

Tamil Voice Against Aryans: Bharatidasan

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The predicament of a non-native minority in a community can be very unenviable. Its habits, sentiments and behaviour patterns are ridiculed even when they are not quite understood. In this paper I shall try to spell out the hostile prejudices of the famous Tamil poet Bharatidasan¹ (1891-1964) against the non-Tamils, especially the Aryans, who lived in and dominated Tamil society.

Bharatidasan was a staunch supporter of E.V. Ramasamy Periyar, the founder of the Self-Respect movement (Suyamariyadai Iyakkam, 1944). He wrote numerous poems, minor epics and dramas, in which his views on the Aryans are very hostile. For him there was little difference between the Northerners and the Tamil Brahmins. When the Aryans were identified as intruders and exploiters in Tamil Nadu, E.V.R. Periyar, Bharatidasan and others raised their voice against the Aryan dominance and condemned the ideology associated with Brahmanism.

It is now generally believed that both the Aryan and the Dravidian had invaded the Indian subcontinent, though the latter did this long before the Aryan. The *dasyus* and *dasas*² mentioned in the Vedic literature, especially the *R̥g Veda samhita*, are the early Dravidians who were conquered by the Aryans: "The current theory is that at the time of the Aryan invasion there was in India a Dravidian civilisation of a highly developed character, and that the Dravidians were a section of the great Mediterranean race. Consequently, it is claimed that the Dravidian civilisation was derived from outside sources, and was linked up with Egypt and Mesopotamia" (Dikshitar, 4-5). About 2000 B.C. the Aryans³ from Central Asia migrated to India and settled down as a pastoral community; they also engaged in agriculture to some extent.

In the early part of the 2nd millennium, whether from pressure of population, desiccation of pasture lands, or from both causes, these people were on the move. They migrated in bands westwards, southwards and eastwards, conquering local populations, and inter-marrying with them to form a ruling class. They brought with them their patrilineal family system, their worship of sky gods, and their horses and chariots. In most of the lands in which they settled, their original language gradually adapted itself to the tongues of the conquered peoples. (Basham, 30)

When the Aryans entered South India, they brought with them the four-fold caste division, namely the Brahman (priest), the Kshatriya (warrior), the

Vaisya (merchant), and the Sudra (serf), on the basis of colour. Using religion for their own benefit and attributing everything to God, they influenced others through their mode of worship, especially their *yagna*, Vedic fire ritual. With the support of the native elite including kings, the Aryans established their supremacy in society.

E.V.R. Periyar was the President of Tamil Nadu Congress Committee in 1924. He left the Congress Party in 1925 on the issue of 'the resolution for caste-wise reservation' (Vaguppurimait tirmanam) that he had moved for approval. He felt that the Party had become the party of Brahmins who were not at all interested in the welfare of the non-Brahmins. The Self-Respect movement was launched the same year and was aimed at safeguarding the interests of the non-Brahmins. Periyar became a vehement opponent of caste-conscious Brahmins. In 1944 he changed the name of his Justice Party – South Indian Welfare Association (Needek Katchi – Tennindiya Nala Urimaic Sangam) to Dravidar Kazhagam (The Association of Dravidian People). The aim of the Association was not only to safeguard the interests of non-Brahmins but also to expose the exploitative nature and practices of the Aryan people. He felt that the Brahmins were exploiting the Tamil land in the name of God. So, he wanted to uproot the idea of God from the minds of his people, and for this purpose he delivered several lectures in which he described the concept of God as illogical and unscientific. He also argued that temples were institutions established by the Brahmins for their own benefit. He bitterly opposed the practice of worshipping the gods which involved waste of money for the common people. Periyar was not against individual Brahmins, but he challenged them as practitioners of Brahmanism.

According to the Brahmins, Sanskrit is the sacred language used for worshipping the gods and other religious purposes and Tamil is unsacred (Neecha bhasha) and unfit even for conversation. Periyar was especially critical of this Brahminic insult to Tamil, and in retaliation he delivered several lectures in which both Sanskrit and Hindi were projected as inferior to Tamil. He also delivered lectures to establish the antiquity and superiority of the Tamil language and culture.

Being a strong supporter and admirer of Periyar and the Dravidar Kazhagam Movement, Bharatidasan wholly endorsed the anti-Aryan view in his literary works. In 1928 he joined Periyar and his movement. After that, even in his private life, he never engaged in any Brahminic practices. He did not celebrate any festival except pongal which he considered truly Tamil.

Besides calling them Aryans, Bharatidasan used for the Aryans terms like Vadavar, i.e. the Northerner, and Parppanar, i.e. one who would foresee the future. However, to see the extent of his disapproval of them we should consider epithets such as *Ariya Nari*, the Aryan fox, (*Pughazh Malargal*, 1978, p. 103, and *Nal Malargal*, 1978, p. 97), *Kodiya Ariyar*, the cruel Aryans, (*Edirparada Muttam*, 1981, p. 57), *Aryar Vanjaha Narigal*, the cunning Aryan foxes, (*Iraniyan Alladu Inaiyarra Viran*, 1978, p. 69), *Nari Vadavar*, the

foxlike Northerner, (*Pugazh Malargal*, p. 18), *Tiya Vadanattinar*, the mischievous Northerners, (*Tenaruvi*, 1956, p. 27), *Parppana Narigal*, the Brahmin foxes, (*Pugazh Malargal*, p. 62), *Parppana Onaygal*, the Brahmin wolves, (*Pugazh Malargal*, p. 62), and *Pedigal*, cowards, (*Iraniyan Alladu Inaiyarraviran*, p. 69).

In ancient Tamil literature, the word *parppanar* was used to denote the intellectual class. Later on it was used for the Brahmins. The word *Andanar*, kindhearted people, was also used for them. Nowadays the words *Iyer* and *Iyengar* are also used to denote the Saiva Brahmins and Vaishnava Brahmins respectively. The two words mean the leader or head of the family or institution. None of these words as such gives the actual meaning of the word Brahmin. Although the word *parppanar* was used without any negative connotation in *Silappadikaram*⁴ (The story of the anklet) and in Bharatiyar's poem,⁵ it is now used in a negative sense by the Brahminic community. This could be due to the critical tone in which it was used by E.V.R. Periyar and Bharatidasan.

Bharatidasan's invocation of cunning foxes and wolves for the purpose of describing the Brahmins has to be understood in the light of the emergence of the anti-brahminic Self-Respect movement. Since the Dravidians were described as slaves, *asuras*, barbarians, etc. in the Vedas, the affected people like E.V.R. Periyar had to launch this counter-movement. Though the Brahmins in question were born and brought up on the Tamil soil, a majority of them were inordinately proud of their Sanskrit tradition and denied themselves the Tamil identity. Such arrogance provoked Bharatidasan to ridicule them. In *Kurinji Tittu* (1968; The Kurinji island) he observes: "Whoever be the parppan, whether Tenkalaip,⁶ Vadakalaip,⁷ or Saivap,⁸ they would see to it that the Tamils are subjected to tonsure" (p. 53). He further adds that the parppan is one who tries to dominate, cause mischief, and destroy the Tamils (*Tamizh Iyakkam*, 1992, p. 31). He condemned the Brahmins as the enemies of Tamil Nadu who had dropped the Sanskrit poison into the nectar of mother-Tamil (Ibid., p. 35). Hence, he cautioned the Dravidians, "Be vigilant. Do not trust the parppan" (Ibid., p. 34).

It was believed by many Tamils that the non-natives, especially the Brahmins, did not identify with the region and its people. They did not even care to learn the Tamil language. They had only exploited and dominated the natives. The Aryans, according to Bharatidasan, were a pastoral community that had settled in and around Tamil Nadu but had gradually gone to the extreme of capturing power by subtle conspiracies (*Bharatidasan Kavidaigal*, Vol. II, 1975, p. 94).

The 'historical' drama, according to Bharatidasan, had unfolded along the following lines:

The Brahmins maintained their fire-worship was superior; they murmured some words and called them as 'Mandram' (Skt. Mantra); they claimed that Dravidians were idiots and that they [the Aryans] were

the people born to rule the land. The Dravidians who were ruling the country were made to fall down at the feet of those Brahmins, who had earlier actually depended upon them for their survival. (Vol. II, p. 100)

The Brahmins were not frank but treacherous ("Kadala Kadanpiya," p. 52). They would be uttering the names of God simply to swindle money from people (Vol. I, 1980, pp. 120-21). So he employs the term 'Urttirudum parppan,' the Brahmin who robs the entire village ("Talaimalai Kanda Devar" in *Kazahaikkuttiyin Kadal*, 1978, p. 22).

Bharatidasan claimed that the Aryans were responsible for the caste-based society and all untoward incidents that claimed many lives on ethnic issues (*Pugazh Malargal*, p. 131). Hence, he called them 'Amaidi maykkum vadavar,' the Northerners who disturbed peaceful life (*Nal Malargal*, p. 19), 'Vadakkup pavigal,' the Northern sinners (Ibid., p. 61), 'Perumpahai Ariyan,' the big Aryan enemies (Ibid., p. 78), and 'Kanal nigar Ariyar,' the fire-like Aryans (*Isaiyamudu*, in Vol. II, 1991, p. 46).

Due to his use of such epithets for the Aryans, a majority of the Brahmins regarded Bharatidasan as their sworn enemy. But he did not care and continued to denounce them for their selfish attitude, their bogus spirituality and their disregard for Tamil culture. Instead of accepting the language and culture of Tamil Nadu, the Aryans had tried to impose Sanskrit and their culture on Tamil people. As the leading Tamil poet, he lit the light of the Tamil spirit both in the language and the country. The Dravidar Kazhagam and the Dravidar Munnerrak Kazhagam movements used his poems as powerful bullets against the Sanskrit language and the Vedic culture. He strongly felt that Vadamozi, i.e. Sanskrit, was the snake killing one's right to live (*Isaiyamudu*, Vol. I, 1991, p. 22), and accordingly stirred the Dravidians to fight against Sanskrit and Hindi and not to be scared of them (*Tamizh Iyakkam*, 1992, p. 31).

An atheist by conviction and critical of Tamil bhakti poems, Bharatidasan nevertheless argued in their favour as against the usage of Sanskrit in the temples of Tamil Nadu. He questioned the necessity of Sanskrit there; it had entered there like a wild locust so as to kill the Tamil crops. When there existed heart-melting bhakti poems from Tevaram⁹ and Tiruvaymozhi,¹⁰ where was the justification for reciting in the temples Sanskrit *slokas* that sound like the unbearable noise coming out of oil crushers (*Tamizh Iyakkam*, pp. 23-24)? Likewise he was equally critical of the Congress move to recognise Hindi as the official language for the entire country. E.V.R. Periyar severely criticised the government move, and Bharatidasan issued a call to the youth to rise against the proposed mixing of Hindi poison into Tamil nectar (*Bharatidasan Kavidaigal*, Vol. III, 1961, p. 168). He believed that the move was a serious threat to the existence of the Tamils as well as Tamil (Ibid., p. 139).

Bharatidasan's thesis about the wickedness of the Northerners finds expression in a number of his works. In *Edirparada Muttam* (The

unexpected kiss), one of his minor epics, the hero Ponmudi, along with some businessmen, is sent to Delhi by his father in order to divert his attention from his beloved Punkodi, his own maternal uncle's daughter. All the relatives of these businessmen pray for their safe return. Bharatidasan categorically states that the North is Emalogam, the world of the god of death, (p. 43) and Chakkadu, the graveyard (p. 45). On their way to Delhi, some thirty miles before it, they halt for resting and cooking. Here, five Aryans approach them for donation to their *yagam*. Ponmudi, as the representative of the group, strongly criticises them for their fire worship and declines to give even a pie for the cause. The Aryans, after considering the size of the Tamil businessmen, pretend as if they are not annoyed at their refusal. However, even as the Tamil group is starting to eat, the Aryans return fully armed and surround it. In the course of the tussle, many of the businessmen, including Ponmudi, are killed in an inhuman manner for having criticised the Vedic ritual and for having refused to donate money. Bharatidasan thus shows that the Aryans are cunning and cruel.

Another of Bharatidasan's minor epics, *Tamizhacchiyin Katti* (The sword of the Tamil Maid), relates some incidents which occurred in the regime of Raja Desingh and which affected some of the Tamils. Raja Desingh, who basically hailed from North India, was one of the hundred and seventy two *palayapats*. He ruled for some time over Chenji, a taluk in North Arcot District of Tamil Nadu, as a chieftain under the Delhi Badshah. He was like any other Northerner and humiliated the Tamils without considering their feelings. Sudarishan Singh, a captain in the army of Raja Desingh, along with his colleagues, once visited Valavnur of Pondicherry. On the way he met a villager named Timman who offered the group coconuts and took it to lunch at his house. Sudarishan saw Subbammal, his intelligent wife, and got excited by her beauty. He decided to seduce her, but sensing his intent she kept away from him.

Sudarishan Singh cleverly arranged for Timman's coming to Chenji along with his wife by promising him a soldier's job in the army. When the couple reached the outskirts of Chenji, he made them stay in a village hut. Offering the military dress to Timman Sudarishan took him away from the place. He arranged for Subbammal's stay with two women of loose character, namely Kuppu and Murugi. He cunningly confined Timman in a dark room of the Chenji fort and tried to seduce Subbammal at night, having already set the hut on fire. Subbammal somehow managed to escape and took shelter in the house of an old man called Chengaiyan. Kuppu and Murugi now offered her poisoned food through the old man. Not knowing that it was poisoned, he made her eat it. She became unconscious for some time, and in this state she was raped by Sudarishan Singh. When she came to and saw what had been done to her, she decided to take revenge. So she went and knocked at his door, and as soon as he came out, she plunged a sword into his chest and killed him. She was arrested and put on trial, although before they could arrest her they were made to fight her husband who got killed. The

Northerner king proved to be prejudiced, for even after knowing the truth he refused to do justice. Instead, he ordered his soldiers to mutilate her bit by bit. At this travesty of justice Subbammal decided not to live for another second and ceased to breathe.

The non-native Sudarishan Singh is portrayed as a womaniser and full of cunning; Raja Desingh is a cruel and biased king. Though they rule the land with the support of the natives, they bring only trouble to the latter. The image of the non-natives is thus wholly black.

In one of his plays, *Iranian Alladu Inaiyarra Viran* (Hiranya, the unparalleled warrior), Bharatidasan portrays the non-natives as cunning and cruel towards the natives. According to him, the tussle between Iranya and Pahlada was not between the father and the son but between the Dravidian and the Aryan cultures.

The play deals with an Aryan conspiracy to seduce the Dravidian prince Pahlada away from his culture and people by his treacherous Aryan friend Kangeyan who uses his own sister for this purpose. Kangeyan wants that the son should turn against his father and everything that the father values. Pahlada does become a puppet in the hands of these non-natives. The father fears the Aryans' influence on his son and in a speech he expresses his fears before his queen:

Aryans . . . had come from outside and settled down here, burnt birds and animals alive in the name of *Yagam* and ate them. They were the people following polyandry, who used to drink *Somarasam* (the divine drink) and behave immorally; and used to capture the ruling power through their womenfolk by any means. They were the people who used to cheat the Tamils by their mandrams. Though they were born and brought up in the Tamil soil and flourished with the support of the Tamils, they used to think that they were superior to the Tamils. They were the people who had done harm to the Tamil country's progress in all respects. At present, these people are trying to destabilise my kingdom and finish off my heirs once and for all. (pp. 47-48)

So completely enthralled is Pahlada by the cunning Chitrabanu and her brother that he refuses to take oath in his father's name at the time of his coronation as a prince. His resolve to take oath in the name of the Aryan Lord Narayana infuriates Iranya who kicks at the pillar in which, as elsewhere, according to the charmed Pahlada, Lord Narayana is present. In Bharatidasana's reading of the myth, it is not the Lord but the treacherous Aryan Kangeyan who comes from behind the pillar in the disguise of a half-man, half-lion and murders the king. At the end of the play the stage is strewn with corpses, and before killing himself the Commander-in-Chief delivers this wisdom piece to the natives. The rhetoric contains the author's views on the Aryans.

O great Tamil people! Do punish me! Don't believe in the Aryans! Don't surrender your knowledge and valour to the Aryans' cunningness! Do eliminate the Aryans! Do make Tamil Nadu as the land of the Tamils! Your great king died for your welfare! He died for protecting you from the atrocities of Aryans! The so-called *vedam*, *mandram* and the incarnation of God were not the causes of his death as claimed by the Aryans. These are all lies of the scoundrels. (p. 107)

Bharatidasan's interpretation of the Iranya and Pahlada episode should be understood in the light of the ideology of Dravidar Kazhagam which worked sincerely for the welfare of the non-Brahmin natives. The movement convincingly demonstrated throughout Tamil Nadu that the Aryans were cunning power-mongers and did not hesitate to force their womenfolk into immoral acts for the sake of material and political gains. The Aryans' unscrupulous use of their women for the purpose of destabilising the rulers of the Tamil country and installing their own wicked rule is also the theme of another minor epic by Bharatidasan, *Kurinji Tittu*.

Some interesting points emerge from Bharatidasan's treatment of the non-native characters in his works. The Aryans are depicted as cunning, treacherous, and politically ambitious, interested in usurping and dominating the Tamil kingdom. In order to achieve their aim they do not mind pushing their womenfolk into shameful acts. The Tamil tradition advocates that everyone fight and die to preserve the honour of their women. In contrast, the Aryans have no sense of honour or of shame. Their women are spies who use their charm for promoting the Aryan political regime in Tamil Nadu.

Though there lived in Tamil Nadu in his times many non-natives from Andhra, Karnataka, Saurashtra, Rajasthan, etc. as well as the Aryans, Bharatidasan condemns only the Aryans, particularly those who practise Aryanism-Brahminism in the land of the Tamils. The other groups of non-natives were poor and had to toil hard for their livelihood, and so he does not bother to isolate them for his attack. His anger was reserved for the non-native Aryans who exploited the natives in the name of God and temples and looked down upon the Tamils' identity.

As a whole, the image of non-Tamils in Bharatidasan's works is flat and one-sided. He viciously attacked all attempts against the Tamil language, the Tamils and the Tamil country.

Bharatidasan's is a typical Tamil voice. He led the revolt against the Aryans, particularly the Brahmins. Several factors accounted for the mass appeal his voice had in Tamil Nadu. First of all, it was against the dominance of the Brahmins in politics. Although they never had a chance to directly rule the Tamil country, they maintained their control over the natives with the blessings and support of the rulers. They ruled from behind the screen as it were. During the times of Bharatidasan, they had occupied all the key posts in the Congress Party and social organisations. The Tamils' sentiments and

needs were totally ignored. Moreover, in the field of education, there was no due representation given to the Tamils. The Brahmins also occupied all the higher official positions in bureaucracy both during and after the British period; the Tamils were denied even the lower level jobs. In the fine arts, too, which offered both fame and money, the Brahmins had slowly entered and eventually established their dominance. The temples and their priesthood also helped them both in terms of power and money. Without performing any hard manual work, the Brahmins were thus enjoying all the privileges at the expense of the Tamils. Therefore, E.V.R. Periyar, Bharatidasan and others sought to awaken the Tamils to their plight and to eliminate their pervasive exploitation by the non-natives. Bharatidasan's voice was thus basically political and social in its impulse, even though it reflects the ideology of the Dravidian Movement rather than of the Tamils as a whole.¹¹

NOTES

1. Bharatidasan, the poet of Revolt, is a major figure in modern Tamil poetry. Next to Subramaniya Bharati, it was he who boldly broke new ground in the field of Tamil literature. Bharatidasan, whose real name was Subburattinam, was born on 29 April 1891 in an upper-middle-class family at Pondicherry which was then under French rule. When Subramaniya Bharati came to Pondicherry as a political refugee in 1908, Bharatidasan had the opportunity of moving closely with him and developed a personal liking for him. He remained a close associate and faithful follower of Bharati all through the ten years he was at Pondicherry. Bharatidasan was a follower of Bharati, but he also broke fresh ground and blazed his own trail. He was nourished by the rationalistic ideals of E.V. Ramasami, popularly known as Periyar, the founder of the Self-Respect movement. Bharatidasan was attracted to it and took great interest in social reform. He actively participated in seminars and conferences organised by Dravidian leaders and became a close associate of Periyar. Bharatidasan was acknowledged as the Bard of the Dravidian Movement. He died on 21 April 1964 following a brief illness.
2. The Dasas are described as dark and ill-favoured, bull-lipped and snub-nosed
3. The Aryans are described as fair in complexion, tall and mostly long-headed.
4. Ilango Adigal, *Silappadikaram*, "Vanjina Malai," l. 53. Kannagi, the wife of Kovalan, the hero of the epic, lost her husband because the king of Madurai mistook him for a thief and beheaded him. Greatly anguished she vowed to destroy the city of Madurai by fire, except for the *parppar* and *aravor* (the people who follow moral preaching) and the *pasu*, the cow, of pattinippendir, i.e. chaste women.
5. Subramaniya Bharatiyar, *Bharatiyar Kavidaigal*, "Sudandirappallu," l. 3: "Parppanai Iyerendra Kalamum pocche" Gone are the days calling parppan as Iyer).
6. Tenkalaip parppan is the Vaishnava Brahmin who follows the Southern sect of Vaishnavism.
7. Vadakalaip parppan is the Vaishnava Brahmin who follows the Northern sect of

Vaishnavism.

8. Saivap parppan is the Saiva Brahmin of Tamil Nadu.
9. Tevaram: Tamil bhakti poems of the Saivite saints, viz. Tirunana Sambandar, Tirunavukkarasar and Sundarar who composed during AD 600 to 800.
10. Tiruvaymozhi: Tamil bhakti poems of the Vaishnavite saints, viz. Nammazhvar (circa AD 800).
- 11 I would like to thank my colleagues Dr C. Ravindran, Mr T.S. Satyanath, Dr P. Balasubramanian, Professor S.K. Das and Dr A. Mariappan for their valuable suggestions, comments and observations.

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