன்றியின்கள், நாற்பற்றிய யேகொன்றின் நுட்பம் பிரம்மப் போர்த்துபோர் நூற்றாண்டு என்படைப் பயன்பட்டு வருகிறது நாட்டின் நிலை.

- கொஞ்சத்து நடு

paññarum upaniṣa nūlēnkal nūlē
pārmicai yētoru nūl itupōlē?
ponnōḷir pārata nāṭeṇkai nāṭe
pōṟṟuvam ikṭai emakkilai īṭē.

mārata virar malintanañ nāṭu
māmuni vōrpalar vālīnta ponnāṭu
nārata kāṇa nālantikañ nāṭu
nallaṇa yāvaityum nāṭuru nāṭu

pūraṇa nānām polintanan nāṭu
puttar pirāṇaruḷ poṅkyiya nāṭu
pārata nāṭu palamperum nāṭe
pāṭuvam ikṭai emakkilai īṭē.

- eṅkañ nāṭu

போன்றியின்கள், போன்றியின்கள்: அவளது
போர்த்துபோரின் யேகொன்றின் நந்தனை
முழுமையான போர்த்து மூலத்தைம்: திருவண்ணறியீன் முழுமை
மனப்பீட்டுப் போர்த்து யுவீன் போர்த்து.

piṇnum mirutikaḷ ceṭṭār : avai
peṇnum manitar ulakini nilai:
maṇnum iyālpina valla: ivai
māri payilum iyālpina ākum.
4. கலில்குக்கு வெளிய மலர்தான - அமை கலில்குக்கு வெளிய துக்குப்பு நாய்க் கணவை வாழ்க்கை விக்கு - நேல கணவை வாழ்க்கை நான்கால்தான் சிற்றைய்।

- நான்கால் மதம் (பரணாந்தை)

kālattuk kērra vakaikaṉ - avvak
kālattuk kērra olukkaṟum nūlum
nālām mulumaikkuṟum onṟai - enta
nālum nilaitṭitum nūloṟrum illai.

- eṟkaḷ matam (purāṇaṅkaḷ)

5. மார்னி கோட்டம் புரோமஞ்சு வித்தி
வெளிய புழக்கம் அப்பந்த காந்தேஸ்வரம்

māṟṟi vaiyam putumaiyurac ceytu
mañītar tammai amarraṅka lākkuvōṁ.

6. பொண்டிப் புத்தாண்டு காலப்பு காவ்
பொருள், போன்றுவன் பெற்றேல் காண்கே?
பொண்டியம் போய்க்கு கால் மதுகே,
பொருள், பல பலமூறு கொண்டேயும்?
பொண்டியம் போய்க்கு போர் குற்றுப்பை இயங்கு;
பொண்டியம் கால் வள்ளுவையும் பொருள்;
பொண்டியக் கொட்டாரப் பல்ல பொருளம்
பொண்டியம் கொட்டாரப் பல்ல பொருளம்
பொண்டியம் கொட்டாரப் பல்ல பொருளம்
பொண்டியம் கொட்டாரப் பல்ல பொருளம்

- பொண்டியார் குவிக

mūṇpi runtāṭor kārāṇat tāḷē,
mūṭare, poyyai meyenā lāmō?
mūṇpeṇaṭc colūṅ kāla māṭarku,
mūṭare, ēr varaiyarai uṇṭō?
mūṇpeṇaṭc colūṅ nēṟrumuṇ pēyāṁ;
munru koṭi varutamum munpe;
munpirun teṇṇi lātu puvimēl
moyyta makka ḫelāmmuni vōrō?
nirpi rakkumun pārmicai mūṭar
nēmta tillai enaniṅgait tīrō?
- pāncāli capatam

pāmēṇavukkara amēṇavukkara ḫeramēṇa,
pāmēṇa ḫahākkarē ḫerkhē ḫeramēṇa,
pahēṇ akkkara pārē ḫeramēṇa
ahēṇi ḫeramēṇa pārēṇi ḫeramēṇa
pahēṇ akkkara ḫeramēṇa
- pāṇcāli capatam

poyyolukkai aramenru koṇṭum,
poyyar kēliyaic cāttira menrum,
aiyakō nāṅkal pārata nāṭtil
arivi lāraṇap parṟumik kullōr
nōyya rāki alintavar koṭi
- pāncāli capatam

namatu mūṭaṭaiyar nāṟpatirṟāntiṇ
munṇiruntavaro, munṇūṟṟāṇṭirku
appāḷ vālintavarkollō! āyiram
āntiṇ mūnṇavarō? aiyāyiramō?
- māṇuṟṟukkī
pavuttarē nāṭelām palkiya kālat
tavarō? purāṇam ākkiya kālamō?
caivarō? vaiṇava camayat tārō?
intiran tāne tānimutar kāṭavul
enru nam muṇnōr ēttiyā vaitikak
kālattavarō? karuttilā tavartām
ematu mūtātaiyar ēñpatiñ kevarkol?

- tamiḻaccāti

9. 

தந்தமும் அரியும்
நாட்டிலகுனியும், பலவுர் கானலும்
முடியவில்லை வேண்டிய அவத்தித்துணை
உதவியாற்றியது.

- தமிழ்க்

نان்மையும் அளிவு
ஏட்டைந்தாயினும், யாவரே காதினும்
marravai taluvi vālviarāyin
accamorillai.

- tamiḻaccāti

10. 

சுடைகுறை ஆரித்தோ குமாரம் கோடுமுன்று
நினையிய மணியே காற்றை - தம்
நினைவிய மணியே காற்றை

- பாரத குருராவின்

ellōrum amaranilai eytum nanmuṟaiyai
intiyā ulakir kalikkum - nam
intiyā ulakir kalikkum

- pārata camutāyam

11. 

ெல்லாம் என்றும், அமர்ந்திரும்
என்றால் தேடும் என்றால் இரும்பு
செய் என்றும் கொண்டு

- தாமிரக தேவானந்தன்
vīmaṇ tirāluṁ, avarkkilaiva
vijayaṇ tirāluṁ vilānki niṅra
cema manippūn tātātu

- ennē koṭūmāi

pōrkkalattē paraṇāna meykkītai
pukaṇra tevarutai vāy - pakai
tirkkat tirantarau pērīnāl pārata
tevi malartiruvāy

- pārata mātā

natiyinulē mulukippōy : anta
nākar ulakilor pāmpin makalai
vitiyure maṇam ceyta - tiral
vimānum karpaṇai eṇpatu kāntōm.
- eṅkaḷ matam : purāṇaṅkaḷ
ನಾಳ್‍ಕೂ ಪೂರಾಣಾಂಕ ಸ್ತ್ರೀತರು: ಅತಿ
ನಾಲ್ಕೂ ಕವಿತೆ ಪಲಾಪಲಸ ತಂತರು:
ಕವಿತೆಯ ಮಿಕೆ ನಾಲ್ಕೂ ತೆಂಣ, ಅಕ
ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೆ ಪ್ಯಾಯೆನ್ನು ತೆಳಿವುವಳಕ ಕಂದೋಮ್
ಪ್ಯಾಯೆತಿಲ್ ವಾಳೀ ಕಾಣ್ಟಿ - ನಾಳ್‍ಕೂ
ಪೀತಕುಮ ಕಾಣ್ಟುಕ ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೆ ಕಟ್ಟಿಕೆ ಅವಿಟಂ

- ಎಂಕಾಲಿ ಮತಾಮ್: ಪೂರಾಣಾಂಕ
Bharathi, the Architect of a New Era*

1. Unity in Diversity

I am happy to be able to participate in this pleasant function. I should congratulate the Delhi Tamil Sangam on having organized the 111th birth anniversary of Poet Bharathi.

You will find that almost on every occasion our leaders refer to 'Unity in Diversity'. We may take a close look at this observation. The diversity is fairly obvious and seen in many respects. We have many languages, different religions; difference in dress, difference in food habits, difference in rituals and also in day-to-day living habits. This is obvious even to a casual onlooker. Then where does our unity lie? What is the source of this unity? It is not as obvious as the elements of diversity. Our unity lies in our culture; in our cultural heritage. A question may arise

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*Speech delivered at a meeting organised by the Delhi Tamil Sangam to celebrate the 111th birth anniversary of Bharathi, December 1992.*
as to what constitutes the heritage of a nation. Science and technology do not constitute the heritage. Commerce and industry do not constitute the heritage. It is essentially the cultural foundations; the art, the music, the literature and the philosophy that we inherit from the past and bequeath to the future which constitute our heritage. Literature is an important component in the legacy of a nation. At a time when divisive forces are dominant, the nation bleeds in different parts and the patriotic hearts are burdened with anguish and apprehension, we have to look to the sources of our heritage; the sources of our strength; the sources of our unity. The literary heritage of India is a perennial source. It was Dr Radhakrishnan who said that "Indian literature is one though written in many languages." The Indian literature written in many languages can become one, only if people have the opportunity to read and appreciate the literary contributions available in other languages. Indian literature remains fragmented. We have not been able to take an integrated view of the richness of our literature.

It may, perhaps, be appropriate to mention here that during the centenary celebration of Bharathi, I made a suggestion that the then Ministry of Education and Social Welfare establish in the central universities and at least in a few of the major state universities, a Chair of Indian Literature designated as Bharathi Chair of Indian Literature. It is not surprising that it has not been acted upon: but it is never too late.

Tamil has nearly 3000 years of rich literary history. Bharath is one in that continuum. He was a poet, a patriot, a rebel, a reformer, a dreamer and a realist - all in one. His was a many-splendoured endowment. His contributions to Indian literature are many. He has dealt with politics, philosophy, religion, mysticism, art, literature and economic
issues and has exhibited a deep perception and penetrating insight into all of them. Whatever he touched, he added to it a new dimension; imported into it a new lustre. The period during the freedom struggle has seen many great poets; but Bharathi is somewhat unique. While our leaders as well as literary giants who participated in the freedom movement concentrated essentially on liberation from the foreign rule, Bharathi thought about the problems of post-independend India. Among the things that attracted his attention are the unity of the country, economic development, modernization, education and liberation of womenfolk.

Bharathi was aware of the diversity of the land; the divisive forces in operation; the vulnerability of the people to the influence of such forces and therefore more than anyone else among his contemporaries, he stressed on every occasion the unity of the nation.

In his scheme of unifying physical parts of India, he would think of interlinking of rivers, saving one part of India from floods and another from drought. We are talking today seriously about the linking of national rivers and the execution of the Ganga-Cauvery link. More than seven decades ago, Bharathi said:

The surplus waters of Bengal we shall use to sustain the crops of the central states. (1)

It was not merely the rich imagination of a fertile and creative mind of a literary genius; but it was an insight, an unusual sweep into the state of things to come. Long distance transport of water will certainly become a popular approach to the solutions of water problems in the coming century when many countries may face critical conditions with regard to water. Again Bharathi says:
In the bright moonlight in the river Sind we shall enjoy boating in the company of beautiful damsels from Kerala singing songs in sweet Telugu.

One could see that he brings people from different parts of the country and moves them to another region to enjoy boating in a moonlit night, only to demonstrate the unity of the country and the easy mobility of the people in their motherland. He declares:

Mother India has 18 languages, but has a single thought.

* * * * *

She has 300 million faces; but a single soul.

He would transport wheat from the Ganges belt as a barter for betel leaves from the Cauvery delta. Bharathi is conscious of the elements of diversity and emphasizes, almost on every occasion, the fact that underlying it, there is a sub-stratum of unshifting unity. The more one reads his poems, the more one sees his concern for national unity. Unfortunately, even today, we have not succeeded in bringing about a holistic understanding of the literary heritage that will help the strengthening of the unity of our nation.

2. No Compromise with Evil

Bharathi was a fighter against all evils. The Indian concept of a good man is one who is helpful and harmless. For Bharathi this is not adequate. According to him, good men are those who fight evil. Passive spectators of evil cannot claim to be good men or women. Bharathi has rendered in poetry the vow of Dhraupadi in Mahabharata
under the title “Panchali Sabatham”. There he portrays the scene where Duchadhana, on the orders of his brother Duryodhana, was dragging Dhraupadi, the wife of the Pandavas along the street, holding her by her hair. As this was happening, there were thousands of people on either side of the road witnessing the event. Bharathi frets and fumes over their inaction and condemns the passive members of the public who did not protest against such an outrage. They were there on both the sides of the street swarming like flies and exclaiming “what a cruelty it is” and doing nothing. Bharathi pours out his indignation against this passivity.

The baseness of these people is beyond description:
Timid dogs they are: they did not trample upon the bestial prince and help Dhraupadi get back to her inner palace.
They all stood like tall trees and wailed over the incident. What help does come out of those who weep like women? (4)

Good men must fight evil. Unfortunately, in India, the culture of fighting evil does not exist. We always think that it is the responsibility of someone else and not ours. This may partly be because of our tradition. According to our puranas, every time there was evil triumphing over good, the Almighty took an Avatar, came to the world and saved all from evil. We seem to be waiting for God to take one more Avatar to fight evil. Since that possibility does not exist, Bharathi has emphasized in more than one place that one should do whatever one can to destroy evil. He advises the young child in a children’s poem:
Dear child, if you see people who commit sins, 
be not afraid of them: 
Trample upon them and spit on their faces.  

Bharathi sings the glory of his motherland in a 
number of poems. In the poem titled Engal Thai [Our Mother] 
he says:

She has Vedas in her tongue, but 
righteous sword on her shoulders 
She would be benevolent to those who seek help 
And would fell down those that are evil 

With sixty crores of her strong hands 
She would conduct the affairs of the world 
She would break up into fragments 
Those who might intend to hurt her.

Bharathi is for fighting evil wherever one confronts it: he 
is equally against any form of injustice prevalent in the 
society. It is really difficult for him to comprehend that 
human beings who constitute the highest of God's creation 
should suffer from such primitive feeling as hunger. Even 
birds and animals are relatively free from this pain. Nature 
has bestowed abundant wealth. All inequalities and 
sufferings therefrom are according to Bharathi man made. 
So he directs his anger against those who hold responsible 
positions and enjoy respect in the society. He declares:

In that place where all the people do not get 
adecuate food to eat, the richer ones that live are 
thieves: the priests and the religious leaders are liars. 
The scholars are stupid people.

To him hunger, more so starvation, is totally unacceptable. 
He proclaims that even if one human being is constrained to
endure the pain of hunger the whole world deserves to be destroyed.

Let us make a law: and guard it for ever;  
If but one fellow being be denied his food  
We will pull down and raze the whole world.  (7)

In the world of his conception, all are equal: every one is a monarch.

He declared:

All of us are one clan, all of us belong to one caste  
All of us are equal in status,  
All of us are the monarchs of India.  (8)

There is no high and low; there shall be no master and servant.

3. Salutation to Russian Revolution

Bharathi, though his expertise was in literature and his involvement in national liberation movement, had his antenna well directed to the world at large and unlike many other poets in Indian languages, followed international events closely and reacted to them. He sang in praise of Belgium, even in its defeat, when it offered resistance to Germany's unjust demand, though the German military might was overwhelming and Belgium had no chance of successfully resisting German invasion. Belgium fought for a just cause and Bharathi was all praise for the moral stand of Belgium. Bharathi translated twice the national anthem of France in appreciation of its gift to the world – the eternally inspiring slogan of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity'. He also translated the pledge of Mazzini, the legendary hero of Italy, placing his life and services at the feet of his country for its liberation. Bharathi acclaimed
the triumph of Russian revolution with great spontaneity and immense excitement. Some of the lines in a few of his poems virtually echo the soul of the Marxist philosophy. It was Bharathi who gave the term ‘Pothu Udaimai’ (போது உடைமை) as the Tamil equivalent to communism, which has come to be accepted in common usage.

4. Women's Liberation

I should refer to two great aspirations of Bharathi. One concerns education and the other, women's liberation. Bharathi was perhaps one of the most uncompromising fighters for the liberation of women. In his essays, poems and speeches, Bharathi has advocated the liberation of women. He declares:

Not only in Tamil Nadu, but in the whole world we find the tradition of treating women as inferior and men superior. This is entirely absurd. This attitude is the foundation of all sufferings, the abode of all injustices. This is the source of all wrongs.

He has an extremely radical view with regard to women's liberation. He does not believe that women should go about asking for freedom, arguing for liberation; pleading for their case. Bharathi believes that if you feel that something is right, you do it. You should not wait to see that your neighbour follows it or the society approves of it. For instance, Gandhiji believed in non-violence. He did not say that he would follow non-violence after his friends or neighbours followed it. Right or wrong, Gandhiji's faith and conviction in non-violence was so great that he practised it. If you believe that something is correct, you should practise it.
Bharathi’s modern women belong to this category. They declare: we are equals of men: what are we equal in? not in height; not in weight: not in hair style; nor in the fashion of clothes or in drinking and smoking: not in muscle power either. We are equals in our mental ability. That is where the greatness of human beings lies.

They unilaterally, without waiting for anybody’s approval, announce that:

We have broken all shackles and have emerged out of the prisons that held us.
The fossils who thought it sin
For women to touch books even have perished
Those strange men who wanted to lock
Women inside the house have been shamed (9)

They inform the world that they have taken over certain responsibilities to themselves. Do you know what Bharathi’s women first take over? They take over the responsibility of law making. You are aware that from time immemorial, power has been in the hands of those who made laws. Once law permits, you can do whatever you want and justify it. What is permitted by law is respectable. Laws were made by respectable people and laws were often or always on the side of respectable people. Men enjoyed the privilege of making laws. They made the laws not only for themselves but also for women. Bharathi’s women therefore took over, on their own, the power to make laws in their hands.

They declared:

We have come to run the government
And make laws for the world
We do claim that in mental prowess
Women are in no way inferior to men. (10)
Do you know what the very first law they made was? You speak of chastity, it is good, but let it be common for men and women.

They talk of the virtue of chastity
Let it be common for both the parties
We shall raze to the ground and trample on
The custom of marrying off girls
by compulsion

(11)

Can you imagine what a revolutionary law it is? It is a law that even today is not strictly in force in any country – shall we say even in advanced countries?

Over the years men have been very generous in certain respects. They have made chastity, modesty, faithfulness as virtues that exclusively belong to their partners and constitute the unshared privilege of women. Our epics and other literary works attribute chastity to women and make it, by and large, exclusively a feminine virtue. The position has not been very different even in other countries in the earlier days. Many may or may not be aware of the fact that the word "virgin" does not have a masculine gender in any language. Only in the modern days, the word "virgin" has been included in the English dictionaries as common to both men and women. In Tamil we have the world "kanni"; it has no masculine gender. Bharathi's women were socialistic. They said that this privilege which all along was theirs should now be enjoyed by both or applicable to both. Even as we stand at the end of the 20th century, this law is not being practised even in advanced countries. The USA is considered one of the most advanced countries in the world with regard to the status that women enjoy. Even there, day in and day out, we hear stories of sexual harassment by men and
not by women. The raw material for sex magazines again is only feminine flesh and not the reverse of it.

Bharathi tells Indian women that their liberation lies in education. He says:

The strength of knowledge is unlimited. It is not possible for others to think low or treat as slaves the people who are knowledgeable.

As long as women do not get any education, men will not respect them. They will treat them as inferior. And again, his advice to women is "You should take care of yourselves". He says women should turn to themselves for the things they want. Otherwise nothing will happen. Unfortunately, the men in our country are not even capable of finding strategies for solving their own problems. They are therefore not capable of solving the problems of women. They should not depend on men for their amelioration. Women should by themselves bring about all the reforms. It is here that Bharathi extols the importance of education.

6. Education for Development

India is a country that valued education highly. There is hardly a piece of ancient literature where the value of education is not stressed in one context or the other. However, education had been confined to a privileged few and mass education was not part of the culture of India. There are some who claim that in Tamil Nadu, universal or near universal literacy existed. That is a matter for researchers in archaeology. The fact remains that even at the beginning of the 20th century the literacy rate in India was only 6.2%.

It was only during the later half of the 20th century that it came to be established conclusively that the standard
of living of a nation and quality of life depended on literacy. Achieving universal literacy became a matter of importance and urgency for developing countries towards the end of the 20th century and it was only in the UNESCO Conference held in Thailand in 1990 that a resolution for achieving universalization of education by 2000 was passed. Bharathi, nearly a century earlier, emphatically stated that there ought to be a school in each street: the light of learning in every house. I quote from Bharathi his yearning for learning:

He declares:

Let there be light of learning in every house:
A number of schools in every street
If there be any town or
hamlet devoid of education
Let it be consumed in flames. \(12\)

This he said at a time when more than 90% of this nation’s population was illiterate.

Had we taken Bharathi’s advice seriously, at least after independence, India would have become less populous and more prosperous. Illiteracy, ignorance and poverty are inseparable companions. It is a matter of great regret that in literacy we have lagged behind even our Asian neighbours; an unpardonable lapse on our leadership which the posterity might never forgive.

Among the weaknesses of the present education system, the most important one is the lack of relevance. What we learn as theory has very little scope for application. It is being complained that we are producing unemployable graduates. Bharathi portrays the picture, then prevailing, in the following words:
What does it profit to have learnt
Mathematics for twelve full years
If one can’t name a star in a clouded sky?
Or, dabbling in commerce
and economic theories,
If one comprehends not how in one’s own land
Wealth gets depleted? \(13\)

Lack of education was a problem in the past. Irrelevant education has become a problem of the present since it does not meet felt needs. Bharathi spells out very clearly the education we need. We need education and training that would provide assistance for the people. We should lift the world through the means of education. Elaborating on this subject, Bharathi says:

Knowledge is power, education is the mother of wealth. We should not think in terms of education for producing literature only. Education is needed for business, for industries. For those who use education and training for all these activities, wealth will increase. Therefore you must all become literate, get educated and get trained. You should also help your children to receive education.

He did not stop there. In 1916 he wrote as follows:

We must send our children to Japan and make them learn all kinds of sciences and technologies. In industry and in sciences of the world, we must become equal to other countries. This is urgent among the most urgent of things. The members of the Congress demand power in our hands. That is necessary; but we must also survive till then and
prosper. It is not only those who fight for freedom
who are patriots. Those who work for industrial
development are also patriots.

For education again, he does not want to depend upon the
government alone. He appeals to the public. He pleads:

Those who are rich give us gold
Those who are not rich, give us coins
Those who are devoid even of the coins, help us
by contributing your words
The strong ones donate your labour.
The women with their sweet voice
Sing in praise of the goddess of learning.
Let us do all that we can; whatever we can;
Let us achieve this objective.  (14)

The objective is the spread of education.

Again speaking of what we should learn, he
enumerates:

We shall create literature
We shall also raise forests
We shall promote arts
We shall also promote smithy
We shall also make paintings
We shall make quality needles
We shall pursue all kinds of occupations
that the world has.  (15)

We see that he combines creative literature and
raising forests that apparently have nothing in common
he speaks in the same breath of promoting arts and
promoting blacksmithy; making paintings and at the same
time making needles. This is only to emphasize that mere
Theoretical education, mere pursuit of abstract knowledge, acquisition of knowledge for its own sake will not do. He was for education that was relevant to the development of the nation.

8. Conclusion

In general, Bharathi was an extraordinary poet. It is said that every poet must be a philosopher. Bharathi has read and imbibed the ancient spiritual and literary works. He was equally conversant with the political and economic theories of the modern world. He was not a poet who contented himself with writing about love, heroism and the beauty of nature. The people and their problems, their joys and sorrows, their sobs and sufferings, their ambitions and aspirations were also the themes of his poems.

He was a poet with a will and determination. He would climb if he confronted a mountain; would swim if a river intervened; would walk if he met a dark forest. His was a soul that would soar beyond the skies and never accept a boundary.

There was in his outlook and approach a streak of scientific temper. He may praise the past, but his approach was futuristic. He would unhesitatingly reject the obsolete from the ancient traditions; he would warmly accept the good and the useful from the modern world though they may come from an alien culture.

Bharathi's outlook and approach, his counsel and guidance are more relevant today than they were in his own days.
Textual quotations in Roman script

1. வாங்கள்க்கோட்டையில் நிர்஬ித்திருக்கும்
   கொடுக்குத் தன்னில் மாலிகையில் பெயர் வேறுபட்டம்
   - பாரத தேசம்
   vaங்காள்க்கோட்டையில் நிர்஬ித்திருக்கும்
   மாலிகையில் பெயர் வேறுபட்டம்
   - பாரத தேசம்

2. கிளட்ச நீதியில் ஒன்று நிர்ப்பியிருந்து
   கொடுக்குத் தன்னில் பெயரில் அலங்கரித்து
   கொண்டாள் நீதியில் பாட்டுக்களில்
   செய்தது கொண்டாள். சிலையையும் வேறுபட்டம்
   - பாரத தேசம்
   cின்று நாடியில் மிகை நிலவிக்கிலே
   சோரா நான்முனி பெய்கலுடனே
   குன்றுகள் தோற்றக்கில் பாட்டிச்சூடு
   தோன்றாள் கொண்டாள். சிலையையும் வேறுபட்டம்
   - பாரத தேசம்

3. முப்பது கொழும்பு கால்வகமாக
   பெய்கலுடன் செய்திகளாக - தேசம்
   கொடுக்குத் தன்னில் பொருளியறக்கமாக
   செய்திகளாக பெய்கலுடன்
   - தாமையா தன்ம
   mுப்பது கொழும்பு முகம்ரத்தையாது: உடல்
   மோய்ம்புறா ஓருடையாது - யாது
   செப்பும் மோள் பதிவுத்தையாது ஏனை
   சின்னானை ஓருடையாது!
   - என்கள் தய
உரவார்த்தம்  கிளைம்  உறைக்கும்  தரமாமோ
நிரைவில்  நாயகள்,  விலங்கும்  இலவராக

டான்னின்  மித்தறு  தரந்தல்லாம்  போக்கியே
பந்தையின்  அவள்  அறுவா  புராத்திற்குத் தேர்வாயவே

நெட்டை  மராங்களோன  நிரும்  புலம்பியர்
பெட்டைப்  புலம்பால்  பிறார்க்கும்  துணையாயமோ

- பாங்காள்  கபடம்

பந்தால்  கையாத்தெருக்கு  குழந்தை,  நந்து
பந்தா  குள்ளலோகாக்கு  பராட்ட

பந்தால்  கிளைக்கிழந்திரு  பொட்டை  அனை
பந்தால்  கிளை இன்னும்  பொட்டை

- பொட்டை  பந்தா

பத்தாகம்  கையாத்தெருக்கு  குன்றை,  நந்து
பயாம்  கோளலக்காது  பாப்பா

மோதி  மித்தறு  விடு  பாப்பா  அவர்
முக்தில்  உமில்லா விடு  பாப்பா

- பாப்பா  பாத்து

தாயிலின்  கையாத்தெருக்கு  கையாண்
தாயிலின்  வர்த்தக - வர்த்தக
தாயிலின்  கைதியுணர்  வெளியும்  திறக்

- தாயில்  வர்த்தக  வர்த்தக
நவினில் வெளம் உதையவா! கையில்
நலந்திகள் வாழ்த்தை யா!-தான்

மேற்கார் கிண்ணரு! செய்பவா! தியாரை
விதிது தொழில் யா!

ஏற்பது கோதி தாட்காற்காலுலம்
அன்கால் நாட்டுவர் தாய்-தானாரிக
செருவது நாத் வருபவராதுகா
சேறு கிட்டுவா! தாய

- என்பது தாய்

7. கருளியர் கருளியவராம் - அல்ல
நாத் கோவை கரும்பாம்
கருளியவராய்ந்து கருளியை கருணா
கருளியுடன் கருளியம்

- பாரத் பேச்சுபான்

iniyoru vīticeyvōm - atai
enta nālum kāppōm
taniyoruvanuk kunavilai enil
jakattinai alittituvōm

- pārata camutāyam

8. குறந்து இந்த சேம்
குறந்து இந்த சின்
குறந்து சிரின் மஞ்சனா
குறந்து இந்த முழு
குறந்து இந்த முளை
ellārum ṥūkulaṁ
ellārum or _inam
ellārum intiya makkañ
ellārum or nirai
ellārum or vilai
ellārum innāṭṭu maññar-nām
ellārum innāṭṭu maññar

- pārata camutāyam

ōṟṟaiyum peṇkai totuvatu tīmai enru
enni iruntavai māyntu viṭṭār
viṭṭukkulle pennaip putṭivaip pōm enra
vintai mañitar talaikavīntār

- peṇkai viṭutalaik kummi

pattaṅkaḷ ālvanum caṭṭaṅkaḷ ceyvatum
pārini peṇkaḷ nātatta vantom
ettum ariviṅiṅ anukkiṅ kepēṅ
ilaippillai kān enru kummiyati

- peṇkai viṭutalaik kummi
11. குப்பு மிதுகவுடன் நீலாண்மை சாறிகள்
கொண்டிரும் அன்ன் பிள்ளக்களும் தவிர்க்கிற
அறுத்தியிற் புனிதக்கல் கருது விளங்கிக்கொண்ட
நீண்டகால தந்தி மிதுகையில்

- பிள்ளாக்கள் மிதுகைக்குள்ளார்

karpu nilaienru collavan tārīru
kaṭcikkum akū potuvaḷ vaippōm
vāppuruttip pēṇṇaik kattik koṭukkum
vaḷakkattait tālī mitittituviḷām

- pēṇkal viṭutalaikkumī

12. கீற்கு உண்ணும் குடும்பங்கள் விளங்குவது
கீற்கு உண்ணும் இருவுருக்கடி பன்னினி
தான் மறியும் ராணா அரசன்
தேசியலாம் அமர்வை பண்வர் பன்னினி
தேச கூட்டமாசு விளங்குவது

- காலமை தேவியின் வகு

vīṭu tōrum kalaiyin vilakkamm
vīṭi tōrum irāṇṭoru pālī
nāṭu murriyum ullāna urkāl
nakarkālenkum palappalla pālī
tēṭu kalviyilāta torūrait
ṭīṭiṇuk kiraiyaka maṭuttal

- caracuvati tēviyin pukal

13. குடியிரு முன்னணி கிளமைகளும், பீடா
காரியளக் நாராயண பீடாவுண்டு குடியிருவது
★ ★ ★ ★ ★
வெளியே இன்னாட நாராயண சீடியே
வெளியே இன்னாட பார்க்க விளங்குவது
kaṇitam panniranṭāntu payilvar, pin
kārko! vānilor minnilai tēntilār
vanikamum porul nūlum pitarruvuvar
vālum nāṭṭil porul kētal kēṭṭilār

- cuyacaritai (kaṇavu)

niti mikuntavar porkuvai tārīr
niti kūraintavar kācukaḷ tārīr
atuvu marṟavar vāycol aruḷir
ānmaiyalar ulaippinai nalkir
maturat tēmoḷi mātarkal ellām
vāṇi pūcaik kuriyaṇa pēcīr
etuvum nalkiyin kevvakai yānum
ippērum paṇi nāṭṭu vam vārīr

- caracuvati tēviyin pukaḷ
kfviyam cevyṭm nalla
kāṭu valarppōm
kalai valarppōm : kollar
ulai valarppōm
oviyan cevyōm nalla
ūcikal cevyōm
ulakat tojjī anaittum
uvantu cevyōm

- pārata tēcam
Periyar E.V.R., the Relentless Crusader*

1. The Beginnings

Periyar Erode Venkata Naicker Ramaswamy was born on 17th September, 1879 at Erode, Tamil Nadu in a family with a background of affluence, deep religious faith, strict adherence to established customs and high regard for traditions. He was the second of four children, two sons and two daughters, born to Venkata Naicker and Chinnathayammal.

His formal schooling was brief; at six, he went to a private school where he spent three years, and thereafter, joined the regular school system and received instruction for another two years. At the age of twelve, he was in his father's shop, assisting him in his business.

In 1898, he married Nagammai, who was then thirteen. Two years later a daughter was born to them; the child died when it was five months old. They had no children thereafter.

The rigid discipline of the family, the strict observance of long-established customs, the routine adherence to numerous rituals and the implicit and explicit pressure on him to conform to the way of life obtaining in the family environment, drove him to a point of despair. When he was twenty-five, he fled home and almost like a wandering sannyasin, went North and reached Benares, only to find that the holy city was in no way holier than any other. Many things that he experienced and witnessed there were to him repulsive and revealing. He left Benares and when he was back in Hyderabad, his father succeeded in locating him and bringing him back. He named the shop 'E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker Mandy', and entrusted the full responsibility to him. As the young E.V.R. was picking up business and shaping well, he started taking interest in public affairs. He emerged gradually as a person of importance in the town. The prestige enjoyed by his father also helped him in this regard. His father died in 1911. Public offices and positions of respectability gravitated to him. He became the chairman of the District Devasthanam Committee; was an honorary magistrate for 12 years; was elected chairman of the Erode Municipal Council; between 1907 and 1919, he held as many as twenty-nine offices of public importance. Whatever position he held, he fulfilled his responsibilities, as was his wont, with utmost sincerity, dedication and efficiency.

2. Entry into Active Public Life

His nature inclined him to take interest in public affairs; his concern for the common man and the society
was genuine, deep and abiding. Consequently, he started deviating decisively from the prevailing background of loyalty to the government of the day and respectable behaviour in the eyes of the ruling class, and was taking increasing interest in the policies and programmes of the Congress; rendered help and even took a leading part in organising them; however, it was only in 1919 that he resigned his chairmanship of the Municipality, joined the Congress and entered active public life. From then on, till his demise in 1973, it was more than half a century of total dedication to the service of the people, with few parallels in the political history of the country.

While the objectives of his struggle and direction of his journey remained substantially unchanged, a few milestones and turning points deserve mention: the decision to resign public office and join the Congress Party in 1919; the issues leading to his leaving the Congress in 1925; the founding of the Self-Respect movement in the same year; his participation in, and leadership of the Justice Party; the anti-Hindi agitation in 1938; the establishment of Dravidar Kazhagam *(D.K.)* in 1944; his second marriage with Maniyammal in 1949; the split of the D.K. consequent on his marriage and the formation of the D.M.K. in 1949; and the D.M.K. capturing power in Tamil Nadu in the 1967 elections are some of the developments that have had far-reaching consequences. Each one of them for Periyar meant redefining priorities; changing strategies; intensifying the struggle on one front and easing it on another; withdrawing support to some and offering support to some others; training new associates; parting company with old colleagues; but always, with a view to achieving certain basic social goals to which he adhered unrelentingly throughout his public life.
When he joined the Congress in 1919, it was a significant change from a life of affluence, comfort and social respectability to one of hardship, struggle and suffering. During the six years when he was an active member of the Congress, he threw himself into the struggle with his usual dedication and vigour. He held offices in Tamil Nadu Congress as its president in 1923 and 1924 and as secretary in 1925. Whether it was prohibition, non-cooperation or promotion of khadi, his involvement was complete and total. While many were content with preaching prohibition, he cut down 500 coconut trees used as toddy palms in his gardens; propagation of khadi to him meant carrying heavy loads for sale in the villages: half-hearted effort went against his grain and was unknown to him.

3. Departure from Congress

Events and experiences, however, made him believe that the Congress leadership was not sufficiently determined to eradicate the caste system; to end caste-based privileges, to take effective steps to ensure social justice and bring about equality of opportunities. The attitude of Congress leaders, including Mahatma Gandhi, to the Vaikom agitation for temple entry which Periyar led, the discrimination against non-brahmin inmates at the Cheramadevi Gurukulam run with the support of the Congress, the non-acceptance of the principle of communal representation for which he moved a resolution in more than one annual conference of the Tamil Nadu Congress, left him disappointed and disillusioned. He sharpened his focus on eradication of the caste system, abolition of social inequalities and promotion of equity and equality of opportunities. In order to be free to pursue these goals, he left the Congress in 1925.

Periyar's departure from the Congress and the formation of the Self-Respect movement by him marked a
decisive and momentous step in his life. His was from then on a career of revolt, reform, iconoclasm and incessant struggle. Till the end, he was a crusader, uncompromising and unrelenting. His platform was one of social justice; equity, equality of opportunities; humanism and dignity of man. It was a life that was never dull, never routine, never one of rest and leisure; but was one of intense activity, with a succession of struggles, each resembling a storm or an earthquake causing reverberations and receiving responses throughout the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu.

4. As Justice Party President

He intensified his demand for communal representation in education and employment, a measure that he considered the Magna Carta for the weak and the down-trodden; rallied the non-brahmins and organised the first provincial conference to articulate their claims. On this issue, he made common cause with the Justice Party, which formulated the communal G.O. in 1921, reiterated it in 1922 and 1924, and implemented it in tangible form in 1929. Periyar was also pleased with many other progressive measures ushered in by the Justice Party, such as the establishment of a large number of primary schools in villages, the denial of government grant to schools that practised discrimination against Harijan students and the abolition of the institution of devadasis or temple girls. He extended strong support to the Justice Party and was elected its President in 1938 even as he was in prison.

During the period between 1925 and 1935 Periyar started a number of journals: *Kudi Arasu* in 1925: *Dravidan* in 1927, *Revolt* (English) in 1928: *Puratchi* in 1933: *Pahuththarivu*, as a weekly and daily in 1934 and *Pahuththarivu* as a monthly in 1935, to carry his message
to the people. In 1937, he took over Viduthalai, a daily started by the Justice Party.

5. Dravidian Movement

In the elections of 1937, the Congress won with an overwhelming majority, and Rajaji became the head of the Government in the then Madras Presidency. The introduction of Hindi as a compulsory subject by Rajaji in 1938, and Periyar's historic agitation against the move, paved the way for discussions and demands in terms of separation and the eventual emergence of the Dravidian Movement. What Periyar started as a fight against social inequalities, casteism and the dominance of Brahmins in education and employment, gradually took a racial connotation and came to be viewed as a North-South, and 'Aryan-Dravidian' conflict. In this context, Anna became a major factor in shaping and formulating the policies of the Self-Respect movement and the Justice Party. Anna interpreted many of Periyar's policies and programmes against the background of historical facts and the literary traditions of the Tamils. These developments led to the founding of the Dravidar Kazhagam in 1944. This step meant intensification of Periyar's struggle against Brahminism; greater emphasis on the cultural, economic and political interests of the South and a demand for self-determination. Although Periyar spoke on behalf of the Dravidian South, his following was essentially confined to Tamil Nadu. Economic and political issues figured prominently on the D.K. platform in the forties. Periyar's remarriage with Maniammai and Anna's disapproval of the event leading to a break with Periyar, brought about the split of the D.K. and the birth of D.M.K., under the leadership of Anna. Periyar again began to concentrate on his fight against social evils, casteism, orthodoxy, superstition and the imposition of Hindi.
6. Self-Respect Movement and Communism

Periyar was inherently inclined to practise socialist principles and gave evidence of it even when he was a businessman: it was no wonder that when he came to be acquainted with the ideals of communism, he was attracted to it. In the Third State Youth Conference of Self-Respect movement held in August 1931 at Virudhunagar, communism was adopted as one of the ideals of the movement. He got the Communist Manifesto translated into Tamil and published in his journal Kudiarasu in 1931.

Periyar undertook a tour of Europe in 1932 and visited Russia and other countries like Greece, Spain, France, Portugal and England. He was a state guest in Russia and spent over three months studying the working of the socialist system in a communist country. After his return to India in November 1932, his speeches and writings reflected perceptibly the impact of his visit to the U.S.S.R. Within a month after his return, he organised a meeting of the members of the Self-Respect movement to which he invited a senior communist leader like M. Singaravelu. At the end of the two day deliberations, it was decided that the Self-Respect movement would combine the social reform principles of the Self-Respect movement, economic policies based on socialism and progressive political views. It was designated as Erode Action Plan. In other words, he transformed his movement into a party of Self-Respect and Communism. Periyar E.V.R. became Comrade E.V.R.

It was Periyar’s nature that whatever task he undertook, he would put his heart and soul into it and work ceaselessly to achieve the objectives. Periyar was arrested and imprisoned in 1933 for 9 months with a fine of Rs.300/- for an editorial he wrote in Kudiarasu. The Government was feeling uncomfortable and insecure with Periyar’s
communist propaganda and started unleashing repressive measures. Subsequent developments made Periyar believe that the vested interests and the forces of orthodoxy were conspiring to move the Government of India to ban the Self-Respect movement and once and for all put an end to his social reform activities. In Periyar's agenda, social reform and abolition of caste system ranked far above economic reform since he believed that the former was a prerequisite to the latter. After deep deliberations and consultations with his senior colleagues, Periyar declared that his objectives were politically, opposition to Congress, socially, eradication of the caste system and superstitious practices and economically, achieving socialism, and to this end, he would work in co-operation with the British Government. To those who criticized his action as 'surrender to the Government', he replied saying that he had no ambition of becoming a martyr and a hero spending his life in prison, but was committed fully to carrying on his social, political and economic reform mission and continuing to awaken and educate the masses till the end of his life. Jeeva was one among his young and socially committed followers who parted company on this issue.

7. Reservation Policy

Communal representation in education and employment was a principle that Periyar held dear to his heart. He believed that education and equality of opportunity were the only two weapons to fight the humiliating inequalities and cruel iniquities perpetrated over millennia and sought to be continued further. He rose in anger and fury, and organised a statewide agitation when the communal G.O. of the then Madras State, for which he had pleaded and fought ceaselessly since 1921, and which was in operation from 1929, was struck down by the Madras High Court in 1950 as ultra vires the Constitution, and the judgement was
upheld by the Supreme Court. The widespread resentment in the Southern states, Periyar's leadership in rallying the forces for social justice, Kamaraj's support for the protection of the weaker sections and Nehru's sympathy for the cause, brought about the first amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1951, and the inclusion of the following clause:

Article (15) (4): Nothing in this article or in clause (2) of article 29 shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes of citizens or for the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribes.

Not many political leaders, members of parliament and leaders of social movements know that it is this amendment which enabled the appointment of the Mandal Commission whose recommendations mark a watershed in the social history of India.

II. Rajaji’s Educational Reform

During the period 1952-54, Rajaji, who was the Chief Minister of Madras State, introduced an educational reform by which school children would spend half the day in the school and devote the remaining half for occupying themselves in productive work, mostly assisting their parents. Periyar opposed it as an attempt at perpetuating caste-based occupation. The scheme met with widespread opposition and was withdrawn when Rajaji resigned his office in 1954.

III. Believer in Peaceful Agitations

Periyar kept alive his opposition to Hindi and carried on a campaign of erasing Hindi letters from the name-boards
of railway stations in 1952, 1953 and 1954. He organised a move in 1953 to break the idols of Ganesha in important towns of Tamil Nadu. However, after Kamaraj became the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, he tended to support the Congress Government headed by him, as he believed that the interests of Dravidians were safe in his hands. He extended wholehearted support to Kamaraj and his Government. A major struggle he threatened to launch during his regime was the one to burn the national flag to protest against moves on the part of the Government of India to impose Hindi; however he suspended the agitation in deference to an assurance from Kamaraj that Hindi would not be a compulsory subject. In 1957 he organised an agitation to burn certain sections of the Constitution of India, declaring that the document was a tool to preserve and perpetuate the caste system and the caste-based iniquities and privileges. A few thousands of his followers who took part in it underwent prison terms ranging from a few months to years.

In all his agitations and struggles, he consistently eschewed violence. He denounced, in unequivocal language, attempts at damaging property during protest marches and agitations. He was essentially for respecting the law and viewed with great disfavour any attempt at disturbing the normal life of the community. He was for the observance of a code of conduct and the adherence to certain norms even in organising agitations and protests. However, speeches made by him in 1957, at Kulithalai and Pasupathipalayam, were found inflammatory and capable of inciting people to communal violence, and Periyar underwent a prison term for six months in 1957-58.
9. D.M.K. Victory

The triumph of the D.M.K. in the 1967 elections, and the formation of Government by Anna, was to Periyar a defeat in a narrow sense, since he strongly supported Kamaraj and the Congress party in the elections. However, Anna in an unexpected, but understandable move, called on Periyar and announced the dedication of his Government to him and all that he stood for by way of social reform, social justice and respect for human personality. The resounding victory for the D.M.K. was unique in the history of democracy in as much as a radical reformer like Periyar, who denied God, condemned religions and went against popular faith, found himself accepted and acclaimed by the masses and the Government in power in his own lifetime. The period after 1967 was for him, full of honours, recognition and mass expression of thankfulness. For his part, he continued to be active, carrying his message through numerous meetings and periodic writings, and registering his protests through agitations. Periyar breathed his last at the Christian Medical College Hospital, Vellore, on 24.12.1973 and was buried at Periyar Thidal with state honours.

10. Aggressive Colossus, not Fully Appraised

Periyar remained a fighter all through his life and fought his battles on many fronts. Although his formal education was modest, the opportunities he had, to listen to learned discourses with which his parents were associated, his own reading in later years and his travels abroad and within the country gave him breadth of knowledge and depth of insight. Periyar had the benefit of visiting foreign countries both in the East and in the West. During 1929-30 he toured in Singapore and Malaysia; in 1931-32 he spent eleven months in Europe visiting among other countries Germany, the U.S.S.R., France and England.
In 1954, he went to Burma to attend the 2500th anniversary celebration of the Buddha.

The streak of rationalism was evident in him from his youth. The following observation by Periyar is significant:

I have not believed in caste nor practised any religion since my youth. I might have put up appearances of conformity where obligatory. Similarly, I have had neither fear for, nor faith in God. I would not have desisted from doing something I wanted to do, fearing God's anger or divine punishment; similarly, I would not have done anything against my will to please or receive favours from God.

He was not an intellectual, postulating and enunciating theories about the heaven and earth; but an active field worker who carried his message to the people, and delivered it in a language that was understood by the illiterate millions, and through methods that were appropriate to them. The apparent crudeness of some of his techniques in the eyes of the elite is to be viewed against this background. To prove to the masses that the idols of gods were nothing more than the stone or bronze they are made of, he broke the idols of Ganesha, burnt pictures of Rama and denigrated the objects of worship. He exposed claims of superhuman powers, ridiculed the puranic stories, and carried the torch of knowledge, inquiry and logic to the humblest of villages and the lowliest of citizens. Awakening the common man, encouraging and motivating him to think on his own and removing the shackles and chains on his mind, continued to be his main mission till the very end.

Periyar believed that education enfranchises, and that the key to human liberation from intellectual, economic, social and political bondage was to be found in education,
Equalization of opportunities for education continued to be the cornerstone of his struggle from the beginning. The single most important issue on which he left the Congress was the principle of Communal Representation in education and employment: in his long public life, he might have made adjustments; shown accommodation and reconciled with differences in policies here and there for the sake of certain larger interests; but he never made any compromise on Communal Representation: never supported any party, never allied with any leader who did not subscribe to this principle. He was convinced that there was no such thing as liberation for the ignorant. To them freedom from one bondage would only mean submission to another. The ignorant would only change their masters and not shed them. In the history of the resurgence of India in the twentieth century, Periyar would come to be acknowledged as the great pioneer and the unique architect of the broad measures for equalization of opportunities, equity in access to education and employment.

Periyar considered the caste system the cancer of the Indian society. To him, nothing was more important than putting an end to this abomination; he waged a relentless war against the caste system, especially against the practice of untouchability, and all its manifestations in the society. Temple entry, abolition of caste-based discrimination in hotels and restaurants, inter-caste marriage, priesthood on the basis of preparation and not by birth, and the use of the language of the people for worship instead of Sanskrit, were some of the positive measures for which he pleaded and fought throughout his life.

Periyar was a humanist; he had no particular emotional attachment to any language or race; no faith in any religion,
no preference for any caste, no unquestioning commitment to any political philosophy. He judged and evaluated everything on the basis of its usefulness, functional efficiency and equity. In a rational humanist like him, what appears to be the consistent hostility towards the Brahmins might seem somewhat irreconcilable. Periyar was convinced somehow, beyond doubt, that casteism was identical with Hinduism and Hinduism to him meant Brahminism and supremacy of the Brahmins. Consequently, his fervour for a casteless society and his crusade against the caste system and its pervasive influence, made him denounce Hinduism as the source of this evil and Brahmins as the early authors and subtle perpetrators of this cancerous stratification.

Periyar sincerely believed that the Hindu mythologies, puranas, stories about gods, divine personages and devils, and the practices obtaining in Hindu temples, were clever innovations and strategies to integrate faith in God with acceptance of the caste system and a Brahmin-dominated culture. He came down heavily therefore on the Hindu gods, mythologies and rituals. He saw them all as an outrage at human dignity and an unpardonable crime on humanity perpetuated over 3000 years and sought to be preserved in the name of rituals, tradition, culture and religion. He observed almost no restraint in demonstrating his contempt and expressing his anger. His mood was one of smashing the obsolete order, melting the ruins and pouring them into a new mould to forge a new order, a new society founded on reason, equity and dignity of humanity.

It may be said in general that he was the willing and self-appointed champion of the causes of all those who were underprivileged. His struggle for the cause of women has perhaps few parallels in the history of women's
liberation in India. Child marriage, widowhood, dowry, male domination, the myths and puranas that weave stories extolling servility in women as virtue, were ridiculed, condemned and exposed by him day in, day out in public meetings, marriage ceremonies, political platforms and writings. He saw clearly that the continuous occupation of women in bearing and bringing up children was the main cause of their confinement to the home and their complete dependence on men. He saw contraception as the most effective tool of women's liberation and was the earliest to advocate family planning. He introduced the concept of 'self-respect marriages', which stressed the equality of sexes, looked at family life as one of partnership and discarded all rituals that implied subordination of women to men. In the Self-Respect Movement, women played a prominent role. In the resolutions adopted in the conferences organised by him, those concerning the rights and privileges of women were given pride of place. He advocated, with feeling and forcefulness, widow remarriage. When his own niece became a widow in her youth, Periyar set an example by arranging her remarriage, defying all his orthodox relatives. At the Self-Respect Conferences in 1929 and 1930, women's right to divorce and to have property was emphasized. It is but appropriate that the title of Periyar, though in occasional use earlier, was officially conferred on him at a women's conference held in Madras, in November 1938.

His interest in politics per se was really secondary. His main concern was social reform. Politics is the game of those who, among other things, aspire for power. Periyar was unwaveringly against fighting elections and capturing power. Since he resigned his chairmanship of the Erode Municipality in 1919, till his death in 1973, he had stoutly refused to seek or accept power. In 1940, and in 1942, he
was twice asked to take up the Chief Ministership of the Madras Presidency. He declined, saying that acceptance of office would be an impediment to his struggle for reform.

After he left the Congress, political interest in him revived only when he opposed Hindi and led the agitation against it. Periyar had great reservations about the Indian languages in general as media of modern knowledge. The absence of literature in science and technology and the abundance of puranas and myths in Indian languages have been Periyar's great concern. He was skeptical about the efficacy of any Indian language as a modern tool and therefore unambiguously and strongly advocated the use and study of English along with the mother tongue. He opposed Hindi as official language since Hindi as a language is even less developed than other Indian languages.

He bestowed his thought on the development of Tamil to meet the needs of the era of science and technology and suggested script reform as one of the measures. He himself introduced some changes in 1934. These were officially accepted by the Government of Tamil Nadu in 1976 and the reform since then has become regularized. He was indifferent to, or critical of, many of the literary works in Tamil, but was a pioneer in projecting the Kural to the public at large as a work depicting more closely the way of life of the Tamils.

He feared the domination of the North over the South in an independent India, and therefore advocated a separate political identity for Tamil Nadu though he used the term Dravidasthan. However, his political interest took a secondary place, and he concentrated on his struggle for social reform and social justice though he kept up his relentless fight against Hindi. The D.M.K. under Anna gave
precedence to political issues over policies of social reform and the split of the D.K. resulted in one concentrating on the social front and the other on essentially political issues. When the D.M.K. gave up the separation demand, following the Chinese invasion, the emphasis came to be on autonomy for the states and on federal concept. In general, the effort of the Dravidian Movement has been, and even today is, to claim for the Tamil language and culture, which are as ancient as, or even more ancient than Sanskrit, a recognition and an identity commensurate with their past.

Periyar courted imprisonment more than ten times; three times in 1922; and in 1924, when he was in the Congress. Later he underwent prison terms, or was arrested and imprisoned in 1927, 1938, 1948, 1949, 1950, 1957 and 1960. Agitation against Hindi, temple entry, resistance to discrimination on the basis of caste in hotels and restaurants, protest against certain provisions in the Constitution and attempt at burning the Constitution or the national flag were among the main battles that put him behind bars on most of the occasions.

Periyar was a rationalist with a difference. He was all the time a fieldworker. His audience ranged from intellectuals to illiterate masses from the slums and remote villages. He took examples from their day-to-day practices, dealt with them in detail, explained himself in a language intelligible to them, and exposed the patent follies in their faiths, beliefs and practices. He was not interested in the philosophical niceties of the many Hindu concepts. These were merely of theoretical interest and were confined to academics, intellectuals and a limited number of persons in the upper strata of society. His concern was in what is believed and observed by the people in their day-to-day life. Religion in the Hindu society is one of rituals, ceremonies,
and observances. He wanted to bring about a change in them. His objective and ambition were essentially one of modernising the society and bringing it in tune with the ideals and values relevant to the times.

Periyar kept an open mind and was refreshingly resilient in accepting and absorbing changes. While he was alert and responsive to new developments, he did not rely on any authority ancient or modern for his views. The opinions expressed and the measures advocated by him were essentially the fruits of his own experience, observation and contemplation. He judged every issue using simple criteria. His approach to and analysis of any issue can be summarized in the following questions:

- Is it fair and just to all concerned?
- Does it stand to reason?
- Is it in tune with the natural inclinations of men and women? If it is not, is it necessary to adopt it or follow it for human welfare and progress on a long-term basis?
- Will it promote human endeavour?
- Will it contribute to human progress?

When an issue failed his tests, he never once wavered in his grim determination to oppose it. He stood steadfastly by the following announcement he made through *Kudi Arasu* in 1925:

Feelings of self-respect and brotherhood must blossom in the society: inequalities and thoughts of one being high and other low in birth must be eliminated. Caste feuds and conflicts must disappear. We shall fearless^ and without discriminating
between friends and foes condemn everyone who might oppose and attack us in this regard.

In general, he took it on his shoulders to fight against every form of oppression, every form of exploitation, every practice that hurts human dignity, every belief that inhibits human effort and human endeavour. For one like him whose philosophy is broad humanism, and whose objectives are human welfare and human progress, the question of hating any community really does not arise. He opposed the Brahmins when he felt that they had been oppressing the non-Brahmin community. He opposed and condemned the male members of the Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities alike, when he saw the injustice they were doing to the womenfolk in general. He criticised bitterly the non-Brahmin caste-Hindus when he found them ill-treating and humiliating the members of the scheduled caste. In general, he was always on the side of the weaker sections of the community. He pleaded and fought for their cause, without being approached or asked to.

In his long public life, he opposed many leaders and political parties and supported many individuals and institutions. On a later date, he supported those that he once opposed and also opposed those that he once supported. His critics and detractors see inconsistency or opportunism in the stands taken by Periyar. He was never inconsistent; his goals were clear in his mind: he worked towards them with a single-minded devotion. He welcomed support for his struggle from wherever it came: whenever he found that an individual leader or a party would help his case, he also lent support. For example, Communal Representation was dear to his heart and he never supported, nor ever spared any leader or party that went against the principle of communal representation. Similarly, he believed that a reform movement should not aspire for power and
fight elections. On more than one occasion, the highest of the offices available at that time in the state was offered to him. He consistently turned down such offers and kept his followers away from fighting elections. Inconsistency, if any, was superficial. There was an underlying current of purposiveness in his strategy, a direction in his journey and they were in harmony with his objectives.

Even among those who broadly agree with his main mission, appreciate and gratefully acknowledge the monumental services rendered by him, there are some who hold the view that while Periyar as an iconoclast sought to destroy many faiths, beliefs and practices, he had no suggestions for replacement to sustain the reform. Introducing new conventions or traditions as substitutes to old ones discarded, and sustaining the reform so made, requires that the new ones be institutionalized. But Periyar was in principle opposed to institutionalizing any practice. This issue requires, perhaps, a separate discussion.

He had in him in full measure the essential traits of great men. He allowed no gap between what he preached and practised. It was not merely his writings and speeches that conveyed his message; his own life and work unmistakably radiated his convictions. One can never find even a trace of hypocrisy in him; duplicity in word and deed was to him an unknown phenomenon. His was a life as transparent as crystal glass; there was nothing to hide, nothing to withhold.

The cornerstone of his virtue was his simple living. His ambitions were high; but his wants were modest; he kept them to the barest minimum. He was free from addiction of any kind. He dressed in the simplest piece of cotton material; ate whatever was served: slept anywhere when
he needed rest. Perhaps no saint, no ascetic would have reduced his needs of comfort to such an irreducible minimum as Periyar did. While he had no great admiration for a life of asceticism, and never supported renunciation, his was the life of an ascetic and sannyasin excepting that he did not choose to starve or sleep on a bed of thorns.

Periyar identified himself indistinguishably with the masses. His time, effort and thought were totally devoted to the task of bringing about an awakening among them, to set them thinking. In the 93rd year of his life, he travelled for 183 days and delivered 249 speeches; in the 94th year, he toured for 177 days and delivered 229 speeches. A life so active physically and mentally in so advanced an age is truly rare in human history.

After 50 years of tireless striving, hard struggle and massive educational efforts through speeches, writings and demonstrations, he left behind him a society vastly different from the one he inherited - more alert, more questioning, less gullible, better educated, more modern, and in general, closer to the take off point for a state of living that would be richer in all respects.
Anna, the Creative Genius*

1. Larger than the Canvas

Anna is one of the few persons, the dimensions of whose greatness have not been fully comprehended even by his followers and admirers; whose contributions have not been understood even by the liberals among his opponents; the levels of whose refinement and sophistication in politics have not been attained by any, among those in position and in opposition.

He is a creative genius of world order born to become an Ibsen or a Shaw, but drawn into a life of revolt against social injustices, rejection of outworn traditions, and negation of many faiths and beliefs. In whatever he did, however, the creator in him dominated, and consequently in every area of his interest, he left behind a new order, a new system and an indelible mark of his natural predilections and potential for creative contributions.

* Article contributed to ANNA 73: A Souvenir, published in 1982
To the politics of Tamil Nadu, he gave a new sense of sophistication and refinement; to the Tamil stage and film, a new theme and style; to journalism, a new language and method of expression; to the party system, a message of development and encouragement of leadership; to the art of speaking a new style; and above all to the Tamil language a new form, new life and new vigour.

The world of art and literature that he left behind was vastly different from, infinitely richer than the one he inherited. The Tamil that we hear from our political platforms, literary forums and discussion groups is the Tamil of his making. The style we see in the contributions of our scholars, writers and reporters is the style that bears an indelible mark of his moulding and shaping. In short, the Tamil that we write and the Tamil that we hear from platforms, stages and screens is the Tamil that bears very distinguishably the mark of Anna. Even those who rejected his political policies and social philosophies have accepted his method of writing and speaking and manner of conducting himself.

Anna was an artist of global dimensions, and creator of a calibre that makes enduring contributions to humanity as a class. He had the sails to move in the wide seas and the wings to fly in the vast skies. But the mission that drew him and the goal he set for himself, chained him to the earth. A genius born for the wide world, confined its contributions to the boundaries of its land of birth, a loss to humanity in general, but a gain, a great gain to the Tamil language and the Tamil race.

2. Builder of Leaders

It was Valluvar who said that the greatness of a person must be judged by what he or she leaves behind.
In the case of a leader, political, social or religious, his/her greatness must also be judged by the kind of the first and second line of leadership that is developed and left behind. In this regard, Anna comes next only to Gandhi in the manner in which he moulded and shaped everyone according to one's talent and potential. The party he belonged to, the philosophy he advocated and the reforms he sought to bring about did not, in the early stages of his career, attract the traditional class of intellectuals. The followers were drawn from the masses and from among the radicals and the less affluent of the students. From the modest potential that was available, he by his magnanimous encouragement, liberal appreciation and discriminating guidance, developed leaders, who today dominate the scene in every political party in Tamil Nadu.

Anna stood, sure at the base, and soaring high at the top. He never feared a threat to his leadership, or a challenge to his eminence, for he was always prepared to transfer both of them to the deserving among his disciples, very willingly and gladly. On every occasion, he invited them to ease his burdens either by sharing them as equals or by taking over the mantle. He encouraged liberally the emerging talent; acknowledged unreservedly the established ones; introduced to the world voluntarily many names that remained unknown, many faces that were unseen but deserved recognition and brought them into the glare of recognition and reputation. The political party they belonged to, the convictions they worked for and the controversies of the day-to-day struggle, did not very much influence his decision and judgement in this regard. The fragrance of blossoming flower in whichever compound, and in whatever clime, found in him a spontaneous bard to sing its glory.
3. An Epitome of Refinement

All through his life, he campaigned against certain vested interests, fought for certain new order, increasingly and incessantly, he strove to bring down or break to pieces many a citadel of privileges and patronages and to an appreciable extent succeeded in them; but all without leaving a trail of bitterness or trace of enmity. He introduced into the world of politics a new culture; into the platform of controversy a new order, and into public life in general a new dimension of understanding and, where possible, appreciating the ‘other view’ even if it be an ‘opposite view’.

It is not our intention here to paint him as a paragon of all virtues and as one who stood above adverse criticism. An analysis of the social and spiritual values, political philosophy, language policy and economic organization advocated by him, his long association with the Dravidar Kazhagam, his total advocacy of Periyar’s objectives as well as the strategies employed by him, irrespective of any reservation in his mind, might throw up many points for long discussions and debates and invite both appreciation and adverse criticism as is natural in public life, but as an individual, he was among the writers a patron; among the politicians a gentleman. among his partymen the brother, and to his countrymen and women in general ‘Anna’, the beloved.
Bharathidasan: a Rebel and a Revolutionary

1. Beyond the Borders+

Bharathidasan centenary is celebrated on a grand scale in Tamil Nadu; it is good and welcome, but that is not enough. In Tamil Nadu, it is speaking about him to people, most of whom already know of him: it may tend to become more a formality: at times a ritual. Still, such a celebration serves a purpose and has a place in the scheme of things in a traditional society. However, any meeting organized outside Tamil Nadu is meaningful and purposeful in more than one sense. You take the contributions and message of Bharathidasan to people who may not have known him: secondly, you create an appreciation among the people for what can be considered as “Indian Literature” in general.

* Inaugural Address: Bharathidasan Centenary Seminar, Delhi Tamil Sangam, April, 1991.
+ Parts of Sections 1 and 2 are a repetition of the contents in section 1 of Chapter 4 on Bharathi. It is retained for completeness of this Chapter.
We proudly announce in the words of Dr. B. Radhakrishnan, former President of India, that "Indian literature is one, though written in many languages". It is an extremely meaningful statement; but to what extent is this realized by us? To what extent do even our well educated people have a glimpse of Indian literature in its whole today? Indian literature, written in many languages, can become one only if they are rendered in other Indian languages.

Another popular motto is "Unity in Diversity". It is again a statement of fact; but one sees evidences of diversity: in religion, in language, in dress, in food and even in stature and colour. But where lies the unity? What is the source of the unity we talk about? Our heritage holds the key in this regard: in what constitutes the heritage of a nation, literature has a major share. This fact has not been fully realized and acted upon.

Even now, I have not known of universities that have a chair on Indian literature. What is often quoted is only the ancient lore of Vedas, Upanishads, and literary and philosophic works in Sanskrit. Even in considering our ancient heritage, the vast treasure of Tamil works that have come down over a period of nearly three millennia rarely find mention. Modern literature also remains fragmented in the respective regional languages, and as a nation we really do not have a holistic view of our literary wealth.

2. A Great Literary Legacy

The Tamil language has more than 3000 years of literary history. Even at the beginning of the Christian era, it was already an established and developed language. Tamil poetry dating back to the Sangam age has seen many forms, has dealt with many themes. These are
extremely valuable contributions that provide evidences of advanced development in art and culture that any nation can really and legitimately be proud of. But regrettably these are relatively unknown to the rest of India.

We state that Bharati brought about a revolution in Tamil poetry in the 20th century, and Bharathidasan carried it forward. What was the revolution about? – not so much in poetical form: since both of them mostly used the forms that existed. The revolution was in the themes that they chose for their poetry; in the message conveyed and the way it was done.

Tamil poetry had pioneers in departure from convention as early as post-Sangam age, i.e., around A.D. 200. The traditional epic and literature normally dealt with love and war: It dealt with kings and queens, princes and princesses, chieftains, their courage, their exploits, the battles they fought and the wars they won. The common man was not a subject for the poem. His ambitions and aspirations, fears and frustrations, troubles and turmoils, his contentment and happiness, his joys and sorrows, in short, the events in the life of a commoner never formed the theme. For the first time, Bharathi released Tamil poetry from this constrained reservoir and allowed it to flow over vast lands, irrigating a thousand new plants, thousand new crops. They transformed a dull uniformity into a rich variety.

Among Indian languages, besides Sanskrit, Tamil alone has two ancient epics, i.e., Silappathikaram and Manimekalai that are nearly 2000 years old; for that matter, Tamil is one of the few languages of the world that can boast of ancient epics. Again, Silappathikaram, the Tamil epic, is unique and different from other epics of the world.
In *Silappathikaram*, the hero is a commoner; the heroine is also a commoner. Three persons dominate the scene: among them two are ladies: one of them is a dancing girl, but rises to a high position of acceptance and respectability based on her conduct. Kannagi, the heroine who hails from the Chola Kingdom, in Tamil land happens to come to Madurai in the Pandya Kingdom, also in Tamil land and is obliged to enter into a confrontation with the Pandya king. It was a dispute over the ownership of an anklet which has led to the execution of her husband by the king. She, a commoner, now a widow, hailing from another kingdom argues her case against the king and proves convincingly that the king was wrong in ordering the execution of her husband - an unusually bold depiction at that time when the king was considered divine. It is rated as a great epic by any standard and it also marks a radical departure from the epics of those times. It is really a pity that such great literary contributions as are a part of the country's heritage are not known even to the scholars at large. There is a real need to initiate steps for disseminating the literary heritage of the country.

3. A Popular Poet

The contributions of Bharathidasan cover a wide spectrum comprising short poems, lyrics, songs and long poems embodying narratives and minor epics. The content in each of them has one thing in common – a view that is modern, progressive; characterized by freedom from the constraints of any doctrine or dogma; refreshingly liberal and remarkably fearless. His association and apprenticeship with Bharathi early in his career and his own nature predisposed him towards social reform and revolution and he found in Periyar E.V.R., a leader who commanded his acceptance and admiration. He become a follower of Periyar, joined the Self-Respect movement and ultimately blossomed
as the celebrated bard of the Self-Respect movement and Dravida Kazhagam. Periyar was his unquestioned leader and he strode over the Tamilnadu landscape like a colossus championing the cause of social reform, social justice, economic revolution, women's liberation and Tamil renaissance. In the history of Tamil poetry, no poet enjoyed, in his lifetime, such popularity as Bharathidasan. He had even during his lifetime, and has also left behind, a blazing trail of young poets, referred to as Bharathidasan Paramparai i.e., the descendants of Bharathidasan or members of Bharathidasan dynasty.

His concern has been for:

i. the poor and the working population
ii. the women and their sufferings
iii. the Tamil people, their land and language.
iv. the society at large and the blind beliefs and superstitions that it suffers from

In all these four areas, Bharathidasan carried forward the tradition established by Bharathi and enlarged the coverage of social and economic issues. The volume of his output is impressive and subscribes appreciably to enriching Tamil poetry.

There are some who hold the view that preaching and propagandist element is dominant in his poems. The boundary line between good poetry and preaching is rather slim. The criticism comes from varied quarters and mainly from those who consider any message as preaching. Those who hold the view of art for the sake of art constitute another core of his detractors. Bharathidasan has an objective before him and therefore he writes with a mission
An objective assessment of Bharathidasan’s contribution lies outside the domain of these groups.

It cannot be the intention of any one to maintain that every stanza in Bharathidasan’s massive collection constitutes good poetry. Perhaps it cannot be said of any poet. What is poetry is a question that is as old as literature itself. A universally acceptable definition does not seem to exist. An interesting one seems to be the definition by Robert Frost that poetry is what is lost in the process when you translate a poem into another language. The school teacher of Samuel Taylor Coleridge would say that in the truly great poets, there is a reason assignable, not only to every word, but to the position of every word. In short, one can recognize good poetry though one may not be able to define poetry precisely. An objective review of the views of recognized critics would show that Bharathidasan has to his credit in his volumes a handsome quantum of poetry of enduring excellence that will form part of the Tamil literary lore.

4. In Praise of Sweat and Toil

Bharathidasan has devoted a number of poems to pay tribute to the contributions of the labour. When he sees a park and the beautiful and fragrant flowers, his mind immediately visualises the sweat and toil of the workers who created the park.

He demands:

Who transformed the primitive lands
   With torrential rivers and dense forests
   With wild animals roaming all over
   With snakes fighting in the holes of rocks
   Into new attractive urban centres?
Whose shoulders were they that toiled
   To establish hamlets and crop fields
   To cultivate and grow paddy crop?

Whose hands were they
   That broke the rocks in mountains
   That worked in deep mines
   To make all the tools we use?

Whose breath was it
   That was held back
   To dive deep to bring out
   Pearls from the sea? (1)

It is the sweat and blood of the working class, it is
their hard labour, sustained effort that have contributed to
the creation of wealth. They do not enjoy the fruits of their
contribution. In a poem, the poet enumerates the develop-
mental works they have done and the denial they suffer
from*.

We weeded thick growths
Set right and ploughed the fields
*     *     *
Broke the hillocks
Filled up the deep ocean for
World's welfare
*     *     *

We wove in plenty the garments
Harnesssed water from rivers to cultivate paddy
*     *     *

---

* Selected Poems of Bharathidasan: Appeal of the Labourers
  Translated by Palany Arangaswamy: Bharathidasan University, 1994,
  pp.253, 254.
Waste, dirt and garbage
We carried on our heads to remove them.(2)

For all these toil and struggle, what is the benefit we got
in compensation?

We wore rags
Covered our body with our naked arms
Gruel in a flagon
Together we drank but stayed hungry
As cattle in a fair
Always without shelter
Agonised we were
Is this the gratitude for all our service? (3)

4. Crusader for Women

Bharathidasan is at his best when he sings the greatness of womanhood. The feminine charms, the grace of the frail frame of women as well as their capacity for strong conviction are captured in every possible manner. Description of these aspects is pervasive in his works:

Even a fowl fights against the mighty eagle that comes to snatch its young ones.
Women are the ones that gave birth to men:
They will rage like snakes in their fury against evil:
Women are not to be trifled with easily. (4)

Child marriage and widowhood are touched upon in many poems. He appeals to the society in more than one forum to find relief from these abuses. Perhaps no writer of any eminence in Tamil carried his/her struggle against the injustice and cruelty to women into the literary works as Bharathidasan did. He touches upon all themes that have a bearing on liberation of women. Frequent conception, whether desired or not, and bringing forth children confined
women to their home and rendered them perennially dependent. I do not know whether any poet of standing among his contemporaries who might have thought of family planning for a theme. Bharathidasan is so concerned with the plight of women that he openly advocated contraceptives even at that time. Alluding to family planning, he declares:

Let us keep the path open for love
But close the door of pregnancy.  

He advocated vigorously widow remarriage; he creates characters of men who advise their wives to marry again if they die. An ailing husband tells his wife:

I am badly ill my dear
Do not live in widowhood when I die
That will be a blame on me
Don’t you worry about
the obsolete traditions
Organise you life
With the one you may love.

Widow remarriage was still considered a blasphemy and frowned at during the earlier part of the twentieth century. Even reformers were equivocal on the subject. When Gandhiji was asked about widow remarriage, he evaded a straight answer by saying that the problem would be solved if the practice of old men marrying young women was given up. Bharathi, reacting to this reply of Mahatma said that Shriman Gandhi did not have the courage to openly support widow remarriage. It is against these circumstances that an ailing husband of Bharathi dasan’s creation advised his wife to remarry in the event of his demise. He has been an uncompromising crusader for the cause of widows and consistently advocated widow remarriage.
8. In Praise of Human Excellence

Bharathidasan was a rationalist and an agnostic. He sees religion as a tool of exploitation and a chain that binds. He declares that the scores of books that we have, and that promote irrationality, cannot do any good: they can't even move an atom.

Books and scriptures
That do not conform to reason
Cannot do a trace of good
They do not have the strength to lift
Even a tiny particle of grain. (7)

He was convinced that many of our religious practices and beliefs have been acting as inhibiting factors on human effort and human endeavour. He was a humanist and extols the unlimited powers of the human mind, the infinite glories of the human race. Speaking about the power of mankind, he declares*:

The sword of humankind
And your arms that wield that sword
Will bring even heaven within your reach
Root your faith in this human power
That will quicken life into fertile growth.

* * *

In the long annals of human life
and of human acts
Have you ever heard of a force
greater than that of humankind? (8)

7. Tamil in Indian Heritage

He was immensely proud of his land, language and his Tamil ancestry. He would pride himself singing*

---

Trumpet, oh conch
And remind the little folk
That we are born with Tamil
Whose birth was with the moon
With the ruddy sun itself
With the sky, the stars
And the murky seas
A manly leonine race we are.

Bharathidasan was visibly enraged over the denial or neglect of due place for Tamil in administration, education, music performances and temple worship. His indignation against those who argued opposing Tamil in worship and religious ceremonies, found expression in the choicest and the most effective words of chastisement in poetry. He opposed Hindi, not as a language per se but its imposition as a compulsory subject by administrative fiat.

Bharathidasan was no doubt an active member of the Dravidian movement, which at one time demanded a separate independent state; but this was given up by the party later. He echoed the sentiments of the party that he belonged to. But his approach in this regard may be summarized as follows.

Tamil, his mother tongue, is as old as Sanskrit. It has literature that dates back to pre-Christian era. It is a language that has substantially contributed to the literary, cultural and philosophical heritage of India. According to many historians, that which we know as Indian culture and heritage today are the contributions of two streams – the Aryan and the Dravidian.
A discriminating scholar like Dr C.P. Ramasamy Iyer who is deeply read in Sanskrit made the following observation in his convocation address on 24.9.53 at Pune University:

The two great components of culture in India are Sanskrit and Dravidian.

If one is to understand the contribution of the latter, it can only be through Tamil. If Greek and Latin constitute the base for the European heritage, Sanskrit and Tamil form the base for the ancient Indian culture. There is some disappointment, even frustration among the Tamils that this dimension of their language and literature has not been recognized and acknowledged. In Tamil Nadu, every political party appeals to this sentiment. Bharathidasan’s approach must be understood from this angle. He is not to be thought of as a separatist in any serious form. His expressions were a manifestation of certain discontent, dissatisfaction over the lack of recognition and acceptance of the vital contribution that Tamil and the heritage it represents has made. He is unable and unwilling to reconcile with the fact that this language is treated just as one of the many regional languages of India without any consideration for the larger role it has played by way of seminal contributions to the ancient civilization of this land.

8. Social Reforms and Social Justice

The main platform of Self-Respect Movement has been educating the people at large and bringing about a general awakening. Advocating a rational approach to all beliefs and practices in life demonstrating the futility of many of the rituals in vogue among the people, exposing the clever use of religious faith by the purohits and poojaris to exploit people and make for themselves a comfortable living, explaining the tyranny of the caste system and the cancerous nature of its consequences on the health of the
society and protesting against the injustice heaped on
women and proving with incontrovertible arguments that it
was doing incalculable harm to the society at large and
waging a battle for equity and equality of opportunities for
the disadvantaged class have constituted the major aims of
the Movement. Bharathidasan as mentioned earlier was the
presiding bard of the Movement and created enough literary
support in the form of short poems, lyrics, songs, long poems,
minor epics, dramas and also prose writing. Besides the
merits of his poems and their appeal to the readers and
listeners, their dissemination was facilitated by the followers
of the Self-Respect movement. They were quoted in
speeches and sung on platforms with great effect.
Bharathidasan came to be hailed as a Puratchik Kavi i.e.,
revolutionary poet, a title that he alone enjoys in the world
of Tamil poetry.

He starts his lessons on fighting superstition from
the cradle. In his lullaby to the female child, Bharathi-
dasan states:

Oh noble lady
you have come to this land
As a self-sustaining lamp
To dispel the dark of
Detestable caste system.

Sleep my dear with a smile
Ashamed of the acts of those
who daub an idol made of dung
With powder, and deem it God.

He sings a lullaby for a male child in the same vein:
Sleep my dear
Pure as Tamil and sweet as honey
You have come down to this earth
To show the might of humanity
To those that covet others’ possession
declaring ‘everything is as ordained by God’
- To those indolent useless people
saying ‘God will protect you till death’. (11)

Bharathidasan yearns and pleads for a new order,
a new world. To this end, he would prefer to smash the
existing one, melt and mould it to create a new world. He
declares:

Let us make a new world
This warring
Vicious world
We shall uproot
And destroy.
Let us take the message of socialism
To all the eight directions
Cherish it as sacred
And guard it as our life
Let our hearts be wet in the river of love
And we shall eschew the tyranny
Of claiming, ‘this is mine’. (12)

Bharathidasan was no socialist or communist by
party affiliation; but he was decisively against exploitation
of any form: he was a fighter for justice to those who toiled
in the farm, sweated in factories. In short, he championed
the creation of a world free, not only from exploitation by
the capitalists, but also by the clergy, the heads of religious
institutions and the privileged classes.
When it comes to developmental programmes of this country, there were two schools of thought:

i. Those who emphasized economic justice and economic development and believed that these would ensure social justice, equity and equality of opportunities.

ii. Those who maintained that equity, social reform and social justice must receive equal priority to economic justice and economic development since the former is a prerequisite to the latter.

The first school had a large number of advocates and the second one a small number. Periyar Ramaswamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, belonged to the second school. Bharathidasan was his follower. Over the years we have come to realize that social justice is an important factor for development and it is more crucial than many of us might have imagined.

9. Conclusion

Bharathi, the mentor of Bharathidasan, had the foresight to make the following observation as early as 1904 in a letter to the Hindu, December 1904:

The National Congress I readily concede has some of India’s best sons in its ranks and its aspirations are of the worthiest. But does anybody seriously believe that a man who in his stony heart condemns a babe widow to perpetual misery might be worthy to be placed at the helm of a rising people? Impossible.

Without social reform our political reform is a dream for social slaves can never really understand political liberty.
And until and unless our social conferences prove a success, our National Congress is nothing but glare and dust.

Briefly stated, Bharathidasan represented three major movements:

i. Rationalism
ii. Sub-nationalism
iii. Social Reform and Social Justice

Bharathidasan has been an uncompromising crusader against all forms of injustice, oppression, superstition and against all the ills as conceived by him, a great champion of the liberty as well as liberation of women. His concern for the Tamils and his devotion to Tamil were absolute and unparalleled. He was well read in ancient Tamil literature and also had intimate knowledge of the contributions of contemporary writers. His poems though modern in every respect, are still not a break with the literary tradition of the past but they represent a continuum, bridging both the worlds. He had a full grasp of the past and a vision of the future. He has made a considerably large contribution to Tamil poetry in the second half of the twentieth century, leaving behind a blazing trail of followers constituting what is referred to as the ‘Bharathidasan Dynasty’. 
1. இரண்டால் நிற்குவிக்க நெறிவாய்க்கால நினைவு பூர்த்து காண்கயு பெற்றியுள்ள 

தின்னுள் முழுவம் பார்த்தது கண்டில் 

மறுத்துள்ள பிள்ளையில் பார்க்கப்பட்டும் 

பூனையும் முடிவேற்றத்துத் தூக்க வைத்து 

புதுக்கும் பாடல் அப்பு தந்தையேயேயே?

* * * *

இன்னும் அப்பெருக்கம் மாசு அன்ன 

தின்னுள்ள பெரும் கூறும் கோளாக்கத்தை 

பொதுக்குழு பெரும் கூறுக, கூறுக 

மறுவிடமும் உள்ள கூறுகளையும் நல்லத 

குறிப்பிட்டு மறுவிடமும் குறிப்பிட்டு பொன்னு 

குறிப்பிட்டு மறுவிட்டு குறிப்பிட்டு பொன்னு 

பொதுக்குழு அல்லாம் என்தடி பொன்னு?

- புல்லிகோள்ளி

nirōṭai nilaṅkilikkka netumaranāṅkal! 
niraintu peruṅ kāṭakkap peruvilaṅku 
nērōṭi vālntirukkap parukkaik kalliṅ 
neṭuṅkuṟṟil pilaṅcērap pāmpukkūṭtam 
pōrātum pāṉnilattai antanāliḷ 
pukkiyavar yār alaku nakaruntuṅkki?

cırṟṟum varampe-utta vayalum āru 
tēkkiyanal vāykkālum vakaippa-utti 
necteṛēra uḷutulūtu payaṅ vilaikkum 
niraiyulaipput tōlkālelām evarīn tōlka! 
karpilantu malaipilantu kanikaḷ veṭṭik 
karuviyelām ceytu tanta kaitāṅ yārkai
porrukaḷai kāṭalmuttai maṇikku lattaip
pōyētukka atakkiyā mūccu evariṇ mūccu?
- puraṭcikkavi

kāṭukaḷaṁtōm - nalla
kalanittiyum uḻavu purintum
nāṭukaḷ ceytōm.

malaiyai pilantōm - puvi
vāḷaveṇē kāṭal
ālamum tūrtōm.

āṭaikaḷ neytōm - perum
ārrai valaittu nel
nāṟrukaḷ nattōm.
ilai, acuttam - kuppai
ilai ennavē enkal
talaiyil cumantōm.

- toliḷāḷar vinṇappam

3.

kantaiyanintōm - iru
kaiyai virritteŋkāl
meyyinaip pōrtōm
montaiyil kūlaip - palar
moyttuk kuṭittup
pacittuk kitantōm
cantaiyil māṭay - yām
cantatam taṅkiṭa
viṭumillāmal
cintai melintōm - enkal
cēvaikkелām itu
ceynanri tāṅō?

- toliḷāḷar vinṇappam
கோண்டல்லு கொல்லாக்கிக்கு
சிகம்பாய மான புதவைத்
குத்தைத்திய அெண்டு
நிறத்து பட்டாலே, குழைக்கு
பத்திரி செப்பூகங்கழு
பல்வெளியுடன் தற்போது
புத்துங்கா நீண்டநீளியிருந்தார்.

- நிறைந்து

கொலியம் தன் குண்டுகாளைக்
kollavarum வான பருண்டாic
cுலிதைத் தங்கியது
tol puviyil, ஓற்றாறிப்
perintutta தாய்க்குளட்டைப்
penkullattai tuṭṭuṟukku
purreṇṭutta naccaraivaip
pulleṇavē eṇṇivittār.

- விராத்ய

கத்தூற்று ஒருபொழுதுக் கூம்பாக்கு கருத்து
காணியன் குடும்பியே, தெளிவான் குறும்
katalukku valivakuttuk karuppātai cāttak
katavanoru kaṇṭarivōm, itileṇa kurram

- மூக்கை

கதும்பியியாலன் நன் இரண்டு பிரமை
கைவெளியார்களை உத்தரத்திற்குப் புதவைத் பயைத்து
ஆஞ்சுப்பம் கொண்டியும் வாழ்க்கையில் காத்து
உச்சத்தில்பிடித்தே உடல், மேலும்
வண்ண குன்று : கோண்டல்லை.

- கூதைனன் வைபுரிய

kaṭumπiṇiyāḷan nān iranta pin mātē
taimpeṇṇay varuntātē paliyenṟuṇ mītē
7. மானிலில் கனவெறியுற அன்று மானிலில் கனவெறியுற வாய்ந்து மானிலில் கனவெறியுற வாய்ந்து

- மானிலில் கைது முழுந்து

8. மானிலில் ரோஜானுற வாய்ந்து - அன்று மானிலில் ரோஜானுற வாய்ந்து மானிலில் ரோஜானுற வாய்ந்து

- மானிலில் முழுந்து

māṇīṭam enoru vālum - atai vacattil atāintīṭa un irutōḷum vānum vacappatavaikkum - itil vaitṭitum nampikkai vālvaip perukkum.

māṇīṭan vālīnta varaikkum - inta vaiyattile avan ceyta varaikkum māṇīṭat tanmaikkku ṛerāy - oru vallamai kēṭṭiruntal atai kūrāy.

- māṇīṭa cakti
9. நீட்சியால் நிகழ்வார்கில் கிளையாறழும்;
சீகர்சங்காலும், சன்னி஧ியாலும்
மானலுக்கு சிப்புணிதாதிது விடுத் தேசிய
உடனையுடன் நாண்கு உணியாகவே
கிளையாறழும் கல் விளையாட்டே திரையாக்கு
அழகு நோய் புரெந்தகு நேர்வே.
- கண்ணகாம்

tīnka lotum celumpariti tannōtum
vinnoṭum, utukkalōtum
maünkulkatal ivarrinōtum piranta tamiḻ
utanpirantōm nānkal anmaic
cīṅkattin kūṭṭameneṟu cīriyōrku
nāpakam cey muḷaṅku caṅkē.
- caṅkanātam

10. caṅkanātam kari ñīram dieñā tamayiyam
kuṇārā jinnakānām kuṇaṅkām nāနēmēnā!
kuṇakām jinnakārē kari nārakā nāmākārē
tunānē yēntē; yēntē nāntēyarē!
- jinnakā nāntēyarē yēntē
veṇṭātā cāti iruṭṭu veḷuppataṟkut
tūṇṭā viḷakkāȳt tulāṅkum perumāṭṭi!

cānīkkup poṭṭīṭṭuc cāmi enpār ceykaikku
nāṇi urāṅku; nakaittunī kaṇṇurāṅku!
- peṇkuḷantāi tāḷāṭṭu.

11. caṅkōṇām aṉeḻ kuruṅiye kāṇuṇ pēṇkōṇiṟṟakāṇu
kuraṅkōṇiṟṟakāṇu aṉeḻi kōṇiṟṟakāṇu
saṅkōṇiṟṟakāṇu kēḻi kōṇiṟṟakāṇu
kūṟīṟṟakāṇu kēḻi kōṇiṟṟakāṇu
kēḻi kōṇiṟṟakāṇu
- aṉeḻ kuṇaṅkām yēntē
ellām avan ceyalē enṟu pirarporulai
vellampōl allī viluṅkum manitarukkum
kăppār kaṭavul umaik kaṭṭaiyil nir pōkumattum
vērppēr ulaippēr ena uraikkum vinarukkum
mānitarin tōlin makattuvattaik kāṭṭavanta
tēnin perukkē en centamīlē kaṇṇuraṅku!

- ān kulantai tālāṭṭu

12. putiyator ulakam ceyvōm-kētta
pōritum ulakattai vērotu cēyppōm
potu utaimaik kōlkai ticaiyētτum
cērppōm
puṇita moṭatai enkāl uyireṇru kăppōm
itayamelām ānpu natiyinil nanaippōm
‘itu enatu’ ennumōr koṭumaiyait tavirppōm

- putiya ulaku ceyvōm
1. Experiment in Federal Democracy

Many take Indian democracy as it exists today for granted. Only a few seem to realize that it is an experiment, a great and unique experiment at that, in federal democracy. Not merely the largest democracy but it is also a system which carries with it the greatest diversity and the widest pluralism. When the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885 Swami Vivekananda was asked about his reaction to that development. The discussion went as follows:

"Have you given any attention to the Indian National Congress Movement?"

"I cannot claim to have given much; my work is in another part of the field. But I regard the movement as significant, and heartily wish it success: a nation is being made out of India's different races. I sometimes think they are no less various than the different peoples of Europe."
There may be difference of opinion about referring to the diverse language groups in India as ‘races’. But certainly, India is a nation comprising peoples who have well developed languages, who have their poets and philosophers, art and culture, rich literary heritage, periods of glory with kings and kingdoms of their own to pride about and specific identities that they are zealous about preserving. In the world as a whole, there did not exist in the past and there does not exist today, a country with a population of a thousand million and eighteen distinct language groups as we have in India. Perhaps the former Soviet Union might have been a distant second. Even they did not last. A stable and strong government for India will ultimately materialize only if due allowance is made for all the diversities and variations. Neither the kind of centralization in governance we have nor the official language policy we follow, comes anywhere near meeting fully the aspirations and ambitions of the people belonging to different states and speaking different languages, providing autonomy and ambition to promote their language, literature, art and cultural practices and also maintain their individuality.

Among the nationalists of Tamil Nadu in the early part of the freedom struggle, Bharathi was the one who had the perception to realize fully the diversity of India in all its dimensions and the formidable challenges it might pose to the unity of the country. Among the national political parties, the communists alone, in my view, have a more realistic grasp of the pluralistic aspects of Indian scene than any other national party. Among the communist leaders of Tamil Nadu, Jeevanandam, popularly known as Jeeva, was perhaps the one who could get more close to the throbs of the people’s heart and the warmth of their breath in Tamil Nadu. He was a patriotic Indian, an active communist and also a devoted Tamil, who empathized silently with the
expectations of a community that is reminiscent of its great past and claims to a great heritage.

2. Theory: Basic and Applied

Those endowed with great intellectual ability and intuitive understanding of the complexity of a given phenomenon, study it in depth and develop sometimes a universal theory that explains its behaviour. Such theorizing may relate to the physical world or social system or political organization. The theory could be universal in principle and good enough to formulate a policy. But, when a theory is to be applied or a policy is to be implemented, certain adjustments and adaptations to suit local conditions are needed. Every principle, every theory has two forms: the basic and the applied. The applied has the basic form as its soul, as its foundation; but accommodations and adjustments, minor or major, as warranted by the circumstances, have to be made when it comes to application for a specific case. It is true of all sciences.

Whether it is a physical or a social phenomenon, the real world has innumerable parameters that tend to vary in space and time. No theory can be formulated to account for all of them. In a typical analysis of a problem, an ideal situation is assumed which takes into account all major factors, but ignores the minor ones. A theory is then formulated. When this theory is to be actually applied, certain adjustments are made to allow for the minor variables that have not been considered and sometimes even for some unforeseen items. In other words, theories are formulated under simplified conditions and coefficients are applied to make allowance for the approximations made.

I may illustrate the point made above from an engineering science, for instance, soil mechanics. In order
to formulate a theory for the design of foundations, we have to consider the soil particles. No two soil particles are identical in shape; they differ from each other. We make the first assumption that all the particles are spherical in shape. This one step dispenses with an infinite number of shapes that the soil particles may have. Similarly, another assumption is made. Particles have a certain amount of cohesion. The cohesive force is again a variable. We assume a cohesionless soil particle. We have then a soil consisting of cohesionless, spherical particles. What we have before us is what is referred to in soil science as 'ideal soil' which does not vary from place to place either in shape or in cohesion. We develop then a theory for the ideal soil. The theory so developed cannot be applied directly to any situation. We need to make a correction by applying a coefficient. In order to decide the value of the coefficient, one needs an insight into the situation under consideration. The one who has such an insight is the practising foundation engineer. Whether it is a social theory or an economic theory or a political theory, its field application needs the use of a coefficient or minor adaptations to suit the situation, based on insight which is a personal endowment gained by intimate association with the situation.

3. Complexities of Indian Society

Indian society is truly a complex one. In this respect, it has hardly any parallel in the world. It has a social system that has evolved over three millennia. It has, in every area of its life, encrustations formed and hardened over centuries. It has its faiths and beliefs, prejudices and practices with infinite minor and major variations across the length and breadth of the country. The Indian caste system is about the most astonishing of social hierarchies ever devised by human ingenuity. From the days of Mahavira and Buddha, upto the present, it has withstood many reforms,
revolutions, upheavals, successive external invasions and major internal conflicts and wars. It has by and large survived all the movements and crusades against it. All our assumptions, regarding its possible fading and disappearing with the spread of education and improvement in standard of living have not materialized. It appears that in any political or economic reform movement to transform Indian society, experiences gained elsewhere, theories developed in other countries or societies may not be applicable unless one makes appropriate adaptations to take into account the challenges that are unique to this society. This requires an instinctive understanding of the disposition of Indian psyche. It appears that Jeeva had internalized this dimension to a remarkable extent.

4. Jeeva’s Insight

It may be said of Jeeva that he had a deep insight into the Tamil social psyche. He moved intimately with the people in all walks of life; he experienced in all its forms the manifestations of orthodoxy and its obscurantism, the pride and power of caste, the pervasive influence of varnashrama dharma, the culture of the bourgeois and the exploitation of capitalists. He could sense the pain of the poor, feel the smell of their sweat and the rhythm of their heart beat. He was in close association with the wisdom of his ancestors, their rich literary heritage and spiritual legacy. In short, he had a comprehensive understanding of the literary, social, spiritual, economic and political system of his environment in its manifold dimensions. It is an extraordinary endowment he possessed, an endowment that could have helped him mould and nourish the communist movement in harmony with the genius of the Tamil soil with great success.
5. Unutilised Potential

The theoreticians around, who were immensely satisfied with and proud of their knowledge and understanding of Marxism-Leninism, did not seem to have fully recognized the extraordinary potential in Jeeva, to allow it enough scope for its extension and employment in giving a lead to, and define the destiny of, the communist party in Tamil Nadu. His eloquence, energy, passion, enthusiasm, readiness to sacrifice, capacity to bear pain and courage to face risks and confront danger were fully availed of by the party; but the promise he had in him was never fully recognised, was never fully extended. The viswarupa in Jeeva never found manifestation. One tends to think that Jeeva really was a big fish in a small pond with rigid boundaries. His loyalty to the party line and ready submission to party discipline and the inability of the party to perceive the extent of his rapport with the aspirations and ambitions of the Tamil people resulted in a born great leader, ending up as a celebrated worker and a brave battler at many fronts. It is, in my view, a matter for great regret that an able designer and an architect had to spend most of his time as a mason and a carpenter.

It makes an outside observer like me to think — though from a relatively superficial knowledge — that if circumstances had given Jeeva the opportunity to mould the Communist Party in Tamil Nadu according to his perception, inclination and vision, he might possibly have made it a much stronger and more formidable alternative to the Congress Party.

6. Premature End

Considering the physique he has inherited, the regimen of exercise he maintained and the health he was endowed with, he should have lived and worked for at least
another quarter of a century and served effectively the country and the Communist Party. He lived in a thatched hut in a slum environment under conditions bordering on poverty. To endure avoidable suffering is no virtue. Sacrificing something which is far greater than the cause for which the sacrifice is made, is courting a loss due to a fault in judgement and error in making choices in life. The party and the public should have spared him the conditions under which he lived, though voluntarily, in the last days of his turbulent life. Among his biographers, Pandian tends to express regret that an utterly selfless soul like him had not been given the minimum patronage to preserve him. It moves you to tears when you contemplate that the colossus of a man, who strode the length and breadth of the country with the firm strides of an elephant and the roar of a lion, with fierce devotion to his mission, always witnessing either a surging crowd of audience or a marching army of protestors, would face the proximity of his end in a thatched hut with neither his wife nor his children nor even his close colleagues by his side excepting a lone friend Nanjil Selvan who could call for help. Jeeva complained of chest pain, breathlessness and became unconscious around 11.00 p.m. on 17.01.1963, was rushed to the General Hospital and admitted at 3.00 a.m. At about 7.30 a.m. he regained consciousness and opened his eyes when he wanted his wife Padmavathy and Kamaraj to be informed of his condition. He closed his eyes again for an eternal sleep. So brief was the story of his end.

7. Receptive Mind

Jeeva was a communist, a great communist at that with a firm commitment. But he was also a rationalist and a practical man who did not believe in the infallibility of any system or doctrine. He seemed to have intuitively held that all systems - however modern, however progressive - would
have their deficiencies and scope for improvement. It might be true that he never expressed any reservation whatsoever about Marxism-Leninism or Communism in general. But the liberal view that he took of other systems, the great respect in which he held ancient poets and thinkers, would indicate that there was no fanatic adherence in him to any doctrine so as to make him totally reject other viewpoints. Jeeva was receptive to every different view and even those strongly opposed to his. He treated differences of views as natural among thinking individuals. In his scheme of things, discussions and debates on economic, political, social and other issues never left any heat behind.

He valued and cherished human relationships; pretension was beyond his comprehension; he knew no guile; genuineness resided in every cell of his being; his concern for the people at large was all pervasive and his heart wept at the miseries of the poor. It was his compassion for the deprived that drew him close to the works of even a spiritual leader like Ramalinga Vallalar.

8. Pure Tamil

In any area of activity, half-hearted effort was beyond him. In the early stages of his public life, he was an ardent lover and advocate of pure Tamil. He was for some reason convinced that the use of foreign words, especially Sanskrit words, as was in vogue, was not warranted and that it was the result of the deliberate Sanskritisation of Indian culture including Dravidian culture. He believed that Sanskrit words were wilfully imported into Tamil to the exclusion of genuine Tamil words that existed. Once he was convinced that something served the interests of the society at large, he would go all out to promote it. He was convinced of the desirability of and the need for pure Tamil. He accepted Maraimalai Adigal as his leader in the realm of
language. He happened to meet him once and observed that Adigalar did not appear to be using pure Tamil in conversation. The famous writer Va. Ramasami who was popularly referred to as Va. Ra. pleaded with Jeeva that he should give up his fanatic adherence to pure Tamil. He argued that it was not natural, but artificial, and would keep him away from people. Va. Ra. was sincere in his advocacy and he spoke from the bottom of his heart. Jeeva no doubt was a man of conviction, but his conviction was amenable to reason and responsive to logic. He could understand that his adherence to pure Tamil did detract from his fluency and the impact of his speech on the audience.

While Jeeva did not persist in his use of pure Tamil, he did not also allow in his written and spoken language, the use of borrowed words unless found necessary. He showed resilience from his strong conviction and adherence to pure Tamil and moved to the use of words from other languages to ensure effective communication. What is sought to be established here is that what held sway over Jeeva's stand on any issue was neither dogma nor doctrine, but only reason and logic and ultimate public good. If you carry with you any material that stands to reason and logic and satisfies the criterion of ultimate public good, you can be sure of doing business with him.

9. Progressive Ideas through the Ages

Jeeva loved Tamil immensely; he was fond of and closely associated with the ancient as well as the modern literature and important literary contributions in the intermediate period as well. He not only loved and read the works of Sangam age, post-Sangam period and beyond, but also presented in extenso selected works to the public in literary forums and platforms. He would present the
socialistic element in ancient literature. For instance, Valluvar says:

The chief of all (the virtues) which authors have summed up is the partaking of food that has been shared with others and the preservation of manifold life of other creatures (322).

Here Valluvar meant that whatever one possesses is to be shared by all; in other words, the rich man is only a trustee and holds the property in trust on behalf of his fellowmen. This he conveys in another place as follows:

The wealth of that man of eminent knowledge who desires to exercise the benevolence approved of by the world is like the full water of a city tank (215).

The wealth of a man (possessed of the virtue) of benevolence is like the ripening of a fruit-bearing tree in the midst of a town (216).

The message is that the wealth possessed by an individual is indeed the property of the community. This is as far as a visionary could go nearly 2000 years earlier than Marx and Engels.

Kamban visualized a society, more advanced, more prosperous and more just. While Valluvar speaks of individual possession being accessible to all, Kamban visualizes a society in which every one has every thing and that there are none who are rich and none who are poor. The following is Kamban's portrait of the Khosala Kingdom of Dasaratha:

Since all possess all the wealth they need
There are none who are poor and
And none who are rich.
It is not as though Valluvar or Kamban could have even remotely visualized a communist society. But they thought of a society where those in need had access to the property of the rich, or they visualized, at least as an ideal, a society where everybody’s need was fulfilled and there was none who possessed in excess and none was left in dire need. Either by way of intuition or by way of visualizing an ideal society, they do touch upon two cardinal elements of communism, namely, common property and equitable distribution. It is interesting to recall the words from *Encyclopaedia Britannica*:

Communism represents a political or social organization based on common property or upon equal distribution of wealth.

The origins of the idea of Communism lie deep in Western thought. The idea of a classless society, in which all the means of production and distribution are owned by the community as a whole, and from which any traces of a State have disappeared, has long held a fascination for human beings. Communist communities have been reported to have existed in ancient times, usually established by a religious order. Many of the Utopias described in literatures including Thomas More’s *Utopia* and Johann Andreae’s *Christianopolis* provide for common ownership of property to some extent.

*[Encyclopaedia Britannica p. 496]*

Communism acquired a new meaning in 1848 with the publication of *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Frederich Engels. An important Marx-Engels principle was that the establishment of communism did not have to await enlightened leaders but was the inevitable outcome of a historical process.
Human society evolves imperceptibly but continuously. In the process of development, occasional breakthroughs occur and they bring about major changes. But even such breakthroughs are not without earlier rays and lightnings. Every theory has its arcs of contributions in modest steps by successive thinkers and ultimately it is given to the genius of one to complete the process, arrive at the circle and gain the credit for inventing or formulating a theory. We may quote here, for example, the absurd story that circulates about Newton’s invention of laws of gravity. We are told that Newton, as he sat or lay in the garden under an apple tree, observed an apple falling and it set him thinking as to why such a phenomenon should happen. He arrived at the concept of gravitation and formulated the theory known by his name. Gravitational force was known to philosophers and scientists for long. Mathematicians and physicists have discussed it at length. The understanding of the force of gravity and laws of motion was available in bits and pieces and it was given to Newton to codify it and propose it ultimately in the form of elegant laws which are known as Newton’s Laws. Newton himself has graciously acknowledged it by saying that he was able to see a little further since he stood on the shoulders of giants. This acknowledgement did not detract from the greatness of his contribution.

Breakthroughs in social systems have greater incubation period and they are in the making for long. Jeeva was not naïve enough to think that either Valluvar or Kamban had any notion or rays of a vision of communism as we now understand; but he was willing to see traces of the concept of common ownership and distribution of wealth in what those great minds contemplated as a desirable condition. Jeeva was willing to give them credit for whatever desirable aspects they visualized. He was
quite at home with some of the earlier philosopher-poets and their works, as he was with communist literature. He was not confined to the world of class struggle alone all the time. This additional dimension made it possible for him to get closer to the patrons and lovers of Tamil.

It may safely be said that while he was as loyal to the party principles and as submissive to the party discipline as any of his colleagues, he was more than a classical Communist; he was a leader who was immensely popular with the workers and the people at large in general. In short, he was truly a man of the masses. He was in every cell of his being a communist, a nationalist and an Indian and at the same time a Tamil; a lover of Tamil language and a promoter of all the legitimate interests of the Tamil community.

He had been elected to membership of committees and position of offices in the party, almost effortlessly and as a matter of routine. He seemed to have had no personal political ambition to promote; no personal agenda in his pocket on any occasion. The communist party of Tamil Nadu faced three general elections in 1952, 1957 and 1962 when Jeeva was alive. From the limited reading I have of Jeeva's life, I could hardly see any evidence of an effort or even interest in him to seek a seat, become a candidate, win the election and go to the assembly. His entry into the assembly in 1952 or contest in any must have been in accordance with party mandate. He was a 20th century example of Appar the great Saivite saint who declared,

En kadan pani seithu kidappathe
(My duty it is, only to serve).

A soul so devoid or free of designs and expectations is hard to come by even among the communities in ashrams and monasteries.
10. A Brief Biography

Born in Bhoothapandi, a small village on 21.8.1907, as the fourth surviving child of an agricultural family with moderate means, and named Sorimuthu alias Mookan, after the family deity, he went to school in the normal course. Even as a school boy, one sees in him the tendency to ignore caste differences and practices, move closely with boys from scheduled castes, eat with them, take them into places and walk with them along streets which they were forbidden to enter. This invited the disapproval of the society and ultimately the wrath of his parents. Even at that young age his natural predilections against the caste practices were so strong that he left his studies and went to Vaikam to participate in the historic movement against the practice of untouchability. If one reviews his brief career in the village, one is inclined to conclude that he was naturally endowed with a strong disposition to become and continue to be a crusader against whatever appeared to him unjust and unfair.

Incurring the displeasure of the village community and consequently the wrath of his parents, he left the village, went and joined the Bharadwaj Ashram run by the great patriot V.V.S. Iyer in Cheramadhevi, referred to as Cheramadhevi Gurukulam. His stay there did not last long. There was in that Gurukulam the practice of separate dining halls for brahmins and non-brahmins. The Gurukulam was supported by the Congress Party and objecting to the practice, E.V.R. the then treasurer and Dr. P. Varadharajulu Naidu refused to support it. Jeeva was equally opposed to the practice; so he moved to Chiravayal near Karaikudi and in collaboration with one Kumbalingam established with some of his friends another Gurukulam by name Gandhi Ashram. It was here that Sorimuthu became Jeevanandam. The Ashram had the privilege of a visit by Gandhiji. During
the visit, Jeeva entered into a discussion with Gandhiji on varnashrama dharma. It is reported that the conversation was broadly on the following lines:

Jeeva: Mahatmaji! you are in agreement with the observation of Lord Krishna that he was the creator of the four varnas based on innate qualities and dharma.

Gandhiji: Yes.

Jeeva: In that case since you stand high in sathvik qualities and dharmic values, you are a brahmin and one who is born a brahmin but guilty of bad conduct must be treated as a 'sudra'.

Gandhiji: .. No, I am a good vysya and the brahmin with bad character is a bad brahmin.

Hearing Gandhiji's reply, Jeeva concluded that Gandhiji's views on varnashrama dharma were orthodox, sanatanic and far from progressive. His respect for Gandhiji, however, as a leader of freedom movement continued to remain. At the same time, his interest and involvement in Self-Respect movement deepened and grew stronger. The president of the Ashram, Kumbalingam was a person with strong faith in religious practices, and differences of opinion between him and Jeeva widened. Jeeva decided to leave the Ashram and he established a new Ashram where he combined the activities of National and Self-Respect movements. A few of the students and teachers also moved out of the earlier Ashram and joined the new one, named 'Unmai Vilakka Nilayam'. He started taking great interest in the activities of Self-Respect movement. He used to organize groups of scheduled caste people and take them along the streets where lived orthodox persons who not only resented it greatly but were also enraged. One of his own friends, a fanatic casteist,
was once so enraged that he attacked him with aruval, a big sized knife, and caused multiple injuries in his body including the chest. The scars in the body remained till the end of his life. Jeeva started realizing more and more that the caste system had roots deeper than they thought and stronger than they imagined. He came to the conclusion that religion constituted the solid foundation on which the entire edifice of varnashrama dharma was built. He turned against religion and declared himself an atheist. He translated the book by Bhagat Singh entitled “Why I Became an Atheist”. For bringing out this translation Jeeva was sentenced to imprisonment. Perhaps Jeeva was the first revolutionary in Tamil Nadu to suffer imprisonment for writing, or to be more exact, translating a book.

Periyar E.V.R. toured Europe in 1931-32 and spent considerable time in Russia. He returned to India fascinated by the communist system and started advocating communism in the media at his command and also on the platforms of Self-Respect movement. Jeeva became a great force in Self-Respect movement and carried forward E.V.R.'s fight against religion, caste system and the exploitation of the labour by vested interests. The 1934 Erode Conference became a landmark event which adopted a resolution vowing to bring about social as well as economic reform.

In the early thirties E.V.R., the Self-Respect leader, Singaravelu, the pioneering communist and Jeeva, a young nationalist and a crusader against caste system and religions formed a formidable force for social reform and socialism. Periyar formed the Self-Respect Socialist movement in which Singaravelu and Jeeva were very active. The Self-Respect movement consisted of the members of the Justice Party who were zamindars and agricultural aristocrats. They were against this trend. In
addition, the British Government threatened to ban the Self-Respect movement itself if it preached communism. E.V.R. also suspected that there were behind the scene attempts on the part of the orthodox to get the Self-Respect movement banned. As far as E.V.R. was concerned, the agenda of the Self-Respect movement (consisting of his battle against the orthodoxy and the caste system and struggle for social justice and women’s liberation) was basic. When he was threatened with a total ban of his Self-Respect movement and extinction of all his activities if he continued to propagate communism, Periyar E.V.R. had to make a choice. Periyar chose to save his Self-Respect movement and continue his work among people in preference to spending the rest of his life either in prison or underground. He declared unequivocally that his life’s mission would be to remain and work with the people till his last breath to educate and awaken them to whatever extent possible and not to become a hero or a martyr. At this stage, Jeeva parted company with E.V.R. and on the advice and pursuasion of his communist friends, who were members of the Congress Socialist movement, he joined as a full time member of the communist group in Congress in the name of Congress Socialists. Periyar gracefully blessed him and wished him well. It may be recorded here that Jeeva had the unique honour of being one of the few persons who parted company with Periyar and continued to enjoy his esteem and affection. It was Jeeva’s total selflessness, blazing conviction and deep sincerity which won Periyar’s appreciation.

The Tamil Nadu Congress Socialist party held its first conference at Salem in 1936. Jeeva was elected the general secretary. Again in 1936, the Madras Presidency Trade Union Congress was formed and Jeeva was elected president.
In Jeeva's life, the prison term that he served during 1930-32 was a turning point. He had opportunities for long discussions with Boothakeswara Dutt, Kunderal, Jeevanlal Joshi and others. A voracious reader that he was, he read plenty of literature on socialism, communism and Soviet Union. He had enough time for contemplation and to compare his experiences with the knowledge gained from his discussions and studies.

When he came out from the prison with a strong feeling that the society needed not mere reform but a revolution, he happened to have the association of Singaravelu, a communist leader who was then in Periyar's camp. Periyar had just then returned from the Soviet Union. Drawn from three directions and belonging to different age groups, the trio became the earliest to openly propagate communism. Jeeva used the platform of Self-Respect movement to promote socialism and ultimately helped the formation of Self-Respect Socialist movement. Its conference was held in 1935 at Trichy. The communists were functioning in the garb of congress socialists and Jeeva was an ardent congress socialist. It is difficult to specify an exact date when he came to be openly identified as a communist. The change might have occurred when the World War broke out and the communists in the congress came out with open opposition to any support for the war effort. It was on Oct. 28, 1939 that Jeeva was arrested while addressing a meeting opposing support to war effort. It was in 1945, when the ban on the communist party was lifted, that Jeeva became a member of the apex committee of Tamil Nadu Communist Party.

Jeeva's life was one of continuous struggle involving imprisonment and police brutality. Between 1932 and 1939 he led industrial or agricultural workers in various struggles
and suffered untold hardship. From 1939 to 1945 he was expelled from Tamil Nadu. In 1946 he was in detention in Vellore prison. In 1948 he went underground as dictated by the party. He was again arrested and kept in prison in Vellore. It was in 1951 that he was released. Thereafter he made his contributions as legislator, editor of Janasakthi and the founder editor of the literary monthly Thamarai. In his public life Jeeva spent nearly 10 years either in prison or in police custody.

In literary field, Jeeva stood tall and unique and was a star performer in any literary forum. He was a poet, an essayist, a creative writer and an extraordinarily gifted speaker. He was well acquainted with modern literature and the prevalent literary trend. He had definite views on the objective of literature, and the concept of art for art's sake was totally unacceptable to him. Perhaps only a few among the communist leaders had such in-depth knowledge in and intimate association with ancient and modern Tamil literature and fewer still were capable of such comprehensive overview of the literary heritage of the Tamils. He could perceive traces of a vision of the days to come and the developments to take place in the writings of our poets, from Valluvar down to Kamban, the torrential outpourings of compassion by Vallalar and the revolution in the language of Bharathi. He presented to the audience evidences of a continuum of progressive ideas cutting across centuries of Tamil creative literature embracing even modern socialist thoughts. A really gifted speaker that he was, he kept the audience enthralled irrespective of whether it was a political platform or literary forum.

Jeeva had a fascination for journalism. In the early stages of his career he was a contributor to the journals Kudi Arasu, Puratchi and Pahuththarivu. Later he started a
journal by name Samadharmam. Again in 1937, during the Congress Government he started a weekly by name Janasakthi which was to have a chequered career. After successive periods of suspension and revival, Janasakthi emerged as a daily in 1952 and played a leading role in the general election campaign. Jeeva continued to be its editor till the end of his life. For literary contributions, he started a monthly by name Thamarai. It continues to be one of the very few really good literary magazines in Tamil. He established the Kalai Ilakkia Perumanram as a vibrant institution for literary activities.

He proved himself to be an able legislator, a constructive political leader and a talented debater during his membership of the Assembly. It was a period relatively free from strikes and struggles. But he continued his battle for many causes dear to him. He was one of the champions of the use of Tamil in the proceedings of the Assembly. He spoke only in Tamil. He pleaded effectively and forcefully for Tamil to be the medium of instruction. If in 1956 the Assembly adopted a resolution declaring Tamil as the language of administration in the state at all levels, Jeeva's voice had its contribution to this course. During the reorganization of states on linguistic basis, Jeeva lent strong support to the inclusion of all Tamil speaking areas in Tamil Nadu. He was working for it even while he was underground. It may be said that when it came to legitimate causes of Tamil language and the interests of Tamils, his nationalism did not detract from his taking a strong stand in favour of the Tamils. Another period - peaceful, pleasant and mentally and physically rejuvenating - was, when he was in the USSR. What he learnt from books, understood from debates and discussions with comrades, visualized from newspaper reports and the kind of society he had formed in his mind on the basis of his fertile imagination, he was able
to see with his own eyes. He longed to see India and Tamil Nadu emerge into similar power and prosperity. With the hope and aspiration of working towards that end, he returned to India. But it was not given to him to live long after his return.

This article may not be complete without at least a brief reference to his family life. Even in a detailed and elaborate biography of Jeeva, his family and family life may not have enough material to occupy more than a few paragraphs. The story of his marriage with Kannamma, the mother of his daughter Kumudha, is lost in obscurity. He happened to meet Kumudha also only towards the fag end of his life. He married Padmavathy in January 1947; it was an intercaste love marriage and it is worth mentioning that the marriage was conducted under the presidentship of Periyar. Whatever might have been the attitude of his party towards Periyar and his movement, Jeeva seemed to have continued to cherish his association with Periyar.

1947 brought independence to India; but to the communists it meant another chapter of armed struggle against their own Government. During this period Jeeva was in prison or underground. Padmavathy was looking after the affairs of the Tamil Nadu Trade Union Congress. From 1952, Jeeva settled down starting with legislative life; but from 1952 onwards Padmavathy was employed in Govt. Service and was away from Madras. Therefore, their family life, lasting for little more than a decade thereafter, was confined to spending weekends together in a hut on poromboke land near Tambaram which was all he could claim as his residence and perhaps his possession as well. Through Padmavathy he had two daughters, Usha and Uma and one son, Stalin Manikumar.
Problem of life is problem of choice. Jeeva faced many situations where he had to make his choice, but the most difficult and the most agonizing one came towards the end of his career when China encroached upon Indian territory and invaded a country that had consistently and without exception supported it on all occasions in the international arena and stretched its hands of friendship unconditionally. He was a sad man: yet he made his choice; and — unambiguously and unequivocally condemned it as aggression.

Jeeva's marriage with Padmavathy took place in 1947, as mentioned already, under the presidency of Periyar E.V.R. Again it was Periyar who arranged for and conducted the marriage of Jeeva's daughter Usha in 1967. Anna who was then Chief Minister attended the marriage and chose the occasion to announce that his Government had legitimized the Self-Respect form of marriage. The leaders of the Dravidian movement among others appeared to have participated in the event as though they were intimate members of Jeeva's family. When Balathandayutham mooted the idea of erecting a statue for Jeeva, it was approved though after some debate and discussion. Then started the inevitable fund raising and when they approached M.G.R. not only a leading film star, but also an equally leading D.M.K. party star, for donation, M.G.R. offered to meet the entire cost of the statue. When the then Mayor of Madras proposed in the Council to name a park after Jeeva, the D.M.K. councillors who were in a majority voted in favour of the proposal unanimously. It may be mentioned here that since Jeeva's parting company with Periyar in the early thirties and joining the communist movement, his party consistently, unsparingly and, it may also be said, unsympathetically condemned Periyar and the Dravidian Movement represented by Periyar and Anna.
When Jeeva regained consciousness for a brief moment in the hospital before his end came, he wanted message to be conveyed to two persons - his wife Padmavathy and Kamaraj, the Congress leader. Kamaraj was the person against whom he and his party carried on for over quarter of a century, a continuous, an unsparing and relentless crusade. But all that did not stand in the way of any of them when it came to Jeeva the man. He enjoyed without exception the esteem and affection of all the leaders of Tamil Nadu. He soared high, above the din and dust of contemporary politics. For friendship and magnanimity in human relationship, he was truly a legendary figure. We are accustomed to looking for characters in Sangam classics, ithihasas and puranas for role models in life; it is time that we looked for role models from contemporary life histories. It we looked for one in human relationship, Jeeva would provide a shining example.
C.S. (Bharat Ratna), a Performer Par Excellence*

1. Legacy Left Behind

Thiruvalluvar, the great Tamil philosopher-poet, prescribed a simple but unique criterion for assessing the worth of an individual. He says:

The worthy and the unworthy will be known by the legacy they leave behind. (114)

Tributes paid to, and praises showered on, a person while in office are no measure of his real merit. The reputation one leaves behind is the real touchstone of one's true merit. In other words, the contribution of the great men must live after them.

2. Unimpeachable Integrity

When we think of C.S. we see the uniform and universal reference to his image as a man of unimpeachable honesty, whether it be in his personal living or in his political practice. One may recall just one or two instances to understand this reputation. Politics is a field of unlimited adjustments and compromises, even the mighty, at times, compromise, reconcile with and overlook an unethical decision either as inevitable or as serving certain larger interests. In the 1969 general elections in Bihar, Congress won a majority and was to form the ministry. The Raja of Ramgarh was included by the local Congress leaders in the list of ministers proposed. He had a record of crime and corruption and was not the one to fit into the ideals and values of the Congress party. C.S. as a member of the All India Congress Working Committee took a stand that a person of such infamous background as the Raja should not find a place in the list of ministers. But the Raja was very highly influential with the State Congress leaders and they were strongly pleading for his inclusion. The Congress President Nijalingappa was not prepared to ask the Chief Minister to drop him from the list. When C.S. came to know of it, he resigned his membership of the AICC stating that he could not accept the responsibility for approving the Raja’s inclusion in the cabinet of ministers. The moral force of his stand, even as a single individual, was such as to make the AICC cause a reversion of the earlier decision and the Raja of Ramgarh was ultimately dropped.

In the parliamentary election in 1967, C.S. was defeated. He gave up his ministership and returned to Chennai to settle down. Fortunately, he had his own house at Chennai but then, he writes in his autobiography that he had to look for a source of income to sustain his family. He accepted the post of legal adviser, offered by Thiru.
N. Mahalingam, an industrialist. Can one imagine today a person after having been a minister for ten years in the State Government, and a Cabinet minister at the Centre for seven years, being so poor as to be constrained to look for a job for monthly income? It sounds like a legend; but that legend belongs to C.S. Again, he has left behind a great legacy of unimpeachable integrity in public life. He is perhaps one of the very few leaders of India who could be projected before the youth as a model for them to emulate.

3. Builder of Leaders

The greatness of any nation depends on the great leaders that it produces: leaders not only in politics, but in science and technology, arts, humanities and all fields of knowledge. Great men and women do not manifest themselves like rains from the heavens. A society must consciously develop them. C.S. is acknowledged as a builder of leaders. He scanned the manpower horizon, identified talent, entrusted them with responsibilities and offered them opportunities to emerge as leaders. Even 2000 years ago, when the philosophy of planning and development as we know of today did not exist, Valluvar had a piece of advice to those in charge of implementing a project. He said:

One who has taken up the responsibility of accomplishing a task must obtain the views of an expert who knows the intricacies of the subject.

One may either try to know the views if one can internalize them himself and use them, or when it is a matter of expertise, one must use the services of a specialist who is knowledgeable. C.S. is a convinced believer in utilising the services of "that person who could do that job
with that tool”. So when he established the Dairy Development Corporation, he decided that the Corporation must be headed by Dr V. Kurien an acknowledged expert in the field. An interesting episode for mention is the choice of Dr Kurien. When the Ministry of Food and Agriculture established the Dairy Development Corporation, the senior officials of the Ministry suggested that the minister must be the chairman. C.S. did not agree; then they suggested that the secretary of the Ministry be ex-officio chairman, but C.S. insisted that it must be an expert who should head the organization and his choice was Dr V. Kurien an acknowledged expert in Dairy Development. But unfortunately, Dr Kurien who was at Anand in Gujarat was unwilling to come to Delhi. The officials were happy and went back to their earlier suggestion in favour of the secretary being ex-officio chairman. But C.S. decided that ‘if Mohammed does not come to the mountain, the mountain should go to Mohammed’. He ordered that the Dairy Development Corporation be located at Anand and Dr V. Kurien be the chairman; I am not able to see another parallel where an expert was given so much importance as in this case. Dr V. Kurien produced really the White Revolution, immensely justified his choice and put India on the world map in milk production. Dr M.S. Swaminathan, a prominent actor in the drama of the Green Revolution, scripted and directed by C.S., Dr Y. Nayudamma the father of the Brown Revolution in leather production, were all promoted and patronized by C.S. Here again, in development of leaders among men, he left behind an indelible legacy which could be an example and a source of inspiration for others.

4. Promotion of Science and Technology

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had abiding faith in science and technology as a tool for social, economic and political
development of a nation. He demonstrated his confidence by introducing the Science Policy Resolution in the Parliament in 1958. A policy is only an enabling provision; much depends on its implementation. C.S. demonstrated the appropriateness and the potential of S&T by using the process as well as the products of S&T in accomplishing a task that concerned and involved the whole nation, namely, achieving self-sufficiency in food. If Nehru was the Buddha for the philosophy of science and technology, C.S. could rightly be termed the Ashoka who carried the philosophy to every nook and cranny of the country.

In his long political career, C.S. held many positions at the state and the centre and has many achievements to his credit. However, he is popularly known and gratefully referred to as the father of the Green Revolution. The initiatives taken, imagination shown, the methods adopted, the tools used, the courage exhibited, the risk faced and the leadership qualities demonstrated by him in bringing about the Green Revolution, present to us a full picture of C.S. the man. In the following pages, a relatively detailed account of the way C.S. brought about the Green Revolution is presented.

A review in general of the manner in which he went about accomplishing the task assigned to him by the nation and undertaken by him reveals his unswerving faith in:

i. science and technology as a tool for development;

ii. competent expertise in the relevant area of knowledge;

iii. professional management, and

iv. autonomy to institutions and individuals.
What is important is that the approach and stand in all these aspects are more relevant today than they were at that time.

Many think that high technology is for the advanced countries; but C.S. believed that it is equally valid for developing countries. There is a saying that “you must do today’s job with today’s tools; if you do today’s job with yesterday’s tools, tomorrow you will be out of business”. Governments in general are the only institutions that do today’s job with yesterday’s tools, but still be in business, whether they do business or not. But, C.S. believed in even Government using today’s tools for today’s job. It was this conviction that prompted him to support and promote research in every department he handled. He says: “In Japan, it is said that for every dollar of imported technology, they invest five dollars in research”. As part of the Green Revolution, he reorganized the research activities, brought about co-ordination of the research programmes, improved the scales of pay of agricultural research scientists and ultimately created the Agricultural Research Service at the national level. He declared unequivocally that, “every country which has improved its agriculture has done so only through the introduction of science and technology into farming. India cannot be an exception”. He maintained this paradigm in every ministry he headed.

5. In Favour of Professionals

Valluvar advocates the importance of consultation with experts in the concerned field of knowledge. When a task is to be undertaken, he says,

There is nothing too difficult to (be attained by) those who, before they act, reflect well themselves and
thoroughly consider (the matter) with chosen experts. (462)

As Minister for Steel and Heavy Engineering, or as Minister for Food and Agriculture, one sees that, as a matter of policy and faith, he sought out, identified experts in the relevant subjects, constituted appropriate committees and availed himself of the benefit of their expertise and the opportunities for discussion with them. He departed decisively from the long prevailing and established practice of heavy dependence on generalist administrators for policy formulation. He has established, conclusively, the effectiveness of this approach which, though a common practice in advanced countries, is yet to gain currency in Indian administration. We have not accorded our experts their due place.

While policy formulation is important in itself, implementation presents formidable problems as earlier referred to. A review of our past performance would show that implementation has been our Achilles' heel. Again, to quote Valluvar:

After having assessed that this person can do this task by these means or these tools, that task must be assigned to that person. (517)

The above, perhaps, is an eloquent advocacy of choosing competent persons based on their preparation and equipment for the task. C.S. believed strongly in professional management, whether it was public sector, private sector, or government institution. He understood fully that a system of administration developed by the British for law and order maintenance is unsuitable for developmental purposes. He observes:
The heritage of a dominant role for the Government servants in administration after independence was one of the factors which lead to great problems in the field of new administration.

When he took over the Ministry of Steel and Heavy Engineering, the chairman of the Hindustan Steels Ltd. was a senior civil servant, who, according to him 'had no knowledge of the industry'. He sought the permission of the Prime Minister to shift him and appoint a professional. Traditionally, the Secretary, Agriculture also functioned as the Director-General of ICAR. This was changed by C.S. and Dr B.P. Pal, a plant breeder and internationally known scientist, was made the Director-General, ICAR. When the National Dairy Development Board was established, the secretaries in the Ministry pleaded with him that the Minister for Agriculture must be the chairman and the Board must be located at Delhi. It has been explained earlier as to how he decided to invite Dr V. Kurien, an expert in the field, to take up the position. For him there was one consuming passion: the right man for the job. Soon after taking over as Minister for Food & Agriculture, he started looking for a Secretary and ultimately chose Shri B. Sivaraman, I.C.S., who was then away from Delhi in Orissa as Chief Secretary and brought him to the Ministry.

6. Autonomy and Decentralization

Decentralization and autonomy were to him inseparable from good management. Referring to his earlier report to the Parliament on the performance of the Steel Plant, he said:

I emphasized that whatever the form of organization, autonomy was of prime importance for the Plant. The Ministry concerned should not interfere with the
day-to-day management and the working of the Plant should not be tied down to secretarial procedures and methods.

In India, people demand autonomy which would stop at their level and will not allow it to percolate downwards. States that demand autonomy are not keen that it is shared by municipalities and panchayats. Universities that demand autonomy are not keen on granting it to colleges: but C.S. was keen that autonomy that he perceived was pervasive. Annual or periodic audit or the financial advisor is another factor to be reckoned with. Although meant to ensure that funds allotted are spent for the purpose for which the allocation is made and also utilized in conformity with the procedure laid down, more often than not, lack of imagination or unwillingness to take a positive view on the part of finance, inhibits the progress and adversely affects efficiency. C.S. says:

An aggressive financial advisor can find occasions to intervene in almost anything and even a strong General Manager will, in the end, take the easy way of submitting to prior financial concurrence... The result may be delay ... I myself made efforts to correct this situation, having authorized General Managers to overrule financial advice when they disagree.

7. A Policy for Agriculture

When he took over as Minister for Food & Agriculture, the country was going through an acute food shortage. The task awaiting was formidable and the responsibility was unenviable. He visualized, clearly, two major tasks to be undertaken: (i) the short-term problem of finding food and facing successfully the shortage and (ii) ushering in a
programme for increasing food production. He visualized that attaining self-sufficiency in food production needed two conditions to be met as prerequisites:

1. Revision in agricultural price policy
2. Adoption of modern methods of food production, involving the use of high yielding seeds, fertilizers and plant protection chemicals.

The proposal for revision of agricultural price policy in favour of farmers met with strong opposition both from the Finance Ministry and Planning Commission. As for resorting to scientific methods in farming, he met with severe opposition from the Members of the Communist Party and the leftists in Congress who argued that import of fertilizers and plant protection chemicals would permanently make India dependent on the USA for foreign exchange. In the way he responded to this opposition, we see another important element in his personality. Speaking about the qualities of a minister, Valluvar would say:

The Minister is one who is able to comprehend (the whole nature of an undertaking), implement it after having a full understanding and who can give decisive advice on an issue under consideration.

(634)

According to Valluvar, it is the responsibility of the minister to consider all possible alternatives, weigh each of them and choose the one that would be the most appropriate and advocate it with definiteness. That is exactly what C.S. did in advocating his approach to self-sufficiency in food. He made it clear that his "entire agricultural policy would depend on the price policy. If Cabinet was not in a position to accept this policy, the
Prime Minister should find somebody else to take over the Agriculture Ministry”.

8. Steps in Green Revolution

It was after a long battle, debate and persuasion that a change in agricultural price policy and sanction of adequate foreign exchange for import of seeds, fertilizers and plant protection chemicals were agreed upon. He proceeded to the next step of formulating a comprehensive agricultural policy which consisted of:

i. intensive cultivation to which our farmers were not accustomed;

ii. use of improved seeds to be imported from abroad;

iii. use of chemical fertilizers in a large measure

iv. introduction of plant protection measures.

All these meant transforming and modernizing our agriculture completely. When one sees the processes gone through in preparing for the Green Revolution, the opposition met with, the lack of whole-hearted support from any quarter, barring perhaps a section of scientists, the massiveness of the task, the uncertainties and imponderables involved, the risk that C.S. has undertaken is amazing. Any failure would have meant the end of his political career. Even the United States which was advocating the application of science and technology and modern methods of agriculture, advised him to go slow. It was a case of extraordinary courage; one wonders as to what could be the source of his courage. He believed that if the method was successful in other countries, it could be made successful in India. If, in India, a few farmers can achieve higher yields, it should be possible for other farmers to do so,
given the requisite condition. There must have been, in addition, the strength of his insight into the problem and the voice of his own intuition that the path chosen was correct and for alternatives, there were none. These are occasions that try one's soul and the way one responds reveals the man.

9. Experiment with Science and Technology

India has adopted the philosophy of planned development and we have successive five year plans; the plan document did not have any separate chapter on S & T. A chapter was introduced by him on S & T in the plan document when he was the minister for S.&T. and Planning. Since then, this legacy continues and will continue in one form or the other – another legacy left behind by C.S.

C.S. has been a pioneer in many ways; an innovator; an experimenter; a builder of institutions and builder of leaders, and above all, the person who represented the confluence of the scientific temper of the West and the spiritual values of the East. He found himself quite at ease in the company of scientists on one side and the saffron clad saints and swamijis on the other. He was the person in whom one sees the influence of Nehru’s scientific temper and the impact of Rajaji’s spiritual values, both blended harmoniously and with no conflict between them.

The second volume of his Memoir, dealing with the Green Revolution, may possibly be titled “My Experiments with Science and Technology in Development” in preference to “Green Revolution”. His experiments involved, at the crucial period, the destiny of the nation itself and he succeeded. While this book may be looked at as a part of his autobiography, it is in effect
i. a record of the achievements in the application of science and technology in a major area of activity in a developing country;

ii. a record of modern management methods and techniques tried in this country very successfully a few decades ago;

iii. a vindication of the importance of professional management, whatever the area of activity; and lastly and most importantly,

iv. a document that commits in writing the tributes of a grateful nation to the achievement of Indian scientists and technologists, given the task and the opportunity.

Every scientist should consider the book as a valuable possession which contains the powerful advocacy of the importance of science and technology and the role of scientists and technologists, by a man who had a uniform record of success story in his entire career as a minister both in the State and at the Centre.
Literature in the Social Reform Front for Two Millennia*

1. Literature in the Battlefield

John F. Kennedy, while speaking about Winston Churchill, said that he armed the English language and sent it for battle against the Axis Powers, namely, Germany, Italy and Japan. The Tamils were pioneers in this regard; they put Tamil in the battle for social reform at the beginning of the Christian era and continued it with intermittent breaks in the first millennium and almost continuously in the later centuries.

2. The Initial Dissenter

It was Valluvar, the philosopher poet, who started the dissent against the caste system nearly 2000 years ago, declaring, all are equal by birth. He says (Kural 972):

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All human beings are equal by birth; but differ as regards characteristics because of the different qualities of their actions.

In simple terms, Valluvar declares that all are born equal as human beings; difference in status arises on the basis of their performance in their calling. In one couplet comprising just nine words he destroys the citadel of varnashrama dharma based on Vedic Hinduism and later propounded by Manu that human beings are not equal at birth. This apparently innocuous couplet destroys the very foundation of what has come to be known as the caste system.

It is a sad fact that by and large all over the world and through all ages, women were subjected to a subordinate position. The disabilities suffered by them may differ in degree and description, but inequality between sexes has been and even today is, in many societies, beyond doubt. Against such a background, two millennia before the emergence of the concept of women empowerment and feminist movement, Valluvar would refer to one's wife as 'partner in life' and declare that "there is nothing on earth greater than a woman". At a time when chastity was considered only a feminine virtue and liberties in the case of men were considered permissible, Valluvar denounced infidelity among men and condemned prostitution which was then an accepted institution. It was a significant, radical, social reform measure.

3. Epic with Subaltern Hero

Among the five great epics in Tamil, the important ones are Silappathikaram and Manimekalai. As a total abandonment of the established traditions for great epics, the hero and the heroine in Silappathikaram are commoners
and the heroine in *Manimekalai* was born in the family of prostitutes, but rose to the level of divinity, favoured by the gods based only on her virtue. Kannagi, the heroine in *Silappathikaram*, a humble woman from a family of merchants, entered into a dispute with the mighty Pandiya king, and won her case: the king conceded that he was in the wrong, collapsed and died instantly in the court itself. It is an extraordinary epic where the king pays the penalty with his own life, for the unjust execution of a humble citizen, and the enraged widow of the victim in an extreme frenzy of revenge sets ablaze the whole city.

4. Siddhas, the Bohemians

We pass through the Bhakthi movement which exhibited streaks of rejection of caste and creed, and come to the Siddhas, an extraordinary class of bohemians, somewhat unique to Tamil history. They were doctors, the practitioners and creators of Siddha medicine; yogis, astronomers and performers of miracles. They were mostly radical thinkers who questioned the established order, condemned the caste system, rejected idol worship, ridiculed orthodox writings and the plethora of ceremonies performed in the name of gods. They were also against all organised religions. The earliest one about whom information is available is Thirumular, said to belong to the 5th century. He declared unequivocally that there is, but 'one caste and one god', rejecting the caste system. From Thirumular we move to circa A.D.1000 and beyond when starts the period of a succession of Siddhas. One of them, Sivavakkiar, asks, referring to idol worship:

You break a stone, make out of one part a statue which you worship;
Another part, you use for steps, which you trample upon:
Which one of the stones is the favourite of the Lord? (1)

Many Siddhas have given expression to similar views. They are categorical and almost denunciatory when it comes to the caste system. Sivavakkiar would declare:

Where is a Pariah: where is a Brahmin?
Is anything marked in
their flesh or skin or bone?
Is the pleasure of union with a Pariah woman
any different from that
with a Brahmin lady? (2)

Kudhambai Siddhar would declare:

All scriptures that advocate many religions are but the result of imagination.

It is believed that there were more than 60 Siddhas, but we have some account of only eighteen of them. They seemed to have spanned the second millennium, with most of them having lived and contributed from the 15th century onwards. In a way, they have laid the foundation for the massive social reform movement that swept the whole of Tamil Nadu and came to power as a political party in the 1960's. A view is held that Siddhas are women haters: it is far from truth. Sivavakkiar declares:

There is none on earth who feigns a saint
Who does not embrace the
shoulders of a woman:
Such an embrace ennobles human life.
Woman is the symbol of power: so
Shiva endears her as Ganges on His head. (3)
5. An Incarnation of Humanism

The cultural life of the Tamils has had a continuous stream of emphasis on non-killing and non-utterance of falsehood. Valluvar stipulated two main criteria for a life of virtue:

The first requirement is non-killing
Next in order comes avoidance of falsehood. (4)

It has the seeds of the philosophy of Saint Ramalingam, a great poet and a reformer who came on the scene in the 19th century, advocating a path of non-violence, truth and humanism. He was either the last in the line of Siddhas or last but one. Initially a devotee of Shiva though, he discarded all ceremonies and came down heavily on caste system. Later he turned against all established religions saying that religion and caste divide humanity, and whatever divides human society must be abandoned. Referring to the scriptures, holy books and various social practices, he says:

The caste philosophy, steeped in ignorance,
And the debris of shastras
All must be spread as manure on the dry land;
The religions and the codes of practices established by them
All must be thrown into a pit and be covered with earth. (5)

He finally established Samarasasuddha Sanmarga Sangam based on non-violence, truth and humanism. The calibre of his humanism can be understood when he says:

Every time I see a wilting plant,
I do wilt, my Lord. (6)
He was literally incapable of seeing hunger around him. He trembles and shivers, and says that every part of his body burns and he is unable to bear the sight of such misery. He was highly progressive in his views, and his movement provides that

Women must be taught yoga and other measures. Their education must be without any discrimination. They must learn philosophy.

Among all the reformers that we discussed so far, Saint Ramalingam was different in that he did not satisfy himself with preaching, but started a movement to spread his message. However, his concept which was intellectual and void of all the ceremonies that appeal to a crowd, did not hold attraction to the masses and he gave it up, as the legend goes, saying:

I opened my shop: there were no customers: I folded it up.

The failure of Saint Ramalingam was the failure of a great reform movement: the failure of universalism and humanism.

The contributions of Siddhas represented a class of literature in Tamil that reached people. The poems of Saint Ramalingam were sung in chorus by people and were very popular. They do remain popular even now. Scattered in the length and breadth of Tamil Nadu are many followers of Saint Ramalingam.

6. Bharathi and Modern Women

We move on to the closing years of the 19th century and proceed further. Till this stage, the literature we talked
about was indigenous in form and content. There has been no impact of Western culture on the literary tradition. Towards the close of the 19th century and later, we see evidence of foreign influence especially in the form of fiction. It is the beginning of renaissance in Tamil literature. The pioneers were creative writers like Mayuram Vedhanayagam Pillai, A.Madhaviah, V.V.S.Aiyar and Subramania Bharathi. The father of the renaissance was Bharathi a great national poet. He has also his contributions to novel, short story, essays and journalistic writings.

The first half of the 20th century marked the period of intense freedom struggle. Among the freedom fighters were many who believed strongly that freedom from social tyranny and liberation from superstitious faiths and practices were equally important. Perhaps the worst among the victims were women who suffered from innumerable disabilities. Bharathi joined the battle and touched the soul of the problem. Men, all through the ages and all over the world, kept law-making to themselves; those who make the law rule the land. Men were so liberal that they assigned all virtues to women: chastity, modesty, preserving the heritage, all are their concern. Men are free from such obligations. Now, Bharathi’s women declare:

We shall run the Government
We shall make laws
*  *  *  *  *
They talk about chastity
Make it common to both the parties. (7)

A simple rule; chastity made common to both the parties: if truly followed, it will revolutionise the social position of women. In most societies, chastity is still viewed only as a feminine virtue. For long, ‘virgin’ was feminine: it had no masculine gender: in the recent years, for
convenience, it has been made neuter. You will be surprised to know that only now the Indian Parliament is in the process of enacting a law making men also punishable for prostitution.

We talk about men and women being equal; mechanical equality is meaningless. Bharathi's women clarify the domain of equality. They claim that they are equal to men in mental faculties; equality is a matter of the mind and not of muscle. With this understanding, men and women should go about taking such responsibilities as they are biologically best suited. Bharathi, though a great believer in Sakti-worship as well as in vedas and upanishads, advocates the path of reason and denounces any inclination to unquestioning acceptance of what others may say.

7. Periyar the Blitz on Fossils

Tamil Nadu was swept through its length and breadth by Periyar Ramaswamy's Self-Respect movement. It produced a great upheaval in the social values and customs. No reform movement has had such pervasive effect as the Self-Respect movement. It was a mass movement based on robust common sense and rational approach to problems. It was a matter of human wonder that with such limited transport system and communication facilities, confined to primitive set of microphones and assisted in the night by petromax lamp, Periyar in his lifetime could succeed in addressing so many meetings, attended by so many people, covering so much of Tamil Nadu. In its own way, it was for Tamil Nadu an age of reason. The movement produced its own crop of poets, fiction-writers, dramatists and artists. The impact of the movement had been felt among other writers as well. Bharathidasan, originally a disciple of Bharathi and even
later his unfailing admirer, led this new team. In his rich and varied contributions, Bharathidasan brought effectively to the public eye the plight of women in general and of widows and young girls in particular. Some of his poems that describe the sobs and sighs of these souls move us to tears. Advocating family planning even half a century ago, he asks:

Is there anything wrong 
in making an innovation -
To open the door for love and 
close the path of conception?  

Bharathidasan lashes out at the entire priest establishment, religious heads and spiritual authorities and laments:

They extinguish the reasoning power of humans 
transform them into stones and 
enshrine stones as gods.  

8. Epilogue

With all the failings and lapses that one may attribute to the Self-Respect movement, to which poets like Bharathidasan and his followers lent literary support, it may be said that Tamil Nadu after 70 years of Self-Respect movement is vastly different from what it would have been otherwise. There were and there are a number of poets in the line like Pattukottai Kalyana Sundaram, Mudiarasan, Suradha, Kamarajan, Abdur Rahman, Vairamuthu, Sirpi, Thamizhanban, Metha and Kulothungan. Kulothungan has shown deeper interest in getting at the roots of some of these problems. Keeping in mind those feminists who want the woman to be a replica of man in the name of equality, he asks:
Is it proper to convert the
Original into a copy?

Men are not superior to women
It is not in keeping with their
dignity to covet the ways of men
and imitate them
Women are not the replica of men
Equal they are to men: but not identical.

Woman is the other half
Equal, yes: but a different half.*

Since the late sixties, there is also a new trend, a
new genre of poetry with a new form, theme, objective,
language and logic. It seems to revel in mysticism,
obscurantism and believes in the philosophy of ‘art for
art’s sake’. We must wait and see the future of this
seedling, alien to Tamil literary culture and transplanted
from elsewhere.

As we stand at the exit gate of the 20th century
and survey the social scene, the women in Tamil Nadu,
with 52% seats to their credit in higher education and 33%
in all elected posts in local self-government, are well on
their way to claim their share. As regards the caste system,
it has lost its primitive features but has institutionalized
itself as political organizations. They are now contesting
elections, and Karl Marx and Gandhiji are standing in queue
to vote for one or the other.

* Poems of Kulothungan, pp. 474, 475.
1. தொன்றுநரா கண்டநர்கள் என்கிறிருந்தாமலும் கொண்டெடுக்கின்றன மற்றும் பலகை கொண்டெடுக்கின்றம் நீங்கின்று
பல்காக்கோ கண்டாலா பயணிகள் அண்மை காண்மின்
நேர்விழா காண்கள் நாட்டு கண்டு காண்மின்
- சிவாவக்கியார்

ஒசயுல்லா கள்ளனிறு உட்டிரண்டாய்ச் செய்துமே
வாசலில் பதித்தா கையாள் மழுட்டவே மித்திரையிரு
புச்சான்கிக் வாய்ந்தாத காலில் புறம் நிரும் கட்டுறியே
ிகாந்தாறு கந்தகால் எங்கள் காண்கு கல்லு கொள்ளுமே
- சிவாவக்கியார்

2. பாளும்பி பானிக்கல்:
பாளும்பி பானிக்கல்
பொன்னானி, பொன்னானிப்பையால்
பொன்னானிப்பையாய்

பாளும்பி பானிக்கல் என்ஐ?
பாளும்பி பானிக்கல் என்ஐ?
பாளும்பி பானிக்கல்
பாளும்பி பானிக்கல்
- சிவாவக்கியார்

பாளும்பி யாவதேர்தா: 
பாளும்பியா தேதா
பாளும்பி, பாளும்பிப்பையால்
பாளும்பிப்பையாய்

பாளும்பி போகம் வேர்தோ?
பாளும்பியேப்போகம் வேர்தோ?
பாளும்பியே 
பாளும்பியே
- சிவாவக்கியார்
3. மாஷை கொண்டை காண்க மாஷை
மாஷையே என்றாலே
மாஷையே வருமாறு காண்க
மாஷையே என்றாலே காணுமாறு
மாஷையே என்றாலே காணுமாறு
மாஷையே என்றாலே காணுமாறு
திருநெடுநான் காணுமாறு
- கிளயகர்

mātar tō! cērāta tēvar
mānilattil illaiyē
mātartō! puṇarnta pōtu
manītari vālvi cīrakkumē
mātarākum cattiyonṟu
māṭṭik koṇṭa tātalāl
mātarākum nīli kankai
makiḻtu koṇṭān icaṇē
- civavākkiyar

4. காந்தாக கூந்தை ஒரையோலைசயம்: மாஷையே
கூந்தையே வேளையோலைசயம் காணை
- குறா (323)

onṟaka nallatu kollāmai: marrataṇ
pinċārap poyyāmai nanṟu
- kūrāl (323)

5. உருட்கை காந்தை ஏற்றை கூந்தை வீடு
காந்தையே புதர்கையே குவெளையே வீடு
மாஷையே அருவிகளை புருந்தையே
புருந்தையே என்று வீடு வீடு வீடு
- திருநடக்கை அடுக்கை
iruṭ cātīt tattuvac cāttirak kuppai
iruvāyp punceyil ēruvākkip pōṭṭu
maruṭcāti camayāṅkaḷ mātāṅkajāccirama
valakkelām kulī koṭṭi maṅ mūṭip pōṭṭu
- irāmaliṅka aṭikalār

6. bānaṇa bāneṭapāḷ kānantām paṭṭiṅkotatā
- vāṭiyam aṭiṇa
vāṭiyam payiraik kaṇṭapō tellām vāṭianēn.
- irāmaliṅka aṭikalā

7. maṅgoḷaṅa aṇmuṇam kānkanā gāmbalāthai
paṇṭiṭiṇi gāmbalāṅa kāṅkā mangalāthai
*  *  *
kaṅkā gāmbalāṅaṅgā gāmbalāṅa kāṅkā : kī ḍhā
kāṅkāṅgā mangalāṅgā gāmbalāṅgā kāṅkāṅgāṁ
- paṭṭiṇaṅgā : paṭṭiṇaṅgā gāmbalāṅgā
paṭṭiṅkāḷ álvatum caṭṭiṅkāḷ ceiyvatum
pārinīl peṅkal naṭatta vantōm
*  *  *
karpu nilaiyēṛu colla vantār : iru
kāṭcikkku maktu potuvil vaippōm
- pāratiyār : putumaip peṅkal!

8. kānteṅkā ṇuṭiṅkathriṅkā kāntāṅkā kānteṅkā
kaṇṭamāṅkai kānteṅkaiṅkai : śhīṅkaiṅkai kānteṅkai
- paṭṭiṅkaiṅkai : kānteṅkaiṅkai pānteṅkai
kāṭalukku vālivakuttuk karuppātaī cāttak
kataḵonṟu kanṭarivōm : itilēṇna kurram
- pāratiṭācan : tavippatarkō pillai
9. உருள் பாகுக்காரியம் தோன்ற விமர்சிப்பு விதி நாட்டு கைவைப்பது கண்டுபிடித்து கல்லின்
பாண்டியரா மற்றைய கல்லைகளை அறித்த
குரு அப்படியான கல்லைப்படிந்து அவர்
- பாரதிதங்கன்: தஃப்ளீயிய் பாகுக்காரியம் மன்னர்

úrum pakuttařivai illa tolittu vittuc
cārāra cakkaiyāy cattutampaik kunṟa vaittup

porpuḷa māntaraik kallakkiyē antak
karkal kaṭavulkaḷāyik kāṇappatam anke

- pāṭatićaçā: caṇcivi parvatattin cāraḷ

10. முல்லாள் தவனாத்தன் பேரியர்?
    *    *    *
அதுலாத இலங்கையாக: மகளிய மகளானிய
அல்லாம் தவ தவக்கப்படுமே அலந்த தொங்களே
பெண்டுதை எல்லாம்: பெண்டுதை எல்லாம்
பிரித்தவர்: பிரித்தவர் பிரித்தவர்

- குலொளுந்கன் கவிதைகள் 474, 475

mūlattai nakalākkal muraiyā?
    *    *    *
அனுலாகம் மெலானிடு: மகளிர் மாணில
ாதாரவர் தம நாடிழையை மெல் அசைக் கோண்டு
பெனுவது பிதனிடு: பென்கள் அனிந
piratiyalar: caripāti peṟu peṇmai

- kulōttaṉkañ kavitaika! 474, 475
The Heritage of the Tamils: Engineering and Technology*

1. Introduction

I am extremely thankful to the organisers of this Seminar for having given me an opportunity to participate in this pleasant function. I have to add at the same time that I feel quite diffident as I stand before you. I realize too well that I will not be able to approach the subject of the seminar with any claim either for breadth of understanding or for depth of scholarship. My observations, therefore, will be somewhat general and, to be frank and sincere, even superficial.

There are various components that go to make the heritage of a people. The social and cultural aspects of a nation are quite intimately bound up with the economic conditions and the capacity of the people for the creation of wealth. While our literature is helpful for understanding many aspects of our past civilization, we are somewhat

* Keynote Address: Seminar on the Cultural Heritage of the Tamils; International Institute of Tamil Studies, Chennai, 1981.
handicapped when it comes to an evaluation of the level of knowledge that was reached in the field of, what is now recognized as, science and engineering.

While mention is made in our literary works of the various aspects of construction and fabrication, both of structures and gadgets, we are not able to trace any worthwhile treatise on these subjects in Tamil. In our effort to understand the state of civilization of our ancestors, this is an area of deficiency. We are still not very happily placed, in terms of reliable documents on practices concerning physical development. There are many aspects that deserve consideration. I will avail myself of this occasion to focus attention on three aspects.

In general, many of the nations which have achieved a high level of development in the agricultural civilization, have normally reached high levels of achievement in one or more of the three major areas: viz.,

i. Development of irrigation
ii. Development of trade involving navigation
iii. Establishment of cities

2. Irrigation

We may take a look at the level of achievement that can be conceded in favour of ancient Tamils in these three fields. We may start with irrigation structures. Sangam literature abounds in references to the benevolence of kings and chieftains who have established a large number of irrigation works, including canals and tanks. They have not only constructed irrigation works in their own country but have also gone outside the boundaries of their homeland and established irrigation works.
A book in German, titled “Wuesten, Deiche und Turbinen” and written by an author named H.W. Flemming* is a treatise in the field of Engineering wherein the following observations have been made with regard to construction of irrigation works in Africa by South Indian Dravidians*:

A very highly astonishing discovery of recent research is the remains of irrigation works in South East Africa which do not belong to the cultural influence of Egypt. The high culture of Indian Dravidians who are pushed South by the Indo-Germans, had enough initiative, once upon a time, to penetrate into the South East of Africa and to build magnificent irrigation works there. These installations apparently helped the cultivation of 'mountain paddy', a very peculiar variety of crop that has ever been come across. Whole hillocks in the North East of Southern Rhodesia were covered with terraces whose steps are based on several layers. Masonry walls of height about 1.30 to 1.60 metres were raised at intervals of about 9 to 11 metres. The spaces between the walls were filled with earth so that horizontal beds of 10 metres breadth were formed. In all places where such terraces were found, there was also evidence of irrigation trenches which served to irrigate the fields. A highly developed form of agriculture should therefore have been practised there formerly, which was far beyond the culture of Negroes presently inhabiting the place, who do not even know the meaning of these plants and are not capable of using them. Terraces are laid only at places where the foundation (the bottom-most

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strata) (sic) consists of granite, that is to say, only at places where there was the guarantee that the water did not seep away, but was used to the advantage of the beds lying lower down. Colleagues of Leo Frobenius, the researcher from Africa, could distinguish between older terrace construction which was very carefully laid and newer ones which was (sic) not so very well built. From the stone carvings, it can be seen that the best carvings belong to the oldest of times and that there was a gradual decline of this art. From legends, fairy tales and details of metal extraction processes, Leo Frobenius has concluded that the high culture which gradually declined in East Africa has been associated with the Indian culture.

[Translated from German by Dr V.C.K. – German passage in Annexure].

The 'mountain paddy' to which reference is made is known in Tamil as aivanam (ஏவனம்). The following poem from Purananuru by Vadamavannakkan Thamotharanar refers to mountain paddy:

We have the patronage of
Pittan who rides the strong
and swift horse. You need
not be concerned about food.
If the fire raised by the
Men who guard the fields
of mountain paddy gets extinguished
we shall get light from the
radiant pearls in the prosperous
land of Pittan. (1)
Again, in Silappathikaram mention is made of mountain paddy in the following lines in Kadukan kathai (கதைக் காதை). Maraiyon, in an attempt to help Kovalan to find way to Madurai, tells Kovalan as follows:

If you cross the forest where
the deers in search of water
roam about, making sounds and
Then the path for the habit of the hunters,
You would come to the fields of
Mountain paddy, (aivanam) ripe sugar cane
And full grown millets. (2)

(Silappathikaram: Kadukan kathai 78-81)

Venkatasami Nattar states that aivanam (ஆவனம்) is a kind of paddy grown in hilly regions. Another example of an important irrigation structure now existing in Tamil Nadu is the Grand Anicut. It is a marvellous structure whose importance from the point of view of history has not been fully recognized. Grand Anicut has been constructed on sand bed, which in Engineering literature is referred to as ‘Pervious Foundation’. The construction of structures on ‘Pervious Foundation’ is even today a difficult area of technology. In the case of these structures, water flows not only over the structure but also by seepage underneath the structure. Failure can take place either due to the forces exerted by the flow over the Anicut or the seepage taking place under the Anicut or a combination of both. That a structure of such magnitude as Grand Anicut was constructed by King Karikalan nearly 2000 years ago and that it has been standing the test of time till today, is a matter of extraordinary achievement. Over the years, there are evidences of failure of hydraulic structures both in developing and in advanced countries. Many modern structures have failed. The Grand Anicut, perhaps, is the only case of a
hydraulic structure in the world that has completed nearly two millennia of service and is still in working condition. The enduring nature of Grand Anicut, in spite of numerous floods over 20 centuries, is a matter of great significance. Neither the structures about which Flemming has referred to nor a structure like the Grand Anicut could have been built either on the basis of thumb rules alone or on the basis of knowledge communicated through mouth from father to son. There must have existed well-developed procedures for planning, designing and execution of such projects. It is really surprising that we are not able to come across even a trace of literature in Tamil dealing with these subjects. The exact period of the terrace cultivation is also not known. It is an area to which anthropologists and research scholars in Tamil should devote particular attention. Here exists a great gap which needs to be filled.

3. Seafaring and Ship Building

Secondly, we come to the area of trade practices and navigation. Tamils were known for their seafaring activities. Some of the ancient Tamil kings had achieved great heights in terms of their naval power. Vennikkuththiyar while singing in praise of Karikalalan says:

Karikal Valavan, the proud possessor of mighty elephants. The one who hails from the tradition of strength over the wind to serve in steering the boats.

(Purananuru 66)

Mention may also be made of Nappasalaiyar’s poem on Malaiyaman Thirumudikkari. While singing the praise of Malaiyaman, the poet refers to the might of the Chera kings, the dynasty to which he belongs, by saying:
In the western seas where
the Chera kings equipped with
a fierce army plied their ships.
None else would enter
with their vessels.

(Purananuru 126)

There are more references to the possession of
vessels that could ply on the seas. These lines, however,
do not give an indication of the technological level of
achievement that had been reached in ship-building in
those days. I like to quote again, from the book by H.W.
Flemming:

Accordingly, the Dravidian culture must at one time
have had so perfected the art of plying of ships,
that their achievements were not very much behind
those of the European discoverers of America. The
distance between India and the east coast of Africa
is greater than that of the shortest route between
Africa and South America and is about as great
as the distance between Spain and North-America.
However, Africa has remained accessible to India
by coastal shipping. The achievements are admirable.

The terrace cultivation of rice is prevalent even today
in the Philippines. Even there, the plants have not
been built by the natives. They too are probably likewise
to be traced to the cultural influences from India. The
subsequent generations of people were at least in
a position to continue to operate these plants. The
journey from India to Philippines by ship is very often
not along the coast, since the stretch is largely
divided. This enlarges the distance from the coast
so much that the voyage of these former people of
India should be recognized as an achievement of high order.
[Translated from German by Dr V.C.K. – German passage in Annexure].

Flemming is of the opinion that the level of shipbuilding reached by the Dravidians in those early days was as good as, if not superior to, the competence achieved by the Europeans in the 15th century when they discovered America. These tributes have been paid by a technologist to whom no prejudice for or against Tamil culture can be attributed. Again, the kind of vessels that they were able to build and the navigation routes that they were able to achieve, not along the coast but across the seas, could not have been done without the assistance of substantial level of knowledge, which should have been developed over generations and transmitted through recorded documents. Even here, we have no evidence whatsoever excepting the brief references to the naval might that we come across in our literary works.

4. Architecture and Town Planning

Thirdly, I come to city building. Every great civilization had to its credit the establishment of great cities. Urbanization may be a phenomenon associated with industrialization. But cities by themselves are not completely the consequences of industrialization. Even in the distant past, art flourished; great intellectual contributions were made and great leadership of men appeared only in the environment provided by the cities. Tamilians were one of the greatest city-building races. I would like to quote again an observation made by Sir Patrick Geddes, who was one of the greatest of town planners. He makes the following observation about Kanchipuram:
Here is not simply a city monumental by great temples and rich and varied by innumerable minor ones; what rejoices me is to find the realization of an exceptionally well grouped and comprehensive town plan and this upon a scale of spacious dignity combined with individual and artistic freedom to which I cannot name any equally surviving parallel, whether in India, or elsewhere.

It is quite possible that Kanchipuram that Sir Patric Geddes refers to is not as old as the irrigation structures or the ship-building activities that I have talked about; but the establishment of these cities was not an abrupt event. It is only a continuation of the traditions that might have been developed over a period of centuries.

The Tamils were great city builders. We find descriptions of cities in literary works like *Silappathikaram*, *Manimekalai*, *Maduraikkanchi*, *Nedunalvadai* and others. *Silappathikaram* provides a graphic description of cities like Poompukar and Madurai. One comes across many concepts that are, surprisingly, in conformity with the modern principles of town planning. We have today the concept of zoning, according to which we try to establish separate zones for different categories of requirements. We specify residential areas, shopping centres and market places. We specify areas intended for industrial establishment, parks, play fields and other uses.

A description of the layout of Poompukar, given in *Silappathikaram* leaves us amazed with the detailed description of the parts of the city. Since Poompukar is a coastal city, and the Tamils were great maritime traders, there were on the shores the residences of foreign traders.
In different places of Pukar
the onlookers’ attention was
arrested by the sight of yavanas
whose prosperity was never on
the wane. On the harbour
were to be seen sailors who came
from distant lands, by all
appearance they lived as
one community. (5)

There were also other streets
where grain dealers lived who
kept their grains in separate heaps.
Washermen, makers of muffins,
wine-sellers, fishermen selling
fish. Dealers in white salt, those
who sold betel leaves, those who
dealt in scents, mutton-vendors,
oil-mongers, meat-vendors, dealers
in bronze, manufacturers of
copper, carpenters, strong armed
blacksmiths, sculptors, potters,
goldsmiths, jewellers. (6)

In another part of the city there
were the king’s street, the car street
with flying flags, the bazaar street
the broad highway where high born
merchants lived on either side in the
turreted houses, the Brahmana street,
the streets of physicians and astrologers. (7)

In an extensive open space, on
the outskirts of the city were
quarters occupied by cavalry men,
with swift horses, elephant warriors, 
charioteers with lofty chariots 
and infantry men with fearsome looks.  

[Indira Vizhavur Eduththa Kathai]

Similarly, we find a detailed description of Madurai city in Urkan kathai. Just as residences for various professional classes had been earmarked in Puhar, we find in Madurai description of well defined locations for various trades and professions.

There are streets for carts and other vehicles, ornamented chariots, coats of mail and goads. There are streets for articles made of copper, bronze, ropes, garlands, articles made by working on ivory. The streets are so rich as to make the royal families covet them. Then there are streets for clothes made of fur, cotton and silk.

Kovalan then saw in the bazaar
Covered carts and other vehicles,
Ornamented chariots, coats of mail,
Attractive goads.  

Articles made of copper, made of bronze,
Newly made ropes, garlands, saws made of
Steel and instruments for working with ivory (10)

Streets of cloth merchants where
Several kinds of bundles were piled up

Each of hundred sarees woven of
Cotton thread, hair or silk thread.  

[Urkan kathai]
In *Manimekalai* mention is made of underground drainage in Vanchi. In Tamil, it is referred to as *surungai thumbu* (சுற்றுக்குரு தம்பு):

The categories of waste waters that reach the drainage are listed as follows:

- The waste waters that come from
- The bathing of women at home
- The waters that come from
- The swimming pool with
  - Automatic machines (that fill and empty water)
- Where the young ones in their houses
- Bathe and wash the sandal paste.  

All these waters reach the underground drainage. We may come across some skeptics who may possibly argue that these descriptions may be the result of the imagination of the poets who were the authors of those works. Anticipating this kind of criticism Sir P.S. Sivasami Iyer makes the following pertinent observation:

> It would be absurd to suppose that such descriptions of cities and towns in literature were not founded on a solid substratum of truth.

The question now arises as to whether learned treatises existed in those days dealing with these subjects in Tamil. I quote the following lines from *Nedunalvadai*:

> The architects who have studied the texts
  Use the measuring tape and
  Decide on the locations for various gods
  And design the mansion to suit
  The requirements of the great king.
It can be seen that planning was done by persons who had studied the relevant books. In *Silappathikaram* mention is made of "தமிழ் மொழியில் தனியே தமிழ் மாற்றம்". We come now to Maduraikanchi. There, mention is made of the city guards who guard the cities in the night. They are referred to thus:

The city guards who perform their duty strictly adhering to the rule in the learned treatise on the subject. (14)

That means these guards did not deviate from the guidelines established in the books for the profession. It is obvious that these city guards had been trained to follow guidelines laid down in the treatise on the subject.

In the first instance, quoted above, it is stated that the planning of towns was done as laid down in the book. In the second case, construction of tall buildings is said to have been done as specified in books. In the third case, it is stated that the guards who keep a watch over the cities in the night do their duty according to what has been laid down in books. Very obviously, these books referred to are not books dealing with literary themes, literary discourses or philosophical treatises. These must be valid texts in the areas of knowledge concerned. Similarly, there must also have been books dealing with the subjects like ship-building, navigation, irrigation structures, drainage structures, tanks and many other similar physical facilities which were necessary for the economic development of a nation.

5. Research Needed

The question now is how we could reconstruct the information that might have been available in the areas of knowledge discussed in the foregoing sections. We do
have books today in Sanskrit dealing with many of these subjects. It must be mentioned that while Tamil Nadu has the richest treasure of granite sculpture, there is not a single comprehensive book in Tamil on this particular area of art. All the books available are in Sanskrit. Scholars in the area of Tamil as well as in history should make systematic efforts to study the literature available in Sanskrit, gather evidences of references to such treatises in Tamil literature and see what part of these contributions now available in Sanskrit could possibly have been either original contributions made by scholars in this part of the country or translations of past literature which might have been available in the Tamil language. We need to make a totally new approach to the authorship of the literature that may be found in Sanskrit. Today even the most talented research worker in Tamil Nadu records most of his contributions in English. We are aware that in the history of India, periods have existed when Sanskrit flourished and was accepted as the language of the scholars and was used in the courts of kings and among scholars. One may have to go into details of the literature available in Sanskrit to see what part of these contributions could be traced to the heritage and civilization of the ancient Tamilians. Knowledge available in Sanskrit literature is not the contribution of any single race or language group. A significant part of it must be ascribed to the Dravidians. Considerable cloud needs to be cleared regarding the composition of and contributions to what we now call Indian heritage. We need to take up systematic research in this regard.

On this occasion, it may be appropriate to make an observation. Research is an activity aimed at finding the truth. We should look for truth as it exists and not as we would like to have it. It needs a scientific approach with a high level of objectivity. I may be pardoned for saying that in
the field of language studies in India, objectivity is not a strong point. Very often, pre-conceived notions dominate and efforts are made to find only such facts as may support a fond belief. Nothing could be more inimical to research than this approach.

Secondly, honest difference of opinion is not viewed with respect and consideration. The one who has a different opinion is sometimes dubbed as an enemy. These are deficiencies and weaknesses that mature research workers should try to overcome. We should make systematic and concentrated efforts to have a comprehensive understanding of our past and interpret it in a proper way to the rest of our countrymen as well as to the peoples of the world. Few nations in the world could claim either in the field of literature or in other areas of human excellence such great records of achievements as the Tamils could. The heritage of the Tamils, therefore, is a matter of pride, matter of interest, not only to us Tamils, but also to humanity as a whole, since it represents a period of glory for mankind. In other words, the heritage of the Tamils is really the heritage of the human race, and it is our duty that we make this known and available to workers in this field all over the world. We should confess that we have done precious little in this regard. Perhaps the International Institute of Tamil Studies is the fittest organization to take over such responsibilities. Let me hope and trust that this Seminar will provide the starting point in this direction.
1. பிரியல் வேண்டா வருபா நாள்
    துடுவதாகவும் பிமை நுழைவா
    மாணையும் சிவகாரதை வளித்து லேகைம
    மண்டசூரு திரை மகாவன பிள்ளை
    - புராணநுரு 172

pariyal vēntā varupata nāṭi
aivanan kāvalar peyti nantīn
olitikāl tiruntumāni nanijiru lakarrum
vanpula nāṭan vayamān piṭṭān
    - puranānūru 172

2. நிமாசை இவ்வகையினால்
    மாணையுடன் சிவகாரதை லேகைம,
    மாணையும் லேகைம், சிவகாரதை
    மண்டசூரு திரைகாலம், அமரசை குட்டையும்
    விலுமின் சிவகாரதை லேகைம் லேகைம்
    - திலகாசிபாணம்: கனிகாணக கூக்க

nimacai i vētkaiyin
māṇinṟu vilikkum kānadamum,
eyinar kātamum, kāṭantāl
aivana vennelum, araikkat karumpum
koypūn tinaiyum koḷumpumā varakum
    - cilappatikāram: kāṭukaṇ kāṭai

3. நலியிரு முன்மிரு நவா யோட்டி
    வளித்தே ளாண்ட ஒயவோன் மருக
    காலியியல் யானைக் கரிகால் வலா
    - புராணநுரு 66

naliyiru munnir nāvā yōṭṭi
valitoli lānṭa vuravōn maruka
kaliyiyal yānaik karikāl valava
    - puranānūru 66
4. சிந்தாய் காணல் வாழ்வதன் காலம்
பார்க்குக் கடவுள் ராமேஸ் அம்சவதியின்
பிரிக்கப்பட்டு வசிக்காது தன்னிடையே
- புராணாந்தர 126

சின்னாகத் தானை வானவன் குடகாதல்
போல்டரு நாவா யோதி யாவலிப்
பிரிக்குமல் செல்லக்காய் தானையே
- புராணாந்தர 126

5. பொய்யா மயூரேஸ் காலநிகழ்த் தின்காலம்
பார்க்கும் மரியா பாலை
பதானை குண்டி (சுருக்கி போல்கு)
- கீழ்காலம்: பொய்யா மயூரேஸ் காலம்

கவளையா மருந்துக் கங்பூற் தட்டுக்கும்
பானாரா வரியா யவனாரி ருக்கையும்

கலகாரு திருவிர் புலம்பையர் மாக்கள்
கலாந்தரு தொறையும் இலங்கூர் நிற வரைப்பு
- சிலப்பாத்திரம்: இந்திய கில்லை வளாகச் சாடர்

6. கோவில்களின் கலை சுற்றிலும்
காலம், காலம், காலம் பத்தாண்டம் பாலையை
சின்னாகத் தானையில் பார்க்கும் பார்க்கு
பார்க்கு, பார்க்கு, பார்க்கு சின்னாகத்
நாகன் ஸ்ரீந்திக் காலமை பூங்கா
- கீழ்காலம்: பொய்யா மயூரேஸ் காலம்
kūlaṅkuvitta kūla vītiyum
kāliyar, kūviyar, kaṇ ūṇtaiyāṭṭiyar
mēṅvilai pāratavar vēllumupp pākarunar
pācavar, vācavar, pānnīṇa vilaiṉarō
ṭōcunar cērinta ūṇmali yirukkaiyum

kaṇcakārarum cempu ceykunarum
marāṅkol taccarum curūṅkaik kollarum
kannul vinaiṉarum māṇṇīṭ tālarum
poncey kollarum nāṅkalantarunarum.

- cilappatikāram : intira vilavūretutta kātal

7.  

kōviyar vītiyum koṭṭīr vītiyum
piṭikait teruvum perūṅkuṭī vanikar
māṭa marukum maṟaiyōrirukkaiyum

vēlkutī ulavaroṭu vilaiṅkiya kolkai
āyūl vēṭaruṅ kālak kanitarum.

- cilappatikāram : intira vilavūretutta kātal

8.  

- kōvāmrī kārṇaṅ, kāvāmrīkā rāmaṅ

- kavāmrī kārṇaṅ, kāvāmrīkā rāmaṅ

- kavāmrī kārṇaṅ, kāvāmrīkā rāmaṅ
katumpari kaṭavunar, kaḷirṛṉ pākar
neṭuntē rūrūnar, cuṭuṅkanṭ maravar
iruntu puṇaṅcurriya perumpā yirukkaiyum
- cilappatikāram : intira vilavureṭṭutta kātai

9. kalampanṭ bālpāḷum kēḻikēṭkāṭ ñigappūḷum
-government kambum āḻigum kēḻilum thōḷum
- kēḻampanṭṭ kāṭaṭ

vaiyamum pāṇṭilum manittērk koṭuṇciyum
meypuku kavacamum vilmanit töṭṭiyum
- cilappatikāram : ūrkāṇ kātai

10. cēnṟē ceynavum kaṇṭcat toṭilavum
vampin muṭinavum mālaiyir puṇainavum
vēṭinat tuppavum koṭukaṭai toṭilavum
- cilappatikāram : ūrkāṇ kātai

11. nūlinum, mayirinum nulainul paṭṭinum
pālvakai teriyāp paṅṉuraṭukkattu
nārumaṭi ceṅinta aruvai viṭiyum
- cilappatikāram : ūrkāṇ kātai
12. மன்னார் செய்தல்
நூற்றூற்றை குறித்து காணப் பட்டு
நிர்வங்கு மன்னாய் இணைந்து மக்களின்
குருக்கு அடைய மாற்று இல்லை
- மோகிசோக்கோ

.......... மண்டவலர் தோகையார்
கருங்குள்ள காண்யா கலவை நிரம்
எண்டியே ஈனாரு மகாலிரும்
tantamil ஆத்யா சங்குலகை நிரம்
- மணிமேகலை

13. முயன்று புளைய நம்பலில் குடியியது
சிறு தோன்றி, நூற்றூற்றை
முடிக்கவை முடிக்கு விளம்பு
மக்கள் மாற்று
- நூற்றூற்றோட்டீ 776-80

nūlari pulavar nunṉitir kayirittut
tēem konṭu, teyam nokkip
perumpeyar manṇark koppa
manṇai vakuttu
- neṭunalvāṭai 76-80

14. பூச்சிக்
நான்மை நீரியவை நான்கு
துண்டை நீர்த்தீ
நான் கம்பியை
- மெருக்காருகை

................. cerinta
nūlvalip pilaiyā nunānku
nun tercci
ūr kāppālar
- maturalikkāńci
Transliteration Convention

Transliteration in the Roman Script is restricted to the quotations from the text.

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<th>Vowels</th>
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Annexure

Excerpts from Pages 48, 49 and 50 of the book.

Wuesten Deiche und Turbinen
By H.W. Flemming
Musterschmidt Verlag
Göttingen, Berlin, Frankfurt: 1957

* Eine höchst überraschende Entdeckung der neueren völkerkundlichen Forschung sind die Reste von Bewässerungsanlagen in Südostafrika, die nicht zum Kulturkreis Ägyptens gehören. Die Hochkultur der indischen Drawida, die von den Indogermanen in den Süden abgedrängt wurden, hatten früher einmal genug Stoßkraft, um nach dem Süden Ostafrikas vorzudringen und dort großartige Bewässerungsanlagen zu schaffen. Die Anlagen dienten offenbar dem Anbau von Bergreis, einer der anspruchsvollsten Kulturpflanzen, die es überhaupt gibt. Ganze Hügelzüge sind in dem nordöstlichen Sudrhodesian mit Terrassen bedeckt, dessen Stufen sich an die Schichtlinien anlehnen. Alle neun bis elf Meter wurde eine Steinmauer von 1,30 bis 1,60 Meter Höhe errichtet. Die Zwischenräume der Mauern waren mit Erdreich angefüllt, so daß waagerechte Beete von etwa 10m Breite entstanden. Überall, wo sich diese Terrassenanlagen finden, lassen sich weitläufige Bewässerungsgräben nachweisen, die der Berieselung der Felder dienten. Dort muß also früher eine hochentwickelte Landwirtschaft berühten worden sein, die weit über der Kultur der jetzt dort lebenden Neger stand, die nicht einmal die Bedeutung dieser Anlagen kennen und sie nicht zu nutzen verstehen. Terrassen sind nur dort angelegt, wo der Untergrund aus Granit besteht, also die Gewähr gegeben war, daß das
herangeführte Wasser nicht versickerte, sondern den tiefer gelegenen Beeten zugute kam.


**


The cornerstone of his virtue was his simple living. His ambitions were high; but his wants were modest; he kept them to the barest minimum... Perhaps no saint, no ascetic would have reduced his needs of comfort to such an irreducible minimum as Periyar did. While he had no great admiration for a life of asceticism, and never supported renunciation, his was the life of an ascetic and sannyasin excepting that he did not choose to starve or sleep on a bed of thorns.

Periyar identified himself indistinguishably with the masses. His time, effort and thought were totally devoted to the task of bringing about an awakening among them, to set them thinking. In the 93rd year of his life, he travelled for 183 days and delivered 249 speeches; in the 94th year, he toured for 177 days and delivered 229 speeches. A life so active physically and mentally in so advanced an age is truly rare in human history.

-V. C. Kulandaiswamy