

Annotated Biography  
(with a National Historical Background)

Ettayapuram

1882 Dec.11: Born in Ettayapuram, Tirunelveli Dist.  
Mother: Lakshmi Ammal  
Father: Chinnasamy Iyer

Chinnasamy Iyer was an erudite Tamil scholar. He was also well versed in the English language without a college education. He was employed at the *Samastana* of the Maharajah of Ettayapuram. He had tremendous influence in the Court of the Maharajah. As a friend of the Maharajah and a Tamil scholar, he became well-known and respected as a scholar in Ettayapuram and in the district of Tirunelveli.

Later in his life, he established a cotton mill in Ettayapuram, became rich and successful in running the mill. Eventually, for certain reasons (perhaps political) he lost his money in the business, and died heart-broken.

1887 Loss of Mother.

Bharati lost his mother when he was five. This had affected him all his life. He saw all women as his mother, and dedicated his life for improving women's status in India.

1893 At the age of eleven, the title "Bharati" was conferred upon him at the *Court* of the Maharajah of Ettayapuram.

He started reading Tamil literature from young age, wrote poetry at the age of seven. As a young boy, he would discuss Tamil literature with the elderly scholars of the *Samastana*, challenge in writing poetry, as and when requested by the scholars.

1894-97 Educated at the Hindu College High School in Tirunelveli, from Form III to Form V (Standard 8 to 10).

- 1897 Jun Married to Chellamma from the village of Kadayam, Tirunelveli Dist. Bharati was 14 and Chellamma was 7. Bharati writes about this “child” marriage in his autobiographical poem called *Kanavu* (Dream). He was against the marriage, but could not do anything to stop it. In any case, he was happy to participate in the function and enjoyed it, says Chellamma in her book, called *Bharatiyar Charitiram* (Biography of Bharati).
- 1898 Loss of Father. Chinnasamy Iyer was an important person in Bharati’s life. He was ambitious to educate his son in the English education; by doing so, he spent all his money. Bharati was devastated when his father died, and lamented in his autobiography that, “loss of money” took his father’s life. Bharati was angry about the attitude of Chinnasamy’s friends and society which did not help him at his time of distress.
- 1898-1902 Lived with aunt Kuppammal in Banares; educated in the Hindu College, Banares.
- 1902-1904 Jul When the Maharajah of Ettayapuram visited Banares, on his way back from the *Delhi Durbar* (conducted by Lord Curzon) he invited Bharati to come back to Ettayapuram and work for him in his *Samastana*. Bharati agreed and came to his birth place to work for the Maharajah. His job was to read newspapers, magazines, and poetry and to spend time with the Maharajah. Eventually, he was displeased with the “authoritative” environment at the palace, had a disagreement with the Maharajah, and left the *Samastana*.
- 1904 Aug.1 Tamil (pundit) teacher at the Sethupati High School, for 3 months in Madurai.
- Nov.10-1904 First daughter Thangammal was born.

## Chennai

1904 Nov. –  
1906 Aug.

Life in Chennai.

Bharati joined *Swadesamitran*, as its sub-editor. G. Subramania Iyer, a staunch member of the Indian national Congress, published *Swadesamitran* from Chennai. He was a founder of “The Hindu,” the English newspaper in Chennai originally; he then started *Swadesamitran*, a Tamil daily newspaper, in order that the ideas and principles of the “Congress” reach the Tamils. *Swadesamitran* started as a weekly then became an important Tamil daily in which Bharati became a part, all his life.

After Bharati’s death, *Swadesamitran* paid Bharati’s wife Chellamma a small amount of money (I think it was Rs.30 per month, from my recollection) till she died; even Bharati’s daughter Thangammal was paid for her contributions to the magazine for quite some time.

1905 Aug. –  
1906 Aug.

Editor *Chakravartini*  
Tamil Monthly, Chennai  
Proprietor: P. Vaidyanatha Iyer

When P. Vaidyanatha Iyer asked Bharati to join *Chakravartini* as its editor, Bharati was holding a job as Sub-Editor of *Swadesamitran*; in spite of that he decided to join *Chakravartini* as he thought that he could handle both magazines at the same time.

The magazine was dedicated to women especially, and Bharati announced in his magazine that the goal of *Chakravartini* was to “improve” the situation of women in Tamilnadu. He wrote a two-line poem (Kural) under the title of the magazine: “when knowledge of women is raised, womanhood becomes great; when this happens, the country becomes great”.

\*1905 Oct.16

Partition of Bengal.

Bengal was divided into two sections: the province of East Bengal and Assam is one and the other, West Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. Originally, when Lord Curzon suggested the partition of Bengal in the year 1903, there was opposition from the Hindus and Muslims in Bengal. Later, when the

Secretary of State approved this decision in 1905, the whole of Bengal opposed this decision.

The British gave an excuse for this partition, that it would be difficult to govern Bengal as it was the biggest province in India. The Indians thought that the actual reason was to break the strength of the Bengalis. The whole political and economic environment in India had changed on this account.

\*1905 Dec.

Bharati attended Congress at Banares.

1906 Aug.

Bharati quit both *Swadesamitran* and *Chakravartini* in order to join *India* as its Editor. He thought he could serve better to the country as an editor, with his “freedom” to express his ideas to the people of Tamil Nadu

“India” Tamil weekly, Chennai  
Founder: Mandayam S. N. Tirumalachari  
Office Administrator: M. P. Tirumalachari  
Legal Editor: M. Srinivasan

1906 Sep.-  
1908 Sep. 5

Editor (unnamed) “India”  
Tamil weekly, Chennai  
Founder: Mandayam S. N. Tirumalachari  
Office Administrator: M. P. Tirumalachari  
Legal Editor: M. Srinivasan

Bharati’s name was not mentioned as editor in the magazine, as the owners feared that Bharati’s writing would be fiery, and therefore the British would likely be interfering with the publication of the magazine.

1906 Nov.- ?

Editor: *The Bala Bharat*  
English weekly  
Published from *India* Office, Chennai  
Proprietor: M. P. Tirumalachari

*Bala-Bharata (or) Young India*, Editor (?)  
English monthly, Chennai  
Proprietor: Dr. M. C. Nanjundarao  
Last issue: 1907 Nov.

\*1906 Dec.

Attended Calcutta Congress; met Nivedita.

Nivedita Devi was Swami Vivekananda's disciple. She came to India, and dedicated her life to the uplifting of Indian women and their education.

Bharati attended Calcutta Congress and met Nivedita on his way back to Madras. This meeting was an important event in Bharati's life. Bharati's attitude towards women's freedom became more aggressive by this meeting. Nivedita showed him the magnificent Bharata-Shakti, as the daughter of Himavan, the Goddess Parvati Herself. She taught him the nature of dedication and service to this Bharati-Shakti through the medium of "silence," as he puts it in his poem *Nivedita Davi Thudi*.

Bharati called Nivedita as his *Gurumani*. and dedicated his *Swadesa Githangal* to her. "Like Sri Krishna showed his "Viswa Rupa" to Arjuna, the guru has showed me the *sampurna rupa* of Bharata-Shakti, and taught me the nature of *swadesa bhakti*; I dedicate this book to Nivedita's feet"

\*1907 Apr.-May.

Bibin Chandra Pal visited Chennai after his tour of the northern provinces. On his way down South, he visited Kadagam, Vizagappattinam, Vijaya Nagar, Kakinada, and Rajamahendrapuram, and delivered speeches to the public.

Elaborate arrangements were made to welcome Bibin Chandra Pal in Chennai, and for his tour of the major South-Indian cities.

\*1907 May

Lala Lajpat Roy was exiled to Burma.

British thought that all the new "Movements" and "Mutinies" in Punjab have been caused by Lajpat Roy and his assistant Ajit Singh; they charged them both and exiled them to Burma.

Bharati wrote two poems on Lajapati on this sorrowful event, *Lajapat Roy Tudi* and *Lajpat Roy Pralabham*. In these poems Bharati praises the greatness of Lajapati and says that the British could not succeed in sending Lajapati away from the people, as he lives in their heart. Bharti laments on Lajapati's situation behind the prison walls of Mandelay, thinking about the future of India, and how India will ever get freedom from the hands of the British.

1907

Bharati's 3 *national* poems were first published by V. Krishnasamy Iyer, the leader of the *Moderate Party* in the province of Madras.

G.A. Natesa Iyer took Bharati to Krishnasamy Iyer's house and introduced him to Iyer. Bharati sang 3 of his poems. Although V. Krishnasamy Iyer was the leader of the *Moderate Party* (Bharati belonged to the *Extremist Party*,) he appreciated Bharati's poems and their nationalistic fervour. He published the three poems: *Vande mataram*, *Nattu Vanakkam*, *Engal Nadu* and arranged to distribute them to all Schools and Institutions in India.

\*1907 Dec.

Surat Congress.

Bharati and his friends arranged for delegates and visitors of the *Extremist Party* from the province of Madras to travel and attend the *Surat Congress*. The group was large and therefore was divided into two, one leaving on the 20<sup>th</sup> and the other on the 21<sup>st</sup> of December. In Bharati's group, there were about 30 people, including Bharati's close friends: Surendranath Arya, Chakkarai Chettiyar, Duraisamy Iyer, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai, Nanjunda Rao, and Srinivasachari were among them.

Bharati had an opportunity to meet with all leaders of both the Parties, which included Tilak, Lajpat Roy, Aurobindo Ghose, and Ghokale. Bharati was greatly attracted by Tilak's majestic appearance: his turban which was twisted in circles around his head; his mustache which challenged the British Empire, his strong face showing his unwavering determination, and his eyes expressing love and the breadth of his wisdom – his voice and eloquence - his unrelenting attitude towards attaining his goal - - all this fascinated Bharati. He became an ardent lover and disciple of Tilak.

The *Surat Congress* ended in a fiasco when Moderate Party suggested that Dr. Rashbihari Ghose should preside the *Congress*, whereas the Extremist Party was hoping that Lajpat Roy would become the *Congress* President; there were violent clashes between the two Parties and eventually Bharati and his friends returned to Madras with great disappointment.

1908

Bharati published a collection of his National songs, *Swadesa Githangal*.

\*1908 March 9

The day that Bibin Chandra Pal was freed from prison was pronounced as *Swarajya Day*, by Bharati and friends. The Extremist Party had arranged meetings in several cities in the Madras Presidency to celebrate Bibin Chandra Pal's release from the prison after six months.

The previous year Aurobinda Ghose was charged by the British Government for writing in the magazine *Vandemataram* in a "seditious" manner. Although the British charged Aurobindo for "sedition," they couldn't prove Aurobindo's connection with the magazine. Pal was invited to prove Aurobindo's connection with the magazine as a witness. Pal refused to be a witness and was arrested. Although Aurobindo came out free from this charge, Pal was arrested for insulting the Court by refusing to attend as a witness, and was put in jail for six months.

\*1908 March 12

V. O. Chidambaram Pillai was imprisoned. Pillai was called by the Tamils and Swadesis lovingly as "Va. Vu. Ci" and "Kappalottiya Tamizhan".

In the southeast part of Tamil Nadu, in Tuticorin, V.O.C., started the business of running ships between Tuticorin and Ceylon (Sri Lanka), against the British. Bharati helped V.O.C. in fund-raising for this great project. V.O.C. and his friend Subramania Siva were arrested for *Sedition* for delivering speeches on the beaches of Tuticorin. Bharati was invited as a character witness in this case.

Eventually, V.O.C. was put in jail and gone through unimaginable suffering in jail. The Tamils called him, "Chekkizhutha Chidambaranar," meaning Chidambaranar who pulled the implement (for which bulls were normally used) around a large stone grinding device.

Bharati wrote two poems describing the conversation between V.O.C. and Tirunelveli Collector Winch; the first one describing the Collector's charges against V.O.C., and the second, V.O.C.'s remarkable answers to the Collector's threats.

\*1908 March 13-15 Mutiny in Tirunelveli  
There was a mutiny in Tirunelveli for three days supporting V.O.C. after his arrest.

\*1908 Apr.30 Bombing in Bengal  
The “supposedly terrorists,” with Barindra Ghose (Aurobindo’s brother) as their leader, began to get involved in violent activities such as bombing and murdering British officials. Kudiram Bose, one of the terrorists, tried to kill Judge Kingsford, the magistrate in Bihar, who was doing atrocious acts. He made a mistake of killing somebody else instead, and was arrested.

This created a “terror” in the minds of the British. There were drastic measures taken by the British Government in treating the *Nationalists* and there was a change of attitude in governing the Nation. One of the results was to stop Indian newspapers and magazines and arrest the editors of these publications.

1908 Sep. 5 The *India* magazine in Chennai was stopped by the British Government and the *legal* editor M. Srinivasan was arrested. (While Bharati actually edited the magazine, M. Srinivasan was named as the *legal* editor of the magazine for obvious political reasons).  
G. Subramania Iyer and Surendranath Arya were also imprisoned.

### Pondicherry (1908 – 1918)

1908 Sep. Bharati moved to Pondicherry.

As the result of M. Srinivasan’s arrest, Bharati decided to move to Pondicherry, the then territory of the French. Bharati and his friends realized that under these circumstances, it would be impossible to publish *India* from Chennai, and therefore they took the magazine to Pondicherry.

In the meantime, a few things have happened to the *Swadesis* in India. Tilak had been imprisoned and Lajpat Roy had been expelled to *Mandelay* prison; Aurobindo Ghose and Bibin Chandra Pal were arrested, and there were more arrested in the South. V.O.C. and Subramania Siva and a few others had already been sent to prisons; lately, G. Subramania Iyer and M. Srinivasan had been imprisoned.

Bharati thought that he could be the next one and it was necessary for him to do service to the country from a foreign territory.

1908 Oct. 10

*India* magazine was started again from Pondicherry.

1908

When Bharati was in Pondicherry, his second daughter Shakuntala was born. He was then reading Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam* (Sanskrit) and was fascinated by the heroine. He named the new born baby *Shakuntala* after the name of the heroine.

1909

*Janma Boomi* (Swadesa Githangal – 2<sup>nd</sup> part) was published.

1908 Oct.10 –  
1910 Mar 12

Bharati became the editor (unnamed) of *India* magazine (Tamil weekly) again, in Pondicherry.  
Administrator: Mandayam Srinivasachari

1909 Sep. 7-  
1910 Apr.7

Also, he became the editor for the daily newspaper *Vijaya*, in Pondicherry  
Proprietor: Mandayam Srinivasachari

1910 Jan.-?

Editor for *Karma Yogi*, a Tamil monthly, in Pondicherry  
This was Bharati's own journal

1910 Mar.

Proscription in British India for  
*India* and *Vijaya*.

1910 Mar. – Apr..

Both *India* and *Vijaya* stopped publication from  
Pondicherry.

\*1910 Apr. 4

In the meantime, British issued a warrant to arrest Aurobindo for writing an article in his magazine *Karma Yogin*. Aurobindo escaped to Chandranagur, stayed there for a month, and finally went to Calcutta in disguise and came to Pondicherry by the ship *S. S. Duplex*.

Bharati and Aurobindo became good friends. They read Hindu scriptures together and did an extensive research on the "more than two and half millennia-old" *Vedas*.

1910

*Kanavu* (Dream), Bharati's autobiographical poem, was published. It was proscribed later in 1911, with his short story called *Aril Oru Pangu*.

\*1910 Sep./Oct.

V. V. S. Iyer came to Pondicherry. Iyer was a reporter for Bharati's *India* magazine from London.

Iyer was involved in the *National Movement* while he was studying in London for his law degree to become a barrister. He had connections with Indian nationalists Savarkar and T. S. S. Rajan in the *India House* in London.

When Madanlal Tinkara murdered Curzon Wily, a British official, Savarkar was arrested, and Iyer disguised himself as a *wanderer*, escaped to Pondicherry with great difficulty. Iyer was an *Extremist*. He was a writer, literary critic and well versed in Tamil, English and French languages.

\*1911 Jul. 17

Murder of Collector Ash. Vanchi Iyer, who was an *Extremist*, murdered Collector Ash and then killed himself.

1911

Warrant issued for all *Nationalists* who lived in Pondicherry. There was also an announcement in British India that one thousand rupees will be awarded to people who could help to capture the *Nationalists* in Pondicherry.

1912

*Panchali Sabatham –Part 1*, Bharati's epic poem, was published.

1913

Bharati performed the "Sacred thread" ceremony to a *harijan* boy, named Kanakalingam.

Bharati was determined to abolish the caste system in India. He selected an *untouchable* boy, to prove his principle of "equality" to the society.

This uncommon incident is described by Va.Ra., a disciple of Sri. Aurobindo and Bharati, as follows:

"It was eight o'clock in the morning. By chance, I came to Bharati's house from the Aurobindo Ashram. There was a small gathering in the verandah of the house. From the centre of the verandha smoke was coming out. It looked as though somebody was lighting a fire. Some people were uttering *Veda mantras*. Bharati was seated by the fire and an untouchable boy, Kanakalingam was sitting next to him. There were also present some scholars like Professor Subramania Iyer. I asked the Professor what was

going on. He said, “Kanakalingam’s holy thread ceremony is just over and he is learning the *Gayatri mantra* now”. I again, asked him, “Is this the *untouchable* Kanakalingam who is seated there?” “Don’t you doubt it,” the Professor replied, “he is exactly the same person you are referring to. Bharati is teaching him *Gayatri mantra*.”

Kanakalingam himself writes in his book:

“When caste system and untouchability were prevailing, Bharati not only invited the untouchables to his house but also gave them a permanent place in his heart. My *Guru* Bharatiyar shared the joys and sorrows of the untouchables as Mahatma Gandhi does today.”

\*1914 Aug.

World War I made a great impact to the people of the world. It made a greater impact to the people of India, as India was the supporting nation providing help to England by military means. To the nationalists in India, it was crucial that England should be able to do the necessary ‘reforms’ that India needed at the time of war; there was no time for India to wait until the war was ended.

1914

*Maada Manivachagam*, a collection of Bharati’s poems, was published in Durban, South Africa by Saraswati Printing Press.

1917

*Kannan Pattu* 1<sup>st</sup> edition was published by Parali Su. Nellaiyappar, Editor of *Lokopakari* and a friend of Bharati.

A letter written by Bharati to Nellaiyappar, addressing him as his younger brother (*Thambi*) is noteworthy. The letter is quite exceptional as it elucidates Bharati’s passion for Tamil language and people, love for humanity, and his intense desire to “touch the sky from the earth.”

“Brother! The world is your Heart.

Ascend! Ascend! Ascend! Higher! Higher! Higher!  
Laugh (*kudal kulunga*) at the fools of the old-times who try to survive, building ropes and holding them tight, in order not to fall from their positions.

Let you have wings. Fly away ! ”

1918

*Nattuppattu* 1<sup>st</sup> edition was published by Parali Su. Nellaiyappar.

1918 Nov. Bharati left Pondicherry, was arrested in Cuddalore, the Indian territory, and imprisoned.

### Kadayam

1918 Dec. Bharati was released from Cuddalore jail after twenty days, with the help of his friends. He went directly to the village of Kadayam, Tirunelveli Dist., the birth place of his wife Chellamma.

He had written an agreement to the British Government before he was released from Cuddalore jail, that he would publish any of his work only after showing them to the Police Deputy Inspector General.

1919 *Kannan Pattu* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition was published by Parali Su. Nellaiyappar.

1919 Mar. Bharati's meeting with Mahatma Gandhi in Chennai. Va.Ra. describes this memorable incident as follows:

“At the invitation of Kasturiranga Iyengar, Mahatma came to Chennai to discuss Rowlett committee's Report. He stayed in Rajaji's house. Gandhiji thought that the Report was not acceptable to any human being who has some self-respect; he wanted to take action against the Report.

Mahatma was surrounded by a group of people. He was in the middle of a discussion about organising a nation-wide *satyagraha* (passive resistance) as he thought that it was necessary to do so in order to accomplish his goal. In the group of people, the Madras *elite* personalities were present, such as Adi Narayana Chettiyar, Rangasamy Iyengar, Satyamurti, Rajaji, and Va. Ramasamy Iyengar.

Bharati came to see Gandhiji. He went straight to the Mahatma and asked him, if he would be able to preside over a meeting at the marina beach, where he was giving a lecture. Gandhiji turned around and consulted with his secretary Mahadev Desai as to his program schedule for that evening. As he was not free that evening he asked Bharati, if he could postpone the meeting for another day. Bharati said “no, he couldn't,” “blessed” Gandhiji's “new Movement,” and left the group.

Apparently, Mahatma asked the group who the man was, and Rajaji answered, 'the man is a Tamil National poet'; Gandhiji said, 'you should take good care of this man'."

1919 Apr.- May

A few days in Ettayapuram to visit relatives and friends. There, they insisted that Bharati should visit the Maharajah and ask him for help. Although Bharati did not want to do that, he wrote two poems called, *Chittukkavigal* and sent them to the Maharajah.

*Chittukkavi* is a traditional form of poetry in Tamil in which the poet addresses the king; he praises the king, and explains the quality and greatness of his own poetry to the king, and ask him for material rewards.

These two poems are exceptional: the dignity and pride of the poet are apparent in these poems, and they reveal that Bharati himself was aware of the magnitude of his greatness as a *Mahakavi*.

1919 Jun.

Bharati's elder daughter Thangammal was married. Bharati had a principle that his daughter should marry as she desired, choosing the groom herself; he wanted Thangammal's marriage to be a "love" marriage. But the relatives and the community pushed him to agree to an "arranged" marriage, out of consideration and kindness towards others, and love for his daughter.

On the wedding day, he gave away the bride, performing the ceremony with great care, pronouncing the *mantras* in the original Sanskrit language.

1919 Oct.- Nov.

Bharati Traveled to Karaikudi, Kanadukattan.

1920 Jun 6-10

Again, he spent a few days in Chetty Nadu. Bharati composed two poems, one on Vai.Su. Shanmugam Chettiyar who supported Bharati, and the other on the *Hindu Madaabhimana Sangam*.

1920 Jun. 20

Bharati had many muslim friends and they invited him to speak at the *Muslim Sabha* in Pottalpur, a village nearby Kadayam.

Bharati composed a poem on *Allah*, sang the poem at the meeting, and gave a lecture; this was later published under his prose works, entitled, *The greatness of Islam*.

1920 Jun. 28

Bharati sent a circular letter to all his friends asking them to support him in his endeavour to publish all his writings. This letter was written in English:

“All my manuscripts – the accumulated labour of my 12 years exile – have arrived here from Pondicherry. They are to be divided into 40 separate books; of each book I print 10,000 copies for the first edition. This work will cost me an initial outlay of Rs. 20,000. And, within one year, or at the most, two years from the date of publication, I shall certainly be able to get a net profit of a lac and a half rupees. . . .”

Please send whatever you can send as loan towards the printing expenses. I expect from you atleast Rs. 100. Kindly induce at least twenty more of your friends to lend me similar and much larger sums, if possible.

I shall give stamped ‘Pro’-notes for the sums I receive from you and your friends, paying the generous interest of 2% per month, in view of my large profits. . . .”

Nothing came out of this.

## Chennai

1920 end of –  
1921 Sep. 11

Again, life in Chennai  
Sub-Editor of “Swadesamitran,” Chennai.

1921

Bharati was living in Trippligane, at Thulasinga Perumal Koil Street, near Parthasarathy temple.

One morning, as his daily routine, Bharati, went to the Parthasarathy temple. As his usual custom, he went to visit the temple elephant first. The elephant was tied and kept inside the fence, as he became “mad” and disoriented. Bharati jumped inside the fence inspite of people warning him and shouting. He approached the elephant in order to feed him the bananas that he brought. The elephant pushed Bharati down with his trunk. Bharati fell under the four legs of the elephant and became unconscious. In the mean time, Kuvilai Krishnamachari, Bharati’s disciple and friend, jumped inside the fence, and carried him on his shoulders, and brought him out of the fence.

The elephant kept still, without making a move!

Bharati explained later that “the elephant was not able to recognize that it was his friend who he pushed down; but once he realised, he kept still and did not do any harm whatsoever to his friend.”

A few days after the incident, Bharati visited and gave a lecture at the Karungalpalaiyam library, near Erode. The topic of his lecture was, “there is no death for man,” a goal that Bharati wanted to accomplish and was preaching in his “last” days.

1921 Sep.11

Bharati was affected by a stomach ailment; he refused to take any medicine. Eventually, Bharati became very weak and his *bodily* existence came to an end.

\* Events in the Indian National Movement