

Bharathidasan's Glorification of New Woman

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to present Bharathidasan's glorification of new woman as freedom loving and revolutionary. Highlighting strong willed women characters from Bharathidasan. This paper projects them as 'Puthumai Pen' and 'Puratchi Pen' in the society. Thus, Bharathidasan's new woman is portrayed as love, revolutionary, militant, intelligent, house-keepers and heroic mother who lives for her family and her country.

Keywords: Bharathidasan, new woman, sacrifice, rebellious, revolutionary, strong-willed, independent.

Bharathidasan is a notable Tamil poet gifted with the extraordinary power of poetic imagination which helped him in creating women characters with all the ideals he had in mind. The women characters attest to the common saying, "Behind every successful man is a woman". The women characters are more efficient and wiser than ordinary women. Even ordinary women characters are portrayed with an individuality. They are of ardent and aspiring feelings with high intellectual powers. With the strong will and fearlessness, they make their way almost unaided towards the wide air of liberty and truth. They are equal to men with an independent spirit and capacity for action. They are never afraid to oppose evil and always to establish justice. Being guides and protectors of men, they stand by men. Bharathidasan's women are quite rational and revolutionary in their attitude, thereby attacking the superstitions, established institutions and customs among the people.

Bharathidasan had, no doubt, high estimate of woman and her role in family and in society. His treatment of women is out and exalted in all respects for he is the poet-cum-social reformer paying highest tribute to woman by elucidating her virtues in her role as mother, wife and a lover. For him, a radical woman is a protector, teacher, guide and an inspirer. Women are generally prepared to share the remorse scorn, ills and solitude of men. The excellent virtues and qualities of women are the source of man's inspiration. One can get critical comments from Bharathidasan's poems regarding their virtues like love, affection, compassion, empathy, tolerance and patience. He has created women characters with a magnificent role in every walk of life. This glorification of the excellent qualities of women is just an attempt to make men realise the true place and power of women.

Commonly speaking, Bharathidasan's women characters are the outcome of what he learnt and what he saw through life. The steady growth of women's emancipation discredited the traditional image of woman as being submissive and subservient. This resulted in the emergence of character woman in Literature and she came to be recognised as an individual with rights as well as duties and with an independent autonomous existence. Bharathidasan created a new woman in tune with the changed situation. In Bharathidasan's opinion, wisdom, fearlessness, freedom and truth are the chief characteristics of the New women. Bharathidasan has not only given honour and glory to women in his works of art but also projected women as mothers, lovers and wives. In all these projections, he establishes the glory of women. When Queen Vijayarani accomplishes what she aims at, she has been admired by everyone. Her love for the son made her take the sword and strike the enemy. Bharathidasan pays high regard to the deep love of a mother for her son:

“O! you are the mother! you are the strong
and the brave!
Who can oppose the deep love of a mother?”
(*Bharathidasan Kavithaikal* 49)

Her efforts to educate her son making him shine in all arts are worthy of applause and praise. According to Bharathidasan, a woman's love for her son is the greatest of all in the earth:

“Even the hen opposes the eagle
That tries to kill its young one
You mistake woman that begets man
As weak as grass. Nay! She is snaky
to the villain” (BK 49).

Bharathidasan's Vijayarani proves the poet's regard to woman as mother by being a teacher and a protector to her son. Vijayarani succeeds in restoring the kingdom from the Cenatipati for her son and her diplomacy is praised by all kings:

“You prove to be the mother, the teacher and
the one who safeguards his life” (49).

The Tamil poet Bharathidasan has great admiration for his daughter Saraswathi Kannappan and he created a character in “Kutumpa Vilakku” in the mould of his daughter. It is in glorification of every woman who is loving, fearless, wise, rational and efficient in talking care of a family. Bharathidasan considered it his mission to make men recognise the true greatness of women by glorifying their virtues and their capabilities. Bharathidasan's character Vanci was able to make Kuppen take it a challenge to go to the Sanjeevi Hills with the influence of the love of a woman for a man:

“Even the side glance of love from the lover
Makes the mountain seem a mole-hill for
the Youth” (BK-I-P 122)

He succeeded in establishing the fact that a radical woman is a protector, teacher, guide and also a source of inspiration. He is said to have exalted women as leading agitators inspiring men to go for doing great actions. Bharathidasan’s creation Vijayarani, the Queen of Manipuri, by taking advantage of the weakness of the king, the Cenatipati, in spite of the warning and advice given by the Mantri, keeps the prince Cutarma in ignorance so that he will have no claim over the kingdom. The Queen resorts to disguise as an old man and trains her son in all arts making him capable of ruling the Kingdom. In the right moment, she helps him regain the land. Thus, she proves to be a heroic mother with her resolution, faith, fearlessness, wisdom, truth and resourcefulness. “She is also the human agent and historical force contributing to the creation of a social order cherishing equality, liberty and fraternity” (P 37). She regains the land from the wicked Cenatipati and the land is ultimately given to its right owners, the people. “Her love for freedom and justice is revealed in her words and actions:

“This Manipuri is the own property of the People, here
All are free
The land is for all; the belongings for all
Let all rights go to the people
Let everyone possess good hearts too...”
(*Express Week-End 3*)

Vanci in “Canjivi Parvatatin Caral” does react against the disgraceful treatment given to women. Her life is one of freedom based on reason. In the words of Dr. K. Chellappan, “She stands for love simple and pure as opposed to the superstition of her lover Kuppan who also seems to symbolise life-denial. The woman represents the spirit of life or the revolutionary appetite of the world order” (P 3). Vanci is the representative voice of the rights of women and her indignation at the denial of freedom to women is really great:

“Do you say that woman have no right to speak?
Treat them worse than dust?” (BK-I-3)

Unlike Kuppan, she has discrimination between right and wrong and tries to dissuade the superstitions in Kuppan when he fears that the Sanjeevi will be lifted by Hanuman,

“There was never a man to lift the mountain
And will there be none” (P 10)

She instills courage into Kuppam and convinces him that all books which do not promote discrimination should be discarded:

“Books disagreeable to discrimination
Can never cause me move;
Can they decay what man makes?
Can they create what he destroys?
Nay, No redemption in such stupidity.
Need of the hour is conviction” (BK 14)

Vanci is the ideal woman who is loving and daring. Her heroism as against the fear of Kuppam is commendable. Closely associated with the heroism of women is his capacity for love. Bharathidasan is an excellent poet of love not only in the narrative poems but also in a number of lyrics. Bharathidasan celebrates warm love which is his answer to the world of strife and deep divisions. In the poem, “Mantoppil Tirumanam” (Marriage in the Mango Grove), he says, “to fall in love in the true nature of life.” It seems good that he portrays love as an aspect of nature and a way of life. Love is also responsible for changing the world order, as well as the avenging force when an injustice is done. This is true of his heroines.

In “Tamilacciyin Katti”, (The Sword of Tamil Woman), one can find the full flowering of Bharathidasan’s vision of revolution. The whole people of a cheri (slum) participate in the revolution. Bharathidasan has also given the leading role to a woman, Cuppamma, the wife of Timman. She symbolises the betrayed women in spite of her hospitality to Cutarican Cin Singh who is supposed to be hostile to the Tamils. Cutarican Cin violates the chastity of Cuppamma when she is unconscious. When she comes back to consciousness, along with the *cheri* people, she goes to the place where Cutarican Cin stays and stabs him with the sword. Finally, she stabs herself and dies a heroic death.

In *Pandiyan Parisu*, the theme of the recovery of a lost treasure is linked with the theme of the chaste woman. Here again woman is the source of action and she helps to redeem the lost treasure. Punkotai in “Etirpara Muttam” (unexpected kiss) is another revolutionary woman who protests against the parents when they object to her love for Ponmuti. As Ponmuti has been sent to North, she escapes from her parents ‘custody and joins a group of merchants bound for North in the guise of a man just to be united with him in death. Ponni in “Katal Mel Kumilkal” (Bubbles on the sea) loves Cemmarittiral who belongs to a lower caste. She has been warned to give up her love. But she refuses to do so even at the peril of imprisonment. She is resolved to wear only black dress till she gets a chance to marry her lover. Born in a king’s family, Ponni opposes inequality. Being a girl in an oppressed family, Minnoli, protests against the ruling class and she is also portrayed as strong-willed as Ponni herself. Her words express her sympathy for the poor and her indignation towards the rich:

“I’ll never marry the king’s son
Who swallows varied dishes on the leaf,
Floating in the flowing stream of ghee.
While the poor drink the gruel” (P 84)

Bharathidasan’s *Kutumpa Vilakku* gives a picture of the family in which woman succeeds in achieving a portion of power and wife is a mistress of all she surveys and we read of a happy home governed by an intelligent, free-willed and contented wife. Thus, Bharathidasan’s women shine in all walks of life. The rebellions and revolutionary spirit of the characters of Bharathidasan gets reflected mainly in their domestic life. They are both freedom-loving and service-oriented. Their service is centred mainly in the domestic circle as to prove the proverbial saying, “The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world”. In brief, Bharathidasan’s new woman takes the lead in the domestic life with the rebellious spirit shown in reasonable situations. They are portrayed as love militants, efficient house keepers, heroic mothers sacrificing for the sake of family and their country.

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