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The Voice for the Individual Liberty and Social Values in the Select Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Subramanya Bharathi

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Abstract

The function of Comparative Literature is to analyze and appreciate the artistic values and lasting impressions of different literary works in a broader spectrum. Mathew Arnold fervently emphasized the significance of comparative approach to literature. He used the term "Comparative Literature" in one of his letters in 1848. Considering that Ralph Waldo Emerson representing the West, and C. Subramanya Bharathi representing the East, well known for their Keen Observance of human society and attitude, the Comparative analysis focuses on the practical application of Individual liberty and social values in the pragmatic thought process of these personalities. This research paper exposed the 'Values', that give Sustainability to human society, that saves it from deterioration.

Key Words: Comparative Literature, Liberty, Social values, Society, deterioration.

Introduction

The function of Comparative Literature is to analyze and appreciate the artistic values, and lasting impressions of different literary works in a broader spectrum. Matthew Arnold fervently emphasized the significance of comparative approach to literature. He used the term "comparative literature" in one of his letters in 1848. In his own practice as a critic,

Arnold pioneered criticism in comparative literature. In Britain, the term "Comparative Literature" is said to be used for the first time in 1886 by an Irish writer H.M. Bosnett. But, irrespective of this claim, John Dryden in his "Essay on Dramatic Poesy", tries to compare the ancient verses with the modern, a significant step in the direction of Comparative literature.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), an American essayist, orator, and poet; the exponent of Transcendentalist movement - represents the West, while Chinnaswami Subramanya Bharathi (1882-1921), an Indian Tamil Poet, writer, journalist, a social reformer and an activist of Indian Independence - represents the East.

Both of them share some common bag rounds in their life such as social unrest, civil war, and slavery. Subramanya Bharathi fiercely fight taught against the British colonial subjugation by his powerful writings. Emerson declared "the American Newness," to defy Westernization and spent the rest of his career proclaiming a new American philosophy. In his early life Emerson turned against the doctrine of Christian Church. In both the cases, the consequences are one and the same; Subramanya Bharathi had to go on a self-exile from the orthodox religious practices and begun to develop the new intellectual school of Transcendentalism, which was later considered as the beginning of "Intellectual Independence of America".

Emerson and Bharathi campaigned for the dawn of global humanistic and spiritual consciousness beyond sectarian traditions. Hence, both of them traverse the narrow limits of national and cultural borders and are celebrated internationally for their human values. The slaves worked sixteen hours a day, suffered insult, at a great level, at the hand of their masters. Some of their necks were iron collared, females were rubbed with capsicum and pepper in their eyes, and they were put to death. Emerson grieves, "They are not pleasant sights. *The blood is moral: the blood is anti-slavery; it runs cold in the veins, the stomach rises with disgust, and curses slavery*" (Jean 107). By then he also appreciates the British government for freeing the West Indies from slavery and unlawful possession. Thus Emerson dreams that one day America would get rid of slavery.

While Emerson followed Thoreau for the cause evolved, after twenty silent years. In 1854, at "The Fugitive Slave Law" address Emerson reasoned it out,

I do not often speak to public questions; they are odious and hurtful, and it seems like meddling or leaving your work. I have my own spirits in prison;-spirits in deeper prisons, whom no man visits if I do not... My own habitual view is to the well-being of students of scholars. And it I only when the public event affects them, that it very seriously touches me. And what I have to say is to them." (Garvey 161)

His words expressed the reason for his delayed involvement in the antislavery movement. His reputation was that of the well-respected family man, with moral values. Being a Unitarian Minister and dedicated writer, he was reluctant to attach himself to such a volatile social issues.

Nevertheless he has not taken slavery in simple vein. In his address delivered in Concord on the Anniversary of the Emancipation of the Negroes in the British West Indies in 1844, Emerson pitied the conditions of Negroes, He says,

These men, our benefactors, as they are producers of corn and wine, of coffee, of tobacco, of cotton, of sugar, of rum and brandy; gentle and joyous themselves, and producers of comfort and luxury for the civilized world... children of the sun, - I am heart-sick when I read how they came there, and how they are kept there." (Mikics 197)

Emerson was shocked to know that the Negroes had set to sail on the filthy hold of irons, unable to lie down, suffering bad food, no fortune to hold in their rugs, and above that the suffering from insecurity, toil, famine and insults.

Emerson goes to the height to speak about liberty. He considers liberty above all. It is

necessary for all brave and sincere men. He expected sooner or later all the states would join to bring equality among men.

Bharathi appeared on the national scene at the time when freedom movement was catching fire at every quarters of Indian society. Towering personalities such as Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, Kashab Chandra Sen, Swami Vivekananda, and Rabindranath Tagore in Bengal were setting new standards in literature. Gopalakrishna Gokale, Balagangadara Tilak, Vibin Chandra Paul, Sri Aurbindo, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and V.V.S. Aiyar were his contemporaries, involved in the Indian freedom struggle. It was indeed a cultural renaissance in India and the freedom movement was the sole inspiration for the renewed cultural and national identity. Bharathi belonged to this illustrious class of national poets and patriots. Bharathi's twin attitudes of nationalism showed his early interest in "social reforms" preferably over "political reforms". He believed that without "social reform," the "political reform" will turn to be a myth or dream. He considered the social slaves can never understand the political liberty. In December 1904, he wrote a letter to the editor of daily "The Hindu", in which he heavily criticized the ugly practice of caste systems in India. He compared the equality of people's participation in government in England, while the Indian upper class refused equality to their brothers on hierarchical caste sentiments. This letter seemed to be the first English writing of Bharathi available from his lifetime.

Bharathi had the revolutionary ideal of totally uprooting caste differences from society. His preoccupation with social reform especially the need to end "casteism" and "untouchability" remained till the end of his life. He was a revolutionary not only in politics but also in real life, for he was not man of vain words, but a man of action. His disciple Kanakalingam remembers his treatment towards the low-castes;

This noble-hearted man once conducted a feast in his house for five Harijans... At a time when pride of caste and practice of untouchability were fanatically follows, Bharathiyar, thus opened not only the doors of his house to Harijans, but also freely offered them entry into his heart's temple, and gave them his manna of love. (Kanakalingam 73-75)

By the time he was evolving as a matured poet and journalist, he concentrated more on focusing political freedom, and as and when required, he comprehensively argued the amendments to reform Indian society. In 1907, he participated in the historic Surat Congress, which saw a sharpening of division within the Indian National Congress; between the militant wing led by Balagangadara tilak and the "moderates" led by Gopalakrishna Gokale. Subramania Bharathi supported Tilak, who openly held armed resistance for the Swadeshi movement. These were the years when Bharathi immersed himself in political activity. In Madras, in 1908, he organized a mass public meeting to celebrate "Swaraj Day", the day of independence. His poems 'Vande Mataram' (Obeisance to motherland), 'Enthayum Thayum' (My Fater and Mother), 'Jaya Bharath' (Victory to India) were printed and distributed free to the Tamil people. The song 'Obeisance to Motherland' captured the hearts of thousands.

"Vande Mataram" we will sing;

These words throughout our land shall ring!

"Vande Mataram" we will say!

Motherland, hail! To you we pray.

No more talk of caste and creed,

No more talk of birth and breed;

Who first drew breath in this our land,

Brahmin or other caste, with us he will stand.

What if an outcaste? Does he not live

With us right here and his labor

Has he become a Chinese man
 And will harm us the way an alien can?
 A thousand castes we have, oh dear!
 But outsiders have no place here,
 However they quarrel, can the sons of
 one mother
 Cease to be brothers of one another? (BP
 152)

He observed that the social reform was
 the concern of people, while the foreign
 government had no business to interfere in their
 affairs. Though, there might be thousands of
 castes and creeds, if only they are united the true
 life could be attained.

Bharathi's message is not only confined
 to the narrow domestic walls. It is a message
 which embraces the interest of the whole of
 humanity. At many points of time he wrote on
 international affairs. The slavery of people in Fiji
 islands tormented his emotion. He believed only
 in an atmosphere of freedom that anything great
 can be achieved. Any kind of slavery may stand
 in the way of human progression. The horror in
 Fiji Island he sings,

In plantations of sugarcane
 With their hands and legs grown,
 lifeless,
 With ceaseless toil, to they sorrow.
 With hearts consumed in burning fire,
 The matrons shrink and shrink.
 Is their nought to remove their pain?
 Is there no remedy for this? (BP 408)

Bharathi was well aware that India had
 many races, which equally contributed to the
 welfare of common cause. He dreamt about
 building a new nation "Samathuva
 Samudayam" in which all are equal, with
 religious harmony, and economic freedom. In
 which, the visible diversity would hold people

together with unbreakable bond of love in the
 name of Mother Bharat. He sings,

She has thirty crores of faces,
 But her heart is one;
 She speaks eighteen languages,
 Yet her mind is one. (Nadakumar 59)

Thus, the two personalities belong to
 different parts of world, ages, languages and
 cultural backgrounds. They greatly influenced
 and enriched their literary world. They were
 skeptical about the fundamentals of civilization,
 rebelled against the mindless conventions, and
 created new paradigms shifts with of hope and
 possibility. Both of them share some common
 elements in lifetime such as social unrest, civil
 war, and slavery. In a way, these self-styled
 personalities are unique as naturalists, freedom
 lovers, champions of social inspiration and
 campaigners of individualism and nationalism.
 This love for sense of their aestheticism, beauty,
 conscience of universal oneness, insight of self-
 esteem, their concern for both individualism
 and society, are almost and their contribution to
 the society is indispensable.

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