

MIDS WORKING PAPER NO. 245



READING SUBRAMANIA BHARATI UNDER PROGRESSIVE EYE

LITERARY CRITICISM AND
THE CULTURAL LEFT IN
TAMILNADU

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Published by

Madras Institute of Development Studies

79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar

Chennai 600020 India

Phone: 044 2441 1574/2589/9771

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Reading Subramania Bharati Under Progressive Eye

Literary Criticism and the Cultural Left in Tamilnadu

Rajesh Venkatasubramanian¹

Abstract

Modern Tamil literature traces its lineage to the iconic Tamil poet C. Subramania Bharati (1882–1921), among other foundational figures. Bharati is remembered every year on 11 December, his birth anniversary, to commemorate the day as Bharatiya Bhasha Diwas to promote language harmony in the country. While we recall the poet's life and compositions, we must remember that there is also a history of reception of Bharati in the intellectual tradition of the twentieth-century Tamilnadu. Bharati was variously referred to as *Desiya Kavi* (nationalist poet), *Vedanta Kavi* (vedantic poet), and *Maha Kavi* (great poet) by different people based on their ideological positions. Among many readings of Bharati, the efforts of literary critics associated with the progressive literary movement in Tamilnadu focused on his social and political message. The progressives reframed criticism to highlight hitherto much-neglected aspects of his poetry and prose, namely, the social reform and socialism on the one hand and his criticism of caste, patriarchy, and authoritarianism on the other. Focusing on the writings and speeches of P. Jeevanandam (1907–1963) and T.M. Chidambara Rangunathan (1923–2001), representative figures of the progressive literary movement in Tamilnadu, this paper attempts to outline their views on Bharati and evaluate the strength and weaknesses of their intervention.

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Acknowledgements This paper is part of the research work I carried out at the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) as an affiliate in 2024 during the sabbatical break from IISER Mohali. I thank Professor A.R. Venkatachalapathy for his encouragement and feedback on the research. I presented a seminar on this theme at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Tirupati and MIDS. I thank Professor A. Raghuramaraju for his encouragement and feedback on my talk at IIT Tirupati and the audience at both these institutions for their response during my talk.

Introduction

The University Grants Commission (UGC), a statutory organisation under the Ministry of Education, Government of India, sent a circular to institutions of higher learning in 2022 to observe 11 December every year as Bharatiya Bhasha Diwas to create language harmony, patriotism and cultural oneness of the nation. The Bhasha committee selected the date as it marks the birth anniversary of poet Subramania Bharati, a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry and freedom fighter against British colonial rule in India.¹ Marking the 100th anniversary of Bharati's death in 2021, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that a Tamil chair in the name of the poet will be set up at the Banaras Hindu University. What is interesting is the Prime Minister's observation that Bharati's intellectual output is the epitome of his neo-nationalist integration policy of 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'. In the inaugural edition of the Kashi Tamil Sangamam held in Banares in 2022, Minister of State L. Murugan claimed that Prime Minister Modi's 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat' policy is Subramania Bharati's dream.² These recent moves by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government to use the image of Subramania Bharati for the Hindutva project of a renewed national integration are indicative of the extent of appropriation of the poet happening in our times by the Hindu Right.³ However, what is important to note is that such a reading of Bharati by the Hindu Right as a poet who championed national integration, spiritualism and cultural oneness of the nation can be possible only by selective reading of the poet's life and intellectual output. The other aspect to be noted is that there is a history of the reception of Subramania Bharati in the Tamil intellectual tradition of the twentieth century. Excavating the plural histories of the reception of Bharati becomes urgent in today's context when the poet's image is deployed for an exclusionary version of nationalism premised on Hindutva. The afterlife of Bharati has been the subject of contending interpretations of people located in different ideological spectrums in Tamil intellectual history. Characterised variously as *Desiya Kavi* (nationalist poet), *Vedanta Kavi* (Vedantic poet), *Parppana Kavi* (Brahmin poet) and *Maha Kavi* (great poet) depending on the ideological leanings of the

critics, Bharati's works were freed from copyright of private individuals and organisations by the Government of Madras in the middle of the twentieth century.⁴ In this essay, I attempt to examine the reception of Bharati by the personalities associated with the Left in Tamilnadu. In particular, the essay focuses on the writings and speeches of P. Jeevanandam (1907-1963) (henceforth Jeeva), one of the well-known political figures associated with the Communist Party of India (CPI), and T.M. Chidambara Ragunathan (1923-2001), the literary critic, author and poet associated with the cultural Left in Tamilnadu. Although the influence of the Communist parties in Tamilnadu on the electoral front is minimal and confined to a few localities, the intellectual presence of the Left in the state is considerable to the extent that some of the leading writers and critics in the Tamil language of the twentieth century came under the spell of communist ideology and Communist Party at some point in their lives.⁵ The context of Left intervention in literary criticism during the middle of the twentieth century in Tamilnadu is marked by a lack of historical and sociological approach to Tamil literature. Informed by colonial philology and missionary discourse, the Dravidian ideologues were caught in the Aryan-Dravidian and Brahmin-non-Brahmin dichotomy in their reading of Tamil history.⁶ If *tanittamil iyakkam* (Pure Tamil Movement) of Maraimalai Adigal is understood as a strand of literary and cultural expression of the non-Brahmin Tamil nationalism, then it aspired for a certain antiquity and classicism lacking a dialectical understanding of language and history.⁷ In his survey of the modern Tamil prose, Zvelebil, while noting the lack of literary criticism in Tamil, traces the emergence of promising criticism in the writings of T.M.C Ragunathan, Kailasapathy and the Left and Marxist-oriented magazines like *Saraswati*, *Thamarai* and *Araichi* between the 1950s and the 1970s.⁸ Despite the presence of a vibrant Marxist tradition of literary criticism in Tamil, there has been no serious work in English language scholarship evaluating their works.⁹ However, before we examine the interventions of Jeeva and Ragunathan, it is necessary to do a brief survey of studies related to Bharati in Tamilnadu.

On Bharati Studies

Writing as late as 2012, historian Venkatachalapathy observed that there is no definitive biography of Bharati.¹⁰ Despite the avowed presence of ‘Bharati Scholars’ (*Bharati Aringnargal*) in Tamilnadu, a critical biography of the poet attentive to the socio-historical milieu is yet to be written. Although Bharati lived for merely 39 years, the period is characterised by far-reaching changes in national and international life. With few exceptions, the scholarship on Bharati is mainly about retrieving and publishing his poetry and prose writings from books, magazines and newspapers and recollecting his life by family members, friends and acquaintances.¹¹ This is understandable because several of Bharati’s poems and other writings were not published during his lifetime. Bharati’s literary career spanning 16 years from 1906 to 1921 included life in exile in French-ruled Pondicherry and constant surveillance from the British colonial state. Conditioned by the structural constraints of the colonial economy, Bharati faced several impediments in getting his works published including but not limited to finding patronage and the reading public.¹²

One of the critical works in the Tamil language that dealt with the afterlife of Bharati in Tamil society, especially the story of his elevation to the status of, and recognition as, *Maha Kavi*, is that of Sivathamby and Marx’s *Bharati: maraivu mutal mahakavi varai* (Bharati: From his Death to the Great Poet) (1984). Noting that the recognition of Bharati as *Maha Kavi* is a product of historical development that involved a series of debates in the Tamil intellectual tradition of the twentieth century after the poet’s death in 1921, the book attempts to reconstruct this intellectual debate in various stages. In the first stage, i.e. from 1921 to 1935, the authors argue that Bharati’s songs were indispensable to the nationalist movement in Tamilnadu in the aftermath of the non-cooperation movement. The imposition of the ban on Bharati’s poems by the colonial government in Burma in 1928 and the implementation of it in the Madras Presidency resulted in police seizing copies of his books. The ban sparked a debate in the Legislative Assembly, which was noted for the fiery speeches by Congress leader Satyamurthy

and others in favour of Bharati's poems and condemning the ban imposed by the colonial government. The authors point out rightly that there was a dialectical relationship between the growth of the anti-colonial nationalist movement and the fame of Bharati in Tamilnadu through the songs he composed. Except for the writings of Somasundara Bharati and Vipulanandar on Bharati's poetry, the literary world in Tamil, characterised by stagnancy during this phase, rarely recognised the literary status of Bharati.¹³ The situation would change in the next phase, i.e. from 1936 to 1944, during which not only Bharati's nationalist songs and other compositions such as *Panchali Sabatham*, *Kannan Pattu* and *Kuyil Pattu* were recognised and debated by literary circles in Tamilnadu but also his songs on social themes like criticism of caste, patriarchy and exploitation by the emerging socialists.

The formation of the literary magazine *Manikkodi* in 1933 by the efforts of K. Srinivasan, V. Ramasamy (known as Va. Ra.) and T.S. Chokkalingam is a landmark event recognised by scholars of Tamil literature. In the pages of *Manikkodi*, among other periodicals, Tamil writers started to discuss and recognise Bharati's literary stature. The authors argue that there was a fiery debate unfolded during this phase between two groups of writers led by Kalki Krishnamurthy on the one side and V. Ramasamy-led *Manikkodi* group of writers on the other on the question of Bharati's stature as a poet. Known as the 'Mahakavi' debate, it involved a series of writings on both sides of Bharati's compositions. The *Manikkodi* group of writers skillfully presented Bharati's literary aesthetics, especially his powerful poetic language, expression and imagination. They highlighted Bharati's poetic achievements in *Oozhikkoothu*, *Kuyil*, *Gyanaratham* and *Kannamma En Kathali* to establish their viewpoint. The authors argue that such a defence of Bharati was necessary for the legitimacy of the literary experiments carried out by the *Manikkodi* writers, who traced their own lineage to the *Mahakavi*. While they succeeded in their literary debate in establishing the stature of Bharati as *Mahakavi*, they failed to engage with the social and political message in Bharati's poetry.

During this period, several prose writings of Bharati were published for the first time, alongside some of his writings in English. Attempts

were also made to write biographies, albeit anecdotal in character, bordering on hagiography. In contrast to the 'literary' debate around Bharati's compositions, his poems on social themes were critically highlighted, discussed and presented by Bharathidasan in the pages of the literary magazine *Sri Subramania Bharati Kavita Mandalam* that he founded in 1935. Furthermore, the authors point out the role of the communist leader Jeeva in popularising Bharati, especially the social perspectives of the poet across Tamilnadu, through his speeches.¹⁴ The final stage in the making of *Mahakavi* was from 1945 to 1949. Bharati was recognised as a great poet by all sections of Tamil society, including the ideologues of the Dravidian Movement and Tamil Pundits. During this period, a memorial for the poet was also constructed and inaugurated in his native town of Ettayapuram in 1947, supported by the Tamil public, and a movement was launched to demand that the government nationalise his works. The authors discuss the writings of C.N. Annadurai, the ideologue and the front-ranking leader of the Dravidian Movement, and Vaiyapuri Pillai, the Tamil scholar on Bharati, to foreground their argument that their recognition of Bharati completed the circle in the making of *Mahakavi*. One of the important observations Sivathamby and Marx make in their work is the role of communist leader Jeeva in popularising the work of Bharati, especially conveying the revolutionary socio-political message of his poems to the Tamil public that was until then ignored by the rest.¹⁵ A brief discussion on the background and rise of the cultural Left in Tamilnadu is necessary before we take up the efforts of Jeeva and Ragunathan.

Cultural Left in Tamilnadu

The formation of the All-India Progressive Writers Association in 1936 in Lucknow signalled the entry and consolidation of the Left in the cultural sphere. The progressive cultural movement emerged in the confluence of three movements during the interwar years: the anti-colonial movement in large parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America, the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the anti-fascist movement in Europe.¹⁶ Premchand's presidential address at the first meeting of the progressive writers in India in 1936 embodied a

spirit of enquiry informed by new aesthetics and a sense of literature for social purposes. Although there was a broader representation of writers from different regions of the subcontinent in the first meeting of the progressive writers, the absence of representation from the Tamil region indicates the nature of the Left in the region and their attitude towards culture. Only in the late 1940s were attempts made to form an association of progressive writers in Tamilnadu but without much success. The pages of *Janasakthi*, initially published as a weekly newspaper of the Congress Socialist Party in Tamilnadu under the editorship of Jeeva in the late 1930s before it became the organ of the Communist Party, are a good example of the attitude of early Left leaders towards art and culture. While the newspaper covered political stories in India, there was hardly any discussion on art and culture. The Left's apathy towards language, caste and culture in their early phase in Tamilnadu has been commented upon by scholars contrary to the politics of the Dravidian Movement under the leadership of Periyar E.V. Ramasamy.¹⁷ The sole exception was Jeeva, who realised the potential of literature in political mobilisation and social transformation. Jeeva composed poems on the theme of socialism and labour. Some of the songs he composed were sung in labour meetings, stirring the masses into political action. The other feature of the Left in the Tamil region was the influence of Stalinism, which demanded strictly the party line and control over the sphere of culture and art.

The adoption by the CPI's national leadership of the 'Ranadive Line' at its Calcutta congress in 1948 that declared Indian independence as illegitimate and called for an armed insurrection against the Nehru government impacted the cultural sphere. This sectarian approach found expression in the pages of *Puthumai Ilakkiyam* and *Munnani* were received critically by the writers and intellectuals. Under this sectarian approach, the foundational literary figure of modern Tamil literature, Subramania Bharati, was declared a Brahmin-bourgeois poet.¹⁸

The failed project of the Calcutta Congress of 1948 and the adoption of the 'soft' parliamentary stance in 1953 at the third congress of the CPI in Madurai seemed to have shifted the stance towards art and

culture. However, the Stalinist tendencies of toeing the party line continued to exert their influence. While this was the case as far as the Party Left is concerned, the 1950s also saw interesting experiments in fiction writing and criticism by writers and intellectuals inspired by Marxism but remained outside the Communist Party framework. The rise of literary criticism inspired by Marxism in the middle of the twentieth century paved the way for critical studies of Tamil literature. The role of left-leaning literary magazines in Tamil, such as *Saraswati*, *Santhi*, *Thamarai* and *Araichi*, cannot be underestimated in terms of the development of literary criticism.¹⁹ These publications produced a group of brilliant young writers and critics like T.M.C. Ragunathan, R.K. Kannan and N. Vanamamalai and introduced Sri Lankan scholars like K. Kailasapathy and K. Sivathamby. Some of the early writings of these scholars appeared in the pages of these literary magazines, including critical essays on Bharati and other themes. With this background, we now examine the interventions of Jeeva and Ragunathan on Bharati.

Jeeva's *Bharati Vazhi* (Bharati's Path)

'Jeeva will ever be recognized as the first man to speak knowledgeable about Bharati - speak in such fashion as to make his listeners proud of Bharati. He had new insights into Bharati and expounded them so clearly and forcefully that Bharati himself would have been astounded had he listened to Jeeva!'

Dandapani Jayakanthan, *A Literary Man's Political Experiences*, translated with an Introduction by M.S. Venkataramani, Vikas Publishing House, 1976, p. 132.

'Jeeva spoke very soon. It was only then that I listened to Jeeva's speech for the first time. He spoke about my father in a new way and in diverse colours. His speech drowned me in the ocean of happiness. When Jeeva spoke passionately, I felt as if I saw my father in front of me. From that day, whenever I found an opportunity, I used to go to the meetings in which Jeeva spoke'.

Sagunthala Bharati, 'My father identified by Jeeva', Special issue of *Thamarai* (1963) on Jeeva. Quoted in Karthigesu Sivathamby

and A. Marx, *Bharati: maraivu mutal mahakavi varai* (Bharati: From his Death to the Great Poet), New Century Book House, Chennai, 1984, p. 171. (Translation mine).

There are a few personalities in the history of the twentieth-century Tamilnadu who experienced different strands of political culture in their public life. Born in 1907 in the village of Boothapandi in the current Kanyakumari District of Tamilnadu, Jeeva was inspired by Gandhian nationalism in his youth and participated in the boycott of foreign goods during the Non-Cooperation Movement.²⁰ He took to wearing a simple handmade *Khadi* during those days, a practice he continued till the end of his life, although he subsequently moved out of Congress due to its social conservatism and joined Periyar E.V. Ramasamy's Self-Respect Movement in the late 1920s. Inspired by the message of *samadharmā* (equality) and *suyamariyadhāi* (self-respect), Jeeva participated actively in the Periyar's movement, contributing poems and translations to the periodicals of the movement.

Given that Bharati's songs were integrally linked to the nationalist movement in the Tamil region, Jeeva must have come under the spell of his songs during this phase. Along with Singaravelu, considered to be one of the early communist leaders in South India, Jeeva pressed for socialism in the early 1930s in the Self-Respect Movement, as evident from the Erode Plan endorsed in the annual Self-Respect Conference in 1933. When Periyar abandoned socialism in favour of social reform, Jeeva parted ways with the Self-Respect Movement and joined the Congress Socialist Party in Tamilnadu. He edited *Janasakthi*, the weekly organ of the Congress Socialist Party in Tamilnadu in 1938. On 10 September 1938, Jeeva appealed in a note in *Janasakthi* to the readers to celebrate Bharati Day (his anniversary falls on 11 September) all over Tamilnadu. He observed that although Bharati's writings have regressive ideas of the feudal-bourgeois nature, they are far outweighed by the progressive socio-political and economic message for the nation. Furthermore, the note highlighted the political nature of Bharati's artistic compositions, which are accessible to a large number of people and are in tune with the modern democratic world. Bharati brought a revolutionary transformation in the composition style and

language use. Being an extremist, he combined these qualities with a socio-political and economic message aimed at the country's complete independence from colonial rule.²¹ It is instructive to note that Jeeva highlighted the social and political content of Bharati's intellectual output right from the beginning when others were ignoring them.

On the eve of the inauguration of a memorial building (*manimandapam*) for Bharati in his native town of Ettayapuram in October 1947, the CPI brought out a booklet authored by Jeeva titled *Bharati Vazhi* (Bharati's Path) printed at the Janasakthi press. *Bharati Vazhi* is a text of Jeeva's speech at the inaugural function of the Bharati Memorial, attended by political and literary figures in Tamilnadu.²² Of Jeeva's available writings, *Bharati Vazhi* is the first systematic exposition of Bharati's life and message to a popular audience. Such an exposition comes in the wake of India's political independence from the clutches of colonial rule, and the country's transition to a democratic republic makes it a significant intervention. Jeeva initially argues that Bharati is being recognised as a revolutionary people's poet today thanks to expanding political, economic and social consciousness among people. This was not always so in the past. Bharati was either ignored or unjustly criticised by people of diverse ideologies. He was variously described as an 'Opium addict poet' (*Kanja Pulavan*), a fanatic of women's liberation, a poet unaware of the grammar and a mere nationalist poet. He was suspected by the critics of Brahmanism that he composed poetry to preserve his privileges. There was even a debate among writers whether he was a Mahakavi. Bharati was criticised for his caste and dubbed as a Brahmin by the ideologues of the Dravidian Movement. For Jeeva, Bharati's writings capture the multi-dimensional nature of India's freedom struggle and the ideologies intertwined with it. Like any other extraordinary poet, Bharati was acutely following the socio-political developments and the accompanying consciousness during his age. Some critics consider Bharati a poet who merely writes about contemporary issues that lack philosophical ideals. Jeeva reminds such critics that there is no truth beyond socio-political problems. Bharati's pride and uniqueness rest on capturing the broad-based, multi-dimensional nature of the nationalist movement. To understand

Bharati, it is necessary to comprehend the history of the nationalist movement in India in its totality.

Jeeva argues that in the long Tamil literary tradition, Bharati replaced devotion to God with devotion to the nation. His patriotism is built not merely on anti-colonial sentiment but equally against all other forms of slavery and subordination. Therefore, the notion of freedom that Bharati conceptualised is much vaster than imagined by his contemporaries. He deployed literary forms like Pattu, Kanni, Viruttam, Pallu, Kummi and so on to convey the message of freedom in straightforward terms. Jeeva takes up two poems in particular from Bharati's compositions to discuss his broader definition of freedom – *Suthanthira Pallu* and *Viduthalai* (Liberation) – composed during the Swadeshi days.²³ While singing the joyful freedom (*ananda suthantiram*) in *Suthanthira Pallu*, Bharati did not just talk of freedom from the British but freedom from the clutches of the caste system and Varna society. He sang freedom for the labour from the exploitation of the propertied class. In the same poem, Bharati emphasised the right to the commons of land and the nation. It is instructive to note that when the very same poem was rendered as a song in the movie *Nam Iruvar*, released in 1947, produced and directed by A.V. Meiyappa Chettiar and sung by DK Pattammal, the verses critical of Brahmin superiority were left out. This shows how the propertied, privileged and dominant groups in Tamil society received Bharati at a time when Jeeva was showcasing the radical social message of Bharati to the Tamil public.

Similarly, in the poem *Viduthalai* (Song of Liberation), Jeeva argues that Bharati was not satisfied with mere freedom from British rule. He demands freedom for Paraiyas, Pulayas, Kuravars, Maravars and Paravas, that is Dalits and Adivasis. For Jeeva, Bharati championed the cause of republican values and welcomed the revolution in Russia. While the Tamil tradition upheld monarchy based on righteous (*Senghol*) rule, in modern times, the institution is replaced with the rule of people. Being a democrat and republican, Bharati wrote poems against authoritarian forms of government. Through creatively engaging with Bharati's poems against monarchical forms of government, Jeeva warns the princely states

such as Nizam of Hyderabad and Maharaja of Mysore to recognise the rising tide of people's democratic aspirations.²⁴ Bharati welcomed the transformation in Russia brought about by the Revolution in 1917. He described the fall of the Czarist regime as a 'collapsing wall' and metaphorically characterised the event as the end of Kali Yuga and the subsequent establishment of the Republic as the dawn of Krita Yuga. Referring to Bharati as a friend of the November Revolution in Russia, Jeeva reminds us that Bharati's famous poem *Bharata Samudhayam*, in which he undoubtedly establishes the communist society as a destiny of India, was born after his celebration of the Russian Revolution.²⁵ To establish this new ideal, the old perspectives and ways of life need to be abandoned. Quoting Karl Marx from *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* that the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living, Jeeva argues that Bharati realised this truth and strived to counter outdated views and perspectives. In *Puthiya Athichudi*, Bharati appealed to the young to not fear for the tradition and aspire for the new. Elsewhere, he penned poems targeting tendencies that venerate the past and superstitions.²⁶ For Jeeva, Bharati was critical of Brahmanical religion and caste society. He attacked the exploitative character of Brahmanical priesthood in *Maravan Pattu*. While at one level he targeted Brahmanism and caste order, he sang for the liberation of Paraiyars, Pulayars and other subaltern communities at another. Jeeva argues that through his private life and public literary life, Bharati attempted to dismantle caste. Citing a verse from *Murasu*, Jeeva appeals to the youth of the Dravidian Movement and the Brahmin community in Tamilnadu to follow Bharati's path to abolish the caste system.²⁷ Bharati's other message in his poems is communal harmony and the need for people of different faiths to live together harmoniously.

Bharati, according to Jeeva, did not participate in the Aryan-Dravidian debates. However, being a Tamilian, Bharati highlighted the achievements of Tamil letters and pressed for the development of the Tamil language by importing contemporary ideas around the world. Bharati praised the poetic achievements of Kamban, Thiruvalluvar and Ilango Adigal and saw in their literary works an unparalleled literary genius not found anywhere in the world. Jeeva

noted that this tendency in Bharati to praise the Tamil language and poets in the Tamil literary tradition should not be mistaken for his blind adoration for the past. Bharati encouraged translating literary works and ideas from the rest of the world into Tamil. While highlighting Bharati's priority for Tamil, Jeeva presents him as a poet who stood for the rights of the Tamil people and the Tamil region. Bharati comes out as a champion of federal consciousness and the rights of the people of the Tamil state to self-determination. According to Jeeva, Bharati conceptualised India as a union of states in the poem *Thayin Manikkodi*, where he summons different nationalities under the flag.²⁸

Bharati composed poems targeting attitudes and structures that subordinated women. Quoting a verse from Bharati's autobiographical poem, Jeeva argued that for Bharati political and other forms of freedom are incomplete if women remain in a subordinate position. Bharati considered human achievements such as going to space as lifeless if women's freedom is not achieved. He deployed such popular literary forms as *Kummi* to sing about women's liberation. For Jeeva, Bharati was acutely aware of class differences in society. In some of his songs, Bharati portrayed the struggles of propertyless peasants and the poor. Having lived before the days of labour activism of the workers and peasants and the formation of trade union congress and Kisan Sabhas, Bharati stood on the side of workers in his songs.²⁹

Jeeva ends his speech with a note that Bharati has been recognised by all sections of Tamil society, including the intelligentsia and the political community. It is binding on the part of young poets and writers to stand shoulder to shoulder with the people of Tamilnadu in their struggles to achieve a new Tamil society. More importantly, Jeeva observed that Bharati's intellectual output is a common property of the Tamil people and the global community. The copyright of his books was in the hands of Bharati's half-brother Visvanathan, and the rights to use them in films, on radio and gramophone with Meiyappa Chettiar. Jeeva appealed to them to give up their rights for the benefit of the Tamil people. He also appealed to the Madras government to declare Bharati's works as people's property if Visvanathan and Meiyappa Chettiar delayed

their surrender of rights.³⁰ It has been said by more than one commentator that Jeeva's speech not only stood out from the rest of the speakers at the inaugural function but also lasted the longest, notwithstanding the limited time allotted to him.³¹

Ragunathan's *Bharati: Kalamum Karuthum* (*Bharati: His Times and Ideology*)

'Ragunathan occupies an important place in the growth of modern literary criticism along scientific lines.'

Kalanidhi K. Sivathamby, Interview by Ponneelan in *Engal Ragunathan* (Our Ragunathan), New Century Book House, Chennai, 2004, p. 72.

T.M. Chidambara Ragunathan (1923–2001), known in the literary circles in Tamilnadu as Tho.Mu.Ci., is a versatile literary personality who wrote novels, short stories, poetry, literary criticism, intellectual biographies and translated works from Russian literature into Tamil.³² One of the representative writers of the cultural Left in Tamilnadu, Ragunathan was associated with *Kalai Ilakkiya Perumandram* (Tamilnadu Art-Literary Federation), the cultural wing of the Tamilnadu unit of the CPI, in various capacities as founder, member, president and vice president since the formation of the organisation in the early 1960s. Born in the Tamil literary heartland of Tirunelveli, Ragunathan's education at the Hindu College in the town was disrupted due to his participation in the Quit India movement when the colonial state arrested him. He took to journalism, assisting and editing Tamil periodicals from the 1940s, such as *Dinamani Prasuram*, *Mullai*, *Sakthi* and *Santhi*. For over two decades from the 1960s, Ragunathan was the editor of Soviet Land magazine in Tamil. He authored *Panchum Pasiyum* (Cotton and Hunger, 1953), the first socialist realist novel in Tamil that portrayed the conditions of cotton mill workers and their struggles. Ragunathan also translated Maxim Gorky's novel *Mother* into Tamil as *Thai* (1975). More importantly, Ragunathan wrote a series of works of literary criticism and intellectual biographies of foundational figures of modern Tamil literature, such as Pudhumaipithan and Subramania Bharati. Inspired by Jeeva's

speeches on Bharati, Ragunathan studied Bharati's life and intellectual output critically from the early 1960s, resulting in a series of publications such as *Bharatiyum Shelleyum* (1964), *Gangaiyum Kaviriyum* (1966), *Bharati: Sila Parvaigal* (1982), *Bharati: Kalamum Karuthum* (1982) and *Panchali Sabatham: Uraiporulum Maraiporulum* (1987).³³ While his initial works on Bharati adopted a comparative approach (*oppiyal ilakkiyam*) to the study of literature, the latter works were based on sociological and historical methods of literary criticism. Influenced by the Marxist method and progressive ideology, writers such as Ragunathan and Kailasapathy undertook a novel comparative approach to the study of Tamil literature in the 1960s. Such early studies undertaken by Ragunathan examined the influence of the ideas of English poet Shelley on Bharati's compositions as the poet returned from Banares at the turn of the twentieth century, addressing himself as a Shelley Dasan (disciple of Shelley). In *Gangaiyum Kaviriyum* (1966), Ragunathan studied the lives of Tagore and Bharati in a comparative framework, situating the life and compositions of two great poets of the Indian subcontinent in historical context. The work emerged from reading Tagore's works and visiting Kolkata to celebrate Tagore's centenary in 1961.³⁴ Ragunathan delivered talks on Bharati during the anniversaries of the poet's birth and death at Ettayapuram, and some of these talks were expanded and published in book form.³⁵ In many ways, Ragunathan's *Bharati: Kalamum Karuthum* (1982) is different from his previous works on Bharati, as he himself discloses in the preface. The book was published during Bharati's birth centenary year and earned the Sahitya Akademi award for Ragunathan in 1983. Focusing on only seven years of Bharati's life, i.e. from 1905 to 1911, the book contains more than 500 pages. An unusual piece of scholarship in the intellectual tradition of twentieth-century Tamilnadu, the book provides a new kind of political and intellectual biography of Bharati during the crucial years of the Swadeshi Movement in India and Tamilnadu. Straddling nationalist historiography on modern Indian history, several pre-existing scholarly works on Bharati and Bharati's own poems and prose writings, Ragunathan provides not only an account of the evolution of political consciousness in Bharati but, more importantly, the poet's relationship with the underground violent revolutionary movement in India. For Ragunathan, this aspect of

Bharati's life has been deliberately ignored, denied, distorted and hidden by the hitherto existing literature on Bharati in Tamilnadu.³⁶ He speculates that the colonial conditions of surveillance and the ascendancy of non-violent Gandhism must have prevented scholars from paying attention to Bharati's political life, especially his relationship with the violent revolutionary movement in India. The book contains eight essays other than the introduction. The essays examines the evolution of nationalist political consciousness in Bharati (*Desabhaktiyin Vithu*), the first newspaper (*Swadesamitran*) that he was part of (*Mutal Pattrikkai*), his involvement in the periodical on women's development (*Chakravartini*), the content of his teacher's (Sister Nivedita) message (*Gurumaniyin Upadesam*), the extremist nationalism and revolutionary movement (*Tivira Desiyavathamum Puratchi Iyakkamum*), facts emerging from *India* weekly that Bharati edited ('*India*' *Unarttum Unmaigal*) and the fire bred by his poetry (*Kavithaiyil Theritha Kanal*) followed by afterword (*Pinnurai*).

The first problem that Rangunathan addresses in the book is the emergence of anti-colonial nationalist consciousness in Bharati. Bharati dedicated his first few publications, which came out from 1908 to 1910, to Sister Nivedita, acknowledging her for imparting Swadeshi consciousness in him. Teasing out contradictory information found in the biographies of Bharati by Chellamma, Padmanabhan and others, Rangunathan claims that Bharati met Sister Nivedita in December 1905 when he attended the annual Congress meeting at Kashi.³⁷ That said, for Rangunathan, the seeds of anti-British consciousness in Bharati were sown during his teenage years around 1897 when Bharati was fourteen years old. By then, Bharati's father Chinnaswamy's cotton ginning factory collapsed due to European competition. Rangunathan cites Bharati's autobiographical poem, which was written much later, in which he blamed the British for the loss his father suffered in the business as evidence for his claim.³⁸ This early anti-British feeling in Bharati evolved into an anti-colonial nationalist consciousness in 1903. In a preface to his second publication, *Gnana Bhoomi* (1909), Bharati wrote that he and his countrymen came under the spell of nationalism in 1902-03. Rangunathan argues that the anti-colonial nationalist consciousness in Bharati emerged in the context of the

country suffering from plague famine on the one hand and the grand Durbar in Delhi in 1903 to celebrate the coronation of King Edward VII by Viceroy Curzon. Bharati was in Benares by then, having studied Western writers and being influenced, in particular, by the works of the English poet Shelley. However, for Rangunathan, the real meaning of Bharati's own disclosure that Sister Nivedita imparted Swadeshi consciousness to him must be decoded.³⁹ He takes up this task in the fourth essay, '*Gurumaniyin Upadesam*'.

The second and third essays in this book are about Bharati's journalistic experience in *Swadesamitran* and *Chakravartini*. Bharati joined *Swadesamitran*, the mouthpiece of the moderate Congress owned by G. Subramania Iyer, as a subeditor in November 1904, and continued till May 1906 before he took up the editorship of an extremist weekly *India*. In between, Bharati was editing a monthly *Chakravartini*, a magazine for the development of Indian women. The biographers and scholars of Bharati in Tamilnadu provided contradictory information regarding the early journalistic life of Bharati. For example, one of the prevailing views among the early biographers of Bharati was that *Swadesamitran* and *Chakravartini* were published in the same office owned by G. Subramania Iyer. By attentively reading the pages of *Swadesamitran* and a few issues of *Chakravartini* (July and August 1906) that he was able to discover, Rangunathan provides a corrective that the latter magazine was not published in the same place as the former but owned by one Vaidyanatha Iyer in Triplicane. Rangunathan speculates that Bharati may have taken up the editorship of *Chakravartini* in order to supplement his meagre earnings at the *Swadesamitran* with the consent of Subramania Iyer.⁴⁰ Besides, he also does a useful survey of the topics covered in the *Chakravartini* from the few issues he managed to collect and consult. Having taken up the editorship of *Chakravartini* in August 1905, Bharati wrote editorials and preferred to publish women's writings. Bharati wrote on the subject of Love (*Kathal*) in one of the editorials for the July 1906 issue. Divided into three sections, love, chastity and family welfare, Bharati elaborates on these subjects. While he celebrates chastity as a virtue, he also recognises and critiques the gendered embodiment of this quality. He indicts Indian men of the ancient and contemporary periods for lacking this

quality but does not seem to recognise the patriarchal character of the demand for chastity on women. Bharati also seemed to have penned a serialised story, Tulasibhai Charithram, in *Chakravartini* under the pen name of Shelley Dasan. The story is about Tulasibhai, a Rajput woman in love with Abbas Khan, a Muslim warrior. In the July 1906 issue of *Chakravartini*, Bharati seemed to have ended the story with the couple marrying despite their religious differences. Bharati argues that true love triumphs over religion and caste differences and cites examples of inter-religious marriages during the time of Akbar. Written in the wake of the Bengal partition, Rangunathan claims that Bharati appealed for Hindu-Muslim unity through such interventions.⁴¹

One of the core portions of the book is a lengthy essay titled *Gurumaniyin Upadesam* (Teacher's Discourse), in which Rangunathan attempts to decode the discourse of Sister Nivedita to Bharati. Noting that the early biographers of Bharati failed even to mention the meeting of Bharati with Nivedita and her impact on him, Rangunathan notes that the first references to such a meeting between the two appear in the testimony provided by Bharati's wife Chellamma in her biography of her husband written in 1941. Later-day biographers and scholars of Bharati, such as Padmanabhan, Thooran and others, relied on Chellamma's testimony to reproduce the event in their works. According to Rangunathan, Chellamma does not provide a clear picture of the meeting and the message, except that Sister Nivedita insisted on Bharati to overcome the consciousness of differences among human beings and treat women equally. Given that Chellamma's testimony contradicted whatever we knew of Bharati until his meeting with Sister Nivedita, Rangunathan proceeds to decode the true content of the discourse.⁴² This entails a recourse to Vivekananda's life and teachings and his influence on the younger generation of nationalists in India. Rangunathan claims that although Vivekananda talked about spiritualism and philosophy, his message was primarily Indian nationalism. Noting that Vivekananda met Russian revolutionaries like Bakunin and Kropotkin in his trips to the United States and England, Rangunathan claims that he supported a secret violent revolutionary movement upon his return to India to overthrow British rule.⁴³

The younger generation of extremists in Madras like Bharati, Subramania Siva and V.O. Chidambaram Pillai came under the spell of Vivekananda's teachings. This, claims Rangunathan, motivated Bharati to meet Vivekananda's disciple Sister Nivedita at Kashi in 1905. Before dwelling on the content of Nivedita's conversation with Bharati, Rangunathan discusses Margaret Elizabeth Noble's life from Ireland to becoming Nivedita as a disciple of Vivekananda. Following Vivekananda's death, Nivedita motivated several young nationalists some of whom took to violent revolutionary tactics against the British. Bharati noted in his dedication of his initial few publications to Nivedita that she revealed the complete stature of the nation (*Bharata Devi*) and imparted swadeshi nationalism in him like Krishna showed his stature to Arjun to impart the godly message. Rangunathan takes note of the impact of the *Bhagavad Gita* among the nationalists of the times and the meaning they derived from the text, prioritising Karma or action and the belief that the soul is immortal. *Gita* had come to inspire extremists and revolutionary nationalists of the times. Reading other compositions of Bharati, Rangunathan claims that Nivedita impressed on Bharati of the violent methods of struggle to evict British rule in India.⁴⁴ In the following essay on extremist nationalism and revolutionary movement, Rangunathan surveys the profiles of extremist nationalists like Tilak, Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal and argues that, while their struggle was based on agitational politics, they maintained contacts with and encouraged revolutionaries who adopted violent methods. Rangunathan speculates that Bharati, being a representative of extremist nationalism in Madras, also must have organised a secret society in Madras and encouraged the method of secret armed struggle with the British. Rangunathan relies on two stray personal recollections of Bharati by Narayana Iyengar, a friend of Bharati, published in Tamil daily *Dinamani* in 1956, where Iyengar observed that Bharati was involved in secret violent activities in Madras during the Swadeshi days.⁴⁵

As if to substantiate this speculative argument, he does a survey of Bharati's extremist weekly *India* in the following essay, '*India*' *Unarthum Unmaigal*. Rangunathan argues that there are indirect references in the writings of Bharati in the pages of *India* that point to his encouragement and endorsement of violent armed struggle

against British rule in India. Furthermore, several organisations and volunteer associations were formed during the Swadeshi Movement to provide physical training and character building. Ragunathan further speculates that Bharati may have had contact with the secret society in Madras. By scrutinising the records associated with the murder of Robert Ashe, the district collector of Tirunelveli, Ragunathan argues that secret societies were functioning in Madras and Bharati must have been associated with them.⁴⁶ Only in the final essay, 'Afterword', Ragunathan evaluates the nature of the Swadeshi nationalism of Bharati. While the anti-colonial nature of Swadeshi nationalism was progressive in nature, it took a regressive, exclusivist Hindu religious character, alienating in the process the Muslims of India. Although Bharati made an effort to overcome this limit, for example, by issuing a disclaimer to the poem on Shivaji that it was not the intention to have enmity with Muslims and that on another occasion, he made an appeal to celebrate Akbar Day; nevertheless, it was overwhelmingly pro-Hindu in character. For Ragunathan, Bharati was also swept away in the flood by the Hindu character of Swadeshi nationalism. The other important critical observation of Ragunathan was that Bharati prioritised political independence over social reforms during this phase, although we may find a few references in his poems to reforms in society. It was only after the decline of the Swadeshi Movement that we find Bharati composing more on social reformist themes.⁴⁷

Situating Left Reading of Bharati

It is widely acknowledged that Jeeva's speeches on Bharati on several public platforms in Tamilnadu constitute the earliest Left reading of the poet.⁴⁸ In the late 1930s, he was cautious about pointing out the existence of regressive feudal-bourgeois elements in Bharati's writings, but he soon abandoned this tendency to focus only on the progressive side in the subsequent decades. One of the major limitations of Jeeva was his focus only on Bharati's poetry, ignoring his prose writings. Jeeva's approach to Bharati was instrumentalist in character to suit the compulsions of the Left politics. Being the editor of the Communist Party newspaper

Janasakthi and a politician adept in public speaking, his writings and speeches on Bharati focused less on the biographical details of the poet but more on the thematic issues central to the politics of the Left, such as socialism, social reform, Tamil linguistic consciousness and Tamil identity, and Indian nationalism attentive to federal sensibilities. At the heart of such politics is the urge to democratise culture. This involved reading Bharati in a particular way and approaching his intellectual output synchronously. Jeeva takes the canon of Bharati for granted and freely moves around his poetry without adequately discussing the historical context taken into account. In *Bharati Vazhi*, for example, Jeeva culls out a few lines from several of Bharati's poems from his canon in his thematically arranged speech without going into the historical context of those poems. As Panikkar pointed out elsewhere, the instrumentalist approach of the Left towards culture entails privileging politics over culture rather than allowing for a possibility of a dialectical interplay between the two.⁴⁹ While such selective reading of Bharati for the compulsions of the Left politics brought out the themes that were ignored by others until then, it also involved suppressing those aspects that were not directly beneficial for the brand of politics that Jeeva represented. An overtly Hindu religious tonality of Bharati's songs during the days of the Swadeshi movement was underplayed, ignored or interpreted differently in Jeeva's speeches and writings. It is those unattended aspects of Bharati's poetry and prose by the Left that were mobilised by his critics to dismiss him altogether or co-opt him for reactionary politics.⁵⁰ Jeeva's interventions on Bharati inspired subsequent writers and critics of the Left to study the life and compositions of the poet critically. Ragnathan referred to Jeeva as 'Living Bharati' (*nadamadam Bharati*) in one of his essays.⁵¹ Jeeva's contribution lies in popularising Bharati to the Tamil public at a time when the Dravidian political discourse in the state ignored him on the grounds of Bharati's caste. Furthermore, his forceful appeal in the 1947 speech at Ettayapuram to individuals to give up copyrights of Bharati's compositions and make it a common property of the Tamil people through state intervention set off a series of developments that ultimately would result in the nationalisation of Bharati's works.⁵²

Ragunathan's *Bharati: Kalamum Karuthum* suffers from excessive reliance on secondary works to make a series of speculative conclusions. Ragunathan has not delved into the rich colonial archive on Bharati to explain the attitude of the state and its repressive apparatus to the poet's activities during the crucial phase of his political life. It is paradoxical that a work that promised to offer us an insight into Bharati's relationship with the violent revolutionary movement ignored the documents produced by the colonial governmental apparatus.⁵³ We are left with Ragunathan's reading of pre-existing published works on Bharati's life and his poetry, prose and journalistic writings. Ragunathan's understanding of the Swadeshi Movement is based on nationalist historiography. He quotes R.C. Mujumdar, R.G. Pradhan, Tilak, Lajpat Rai and others while commenting on the events during the Swadeshi movement. Sumit Sarkar's *Swadeshi Movement in Bengal* (1973), one of the critical works on the Swadeshi era, is missing in Ragunathan's work. Only at the end of his book does he discuss the limits of the Swadeshi movement. The observation that Bharati's politics during this phase was coloured with the dominant Hindu religion and imagery comes out reluctantly at the end. This anxiety on the part of the Tamil Left to transpose their own failures onto the anticipations in Bharati's life and works brings to the fore the importance of nostalgia and melancholy in examining the intellectual history of the Left.⁵⁴ Ragunathan's narrative style and the language deployed appeared like a detective crime novel rather than a work of historical scholarship. Despite these limitations, Ragunathan's exhaustive work focusing on an important phase of Bharati's life can be considered a unique and significant intervention on Bharati in the Tamil language scholarship of the twentieth century. His work brought contradictory information on Bharati's life to the fore in the pre-existing biographies and scholarly works on the poet.

Conclusion

In the Tamil Republic of Letters, there are no two opinions in Tamilnadu about the position of Bharati in modern Tamil literature.⁵⁵ The literary merits of his compositions have long been

debated and exhausted by fellow writers and critics. Right from the late colonial period, Bharati's poems were institutionalised in school textbooks for learning in Tamilnadu. His songs were played in Tamil films, *katcheris* and street theatres. Bharati's iconic status in Tamilnadu is part of the story of his remarkable afterlife. Despite all this, we do not yet have a critical, definitive biography of the poet in Tamil and English language scholarship. The Leftist literature emerged in the context of a lack of development of literary criticism in Tamil informed by sociological and historical methods. While the party Left encouraged the celebration of Bharati Day across Tamilnadu right from the late 1930s, as evident from the advertisements and notes in its official party organ *Janasakthi*, literary criticism informed by the Marxist method emerged in the pages of Leftist literary magazines like *Santhi* and *Saraswati* in the 1950s. Left-leaning critics like R.K. Kannan, Raguathan, Kailasapathy and Kesavan, to name a few, wrote about Bharati's life and poetry. Their interventions enriched our understanding of Bharati, especially the social and political perspectives offered by his poetry. The comparative method adopted by Raguathan and Kailasapathy allowed us to recognise Bharati's personality, intellect and literary output in relation to other literary figures of the times. Although Jeeva's approach to Bharati was instrumentalist in character conforming to the dictates of the Communist Party politics, he was the earliest from the Left to popularise Bharati and creatively identified the social and political content of his poetry to the Tamil public. Besides, Jeeva inspired other Left critics in Tamilnadu and Sri Lanka to study Bharati, as evident from the dedication of their books on Bharati to him. Today, Bharati is being appropriated by the Hindu Right for their renewed neo-nationalist project premised on majoritarian religion. Does the Left reading of Bharati contain resources to counter the Hindutva co-option of Bharati? If selectivity is what characterises the Hindu Right's use of Bharati for the Hindutva project, the very same selective reading of Bharati by the Left offers resources for counter-hegemony. Having lived during the period of transition in Indian political life of the modern period, Bharati's life and works embody contradictory tendencies. Critics have pointed out, for example, the differences between his poetry and prose writings, the former containing radical thought while the latter conforming to tradition and

customary ideas.⁵⁶ Bharati studies and the historiography of early twentieth-century South India have not explored the kaleidoscopic nature of the times, events and individuals unlike studies on other provinces like Bengal. The absence of studies on the Swadeshi period in the south like that of Sumit Sarkar's monumental work on Bengal has resulted in simpler tales of individuals like Bharati either understood as embodying progressive social and political ideas as the Left has argued ignoring his other dimensions of thought or spiritualism and Hindu nationalism as Right has committed.⁵⁷ There are studies that focus only on the literary aspects of Bharati's life ignoring his public and political life. Commenting on Sumit Sarkar's work on the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, Neeladri Bhattacharya has argued that the productive use of irony in history writing by Sarkar has offered us a complex image of the Swadeshi era and a nuanced understanding of the historical events and individuals of the time. As Bhattacharya argues, 'An ironic stance is premised on the idea that nothing in the world can be taken for granted, things are not just what they appear to be, people turn out to be somewhat different from how they see and project themselves. A productive use of irony allows a dialogic vision that believes even as it doubts. It is sensitive to the comic and the absurd even as it recognizes the heroic and the noble. Sceptical of essentialising narratives it sees dualities, contradictions, and paradoxes in the field that it surveys'.⁵⁸ In the absence of such an exploration in the historiography of modern South India, we need to contend with the binary readings of the historical figures such as Bharati in Tamilnadu.

Notes

1. As per the *Annual Report* of the UGC (2023), the Letter to Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) regarding Bharatiya Bhasha Diwas was uploaded on their website on 28 October 2022.
2. The announcement of the chair in the name of Subramania Bharati at BHU by Prime Minister Modi was widely reported in the press. See Chaturvedi (2021); for the claim of L. Murugan, see Press Information Bureau (2022, November 19).
3. For an overview of the BJP's attempts to get a foothold in Tamilnadu, see Arun Kumar (2024).
4. For a fascinating account of the nationalisation of Bharati's works, see Venkatachalapathy (2018b); for a Tamil version, see Venkatachalapathy, (2015).
5. To cite an example, Dandapani Jayakanthan, the recipient of the Jnanpith Award, India's highest literary award in 2002 for Tamil language, writes, thus, 'The Communist Party became my *gnana thanthai* - an expression that may be rather clumsily translated as intellectual father.' (Jayakanthan, 1976, p. xliv); Sundara Ramaswamy, another literary figure in contemporary Tamil literature, was drawn to the Communist Party in the early 1950s. Several of his early fictions were serialised in Left leaning literary magazines like *Santhi* and *Saraswati*. For more on Sundara Ramaswamy, see Venkatachalapathy (2018a, pp. 147-159).
6. (Ravindiran, 2000).
7. (Kailasapathy, 1979; Sivathamby, 1979).
8. (Zvelebil, 1973).
9. In Tamil language scholarship, the work of Sri Lankan Tamil scholar M. A. Nuhman (2014) does a useful survey of Marxist literary criticism in Tamil.
10. See Venkatachalapathy, (2012, p. 51). Venkatachalapathy (2018b) would repeat it in the following terms, 'Subramania Bharati has been ill-served by biographers in English' (p. 170). J. B. P. More (2017), another historian of South India, noted in one of his works on Bharati, 'As a matter of fact, it is nearly century since Bharathi passed away. But a complete and critical biography of Bharathi has still not seen the light' (p. 9).
11. (Chellamma, 1955; Padmanabhan, 2006; Sagunthala, 1974).
12. For a social history of Bharati's publications, see the section on Subramania Bharati in *The Province of the Book* by Venkatachalapathy (2012, pp. 51-64).
13. See Sivathamby & Marx (1984, pp. 46-96).

14. See Sivathamby & Marx (1984, pp. 150–194).
15. See Sivathamby & Marx (1984, pp. 195–225).
16. See Ahmad (2011) and Namboodiripad (2011).
17. See Rajesh (2023) and Vaitheespara & Rajesh (2015).
18. See Ragunathan & Poneelan (1994, p. 52).
19. See Zvelebil (1973, p. 288).
20. A critical biography of Jeeva is yet to be published. *Jeevanandam* by Selvaraj (2002) is an accessible work in Tamil. An excellent account of Jeevanandam’s personality can be found in Sundara Ramaswamy’s 2006 memoir, *Jeeva Ninaivodai*.
21. See *Janasakthi* (1938, September 10, p. 4), digitized version from Endangered Archives Programme (EAP), British Library, London.
22. The selected works of Jeeva, including the essays, poems and articles from *Janasakthi* and *Thamarai* and his public speeches in the legislative assembly were compiled in two edited volumes by Arasu (2007a). The editorials that appeared in the communist party newspaper, *Janasakthi*, edited by Jeeva, were collected in two other volumes. See Arasu (2007b). *Bharati Vazhi* and several other writings of Jeeva on Bharati are found in Arasu (2007a, vol. 1, pp. 211–229).
23. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 214–215).
24. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 215–216).
25. Jeevanandam (2007, p. 216).
26. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 217–218).
27. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 219–221).
28. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 221–223).
29. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 224–225).
30. Jeevanandam (2007, pp. 228–229).
31. See Venkatachalapathy (2018b, pp. 57–61) and Sivathamby and Marx (1984, pp. 202–204).
32. A critical biography of T. M. Chidambara Ragunathan is yet to be written. A short account of his life can be found in the series on Indian literary personalities by the Sahitya Akademi; see Ponneelan (2013); also, there exist two useful edited volumes that contain views of Tamil scholars on Ragunathan; see Ponneelan (2004) and (2003).
33. For Ragunathan’s acknowledgement of Jeeva’s influence on him, see his essays ‘Jeeva - Mutal Arimugam’ and “‘Nadamadam Bharati’ Jeeva - Sila Sindhanaigal’ in Manian (2008). Ragunathan dedicated *Bharatiyum Shelleyum* (1964), his first book on Bharati to Jeeva.
34. See Ragunathan (1966, pp. 5–8).
35. See Pothireddy (2003, pp. 154–155).
36. See Ragunathan (1982, p. 4).
37. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 14–25).
38. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 31–49).

39. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 49–57).
40. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 58–69).
41. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 79–88).
42. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 113–120).
43. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 117–121).
44. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 130–193).
45. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 194–271).
46. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 272–423).
47. See Ragunathan (1982, pp. 486–551).
48. Noting that the Communist Party started to pay attention to culture only after Indian independence in Tamilnadu, Ragunathan contends that Jeeva’s *Bharati Vazhi* (Bharati’s Path, 1947) is the first systematic effort on the part of the Tamil Left to present Bharati to the Tamil public. See Ragunathan (1994, pp. 27–28).
49. (Panikkar, 1997).
50. For a hardline Periyarist critique of Bharati, see Vallavan (2018); for a critique of Hindutva appropriation of Bharati, see Rajesh (2022).
51. Manian (2008, pp. 146–156).
52. Venkatachalapathy (2018b, pp. 57–60).
53. For an exploration of colonial archives in the study of Bharati, see More (2017); also, see Venkatachalapathy (2012).
54. For an interesting exploration of these concepts in the study of the intellectual history of the Left, see Bonnett (2010) and Traverso (2016).
55. Thus, Venkatachalapathy (2018a, p. 119.) writes, ‘Bharati is *the* cultural icon of modern Tamil culture. Except for a thin fringe of the Dravidian and the ultra-left movements, Bharati is universally acclaimed.’
56. In his speech on Ramalinga Adigal, V. Arasu, the retired professor of Tamil Literature at Madras University, makes such an observation. See Red Pix 24x7 (2022).
57. An exception to this trend is a recent work of Venkatachalapathy (2023) on V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and his life in the Swadeshi Movement.
58. (Bhattacharya, 2012).

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