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Poet Baarathi on Education

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POET BAARATHI ON EDUCATION

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The concept of education is as old as language itself ; and each age and generation has given it fresh meaning and significance. Yet, even today, we are often struck by the freshness and beauty, as well as the width and universality of the thoughts expressed down the ages.

The dual role of education is being stressed in our time ; education is seen not only as the means to the development of The individual, but also the means by which the individual is developed to live in harmony with the society in which he is placed. The latent skills and talents of the individual are drawn out and developed, and his spiritual quality fostered, so that he may use those skills and talents as a useful citizen of society, and exercise his spirit in his relation with the men and women among whom he lives and moves and has his being. In other words, we are agreed that education is, and should be, the process both of individual development and social integration.

Wise men of all times and climes have therefore drawn particular attention to the values of education

their ages. In this paper let me briefly estimate the views of Baarathi—the national poet of Tamil Naadu—to whom was given the benefit of study of the languages of not only Tamil and English, but also of Sanskrit and French. During his period of 'exile' at Puduchery, then under French rule, many of his poems were written. He declares in an epistle in verse to the Rajah of Ettayapuram:

The great scholars of that fine and famous country France, and the sweet poets of the renowned English do admire and appreciate very much and translate my Tamil poems.⁵

This fervent and inspired national poet devoted time and thought in expressing his views on education in all its aspects. The first significant reference to education which lies right in the middle of his famous poem on the 'Tamil Land' is as follows:

The land of the Tamils is great because of its education; (hence) this land is also the land of the birth of famous (Epic poet) Kamban; it is this land that wafts the true fragrance of various good works, and of the arts and sciences all over the world.⁶

Kamban, Baarathi implies, could have been born and have flourished only in the Tamil land, because it was well manured by learning.

As one strolls through the garden of Baarathi's poems to enjoy their beauty and fragrance, the blossoms on education attract us because of the epithets themselves, both colourful and meaningful, that he attaches to them.

Here are some of them :

1. பன்னருங்கல்வி⁷ The ineffable education
2. தேர்ந்த கல்வி⁸ Erudite learning

3. (அ) பல்விதமாயின சாத்திரம்⁹ }
 (ஆ) கல்வி பல¹⁰ }
 (இ) பல்கலை¹¹ } Varied arts & sciences
 (ஈ) பல கல்வி¹² }
 (உ) பல் சாத்திரம்¹³ }
 (ஊ) ஆயிரம் சாத்திரம்¹⁴ }
4. தேடு கல்வி¹⁵ Sought-after education
5. கல்விப் பெருங்கடல்¹⁶ The great ocean of Edu-
[cation]
6. (அ) ஒது பற்பல நூல்வகை¹⁷ } The very many books
 (ஆ) சாத்திரங்கள் பலபல } [for study]

In distinct contrast to these sayings are his pungent epithets applied to education, as it was in his own time, for he saw only too clearly that all was not well with education in Tamil Naadu.

1. மண்படு கல்வி¹⁸ Useless education
2. அற்பர் கல்வி¹⁹ Base education
3. பேடிக்கல்வி²⁰ Servile education

Baarathi's passion for extensive learning is most inspiring. It is even more heartening to note that his passion for learning is to be found not merely in his poems but also in his short lived life. Both his poetical and prose works bear witness to his deep and continued concern for all aspects of the life of the Tamil people—social, economic, political and cultural. His interest in the Arts and Sciences, of History and Geography, of Religion and Philosophy are really astounding, and bear witness to the depth and width of his interests and to the unique vigour of his spirit.

Who can forget his command to the people of Tamil Naadu to fly in all the eight directions of the compass and bring in all the treasures of knowledge, and make it available in the Tamil Language²¹ - and

how remarkably relevant it is today! If we do not do this, he warned, 'Tamil will die slowly.'²²

Baarathi was also an ardent advocate of mass education and his words proved an inspiration to us in the 50's and 60's when they were most relevant. He prophesies: "If only the flood-gates of art and poetry are thrown open, even those who have fallen into the ditch of illiteracy, will arise enlightened and occupy places of authority."²³ On the other hand, Baarathi, like Valluvar,²⁴ also emphasises the value of education by condemning its opposite. The illiterate and uneducated are even called 'sinners - Paavikal'.²⁵ He makes it quite clear in his poem, 'The Drum,' that education is for all,²⁶ irrespective of race, religion, caste or colour.

Learning is not the only goal that Baarathi has in mind. He makes the distinction between 'learning' and 'wisdom' quite clear because he considers wisdom much superior to learning;²⁷ for, learning can be had by labour, while wisdom can only come by divine grace.²⁸

His advice to the children to study in the early morning hours is indeed traditional.²⁹ He wished them to do so in the belief that the mind is more alert and more receptive after sound sleep. He also advised them to live in line with their learning.

Baarathi's interest in women's education is also surprisingly modern and farsighted. He saw, as in a vision that women must participate in the upsurge towards freedom and development. His remarkable poems entitled 'Modern Woman' புதுமைப்பெண்³⁰ and 'Liberation of Women' (பெண்கள் விடுதலைக் கும்மி)³¹ are typical examples of his deep concern and farsightedness with regard to the expansion of women's

education which we witness today. Fifty years ago he called on women to share in the search for knowledge by going all over the world and bring in such treasures.³²

The tragic poverty of his country wrung his heart, and he knew that this poverty was one of the greatest hurdles to be surmounted if education was truly to be universal. We know that even today the percentage of literacy in India as a whole is only 30 per cent and in his days it was very much lower. This provoked him to give his clarion - call to provide food before varied education is offered.³³ It is this that inspired and gave impetus to the unique Mid-day Meals Scheme in Tamil Nadu with which I had the privilege to be associated for many years from its inception.

The three most notable factors in Baarathi's concept of education are his patriotism, his worship of Kalaimagal, the Goddess of learning and his demand that education be related to life.

The first of these can be exemplified by his tribute to Lokamanya Balagangadhara Tilak, the great Indian patriot, who inspired and preceded Mahatma Gandhi in the march to freedom. Baarathi's tribute to Tilak has been translated into English verse as follows:

He built a fortress strong,
Education its name;
Around it dug a moat,
A stream of Thought.
He reared a temple too,
Clear speech its name,
And on it unfurled,
Our Freedom's flag.³⁴

It is clear that he relates quite definitely education to love of the motherland and the need for clarity in thought and aim.

Baarathi's call to worship the Goddess of Learning has several new features. He departs from tradition and calls us into the modern world, as the following translation will show:

"O, people of our sweet Tamil Naadu, unite to worship this Goddess. It is not easy to worship Her in the appropriate way. It is not the traditional murmuring of *Mantras*, the offering of flowers, the piling up of manuscripts and sprinkling sandal-wood water on them that is proper today. Every home should be an expression of art; every street should have its school, and such schools should be found in every village and town all over the country; such villages or towns that are not desirous of education should be burnt and destroyed. This is the way of winning the love of our Mother, the Goddess of Education, who washes away all evils."³⁵

As we can easily see, he is vehement to the point of violence in his desire for the promotion of education all over Tamil Naadu.

The last and most vital issue that he raised over half a century ago is that of the value of a purely academic and theoretical education unrelated to life, an education suited only to forge 'tools for an alien rule'. This scathing attack on the English system of education, as it was in his time, is fully borne out in the Report of the Education Commission composed of both national and international authorities on education and presided over by Dr. D.S. Kothari, published in 1966. This Commission found that the present system of education, designed as it was to meet the needs of an impartial administration within the limitations set by a traditional society was inadequate to meet the needs of a modern democratic and socialistic society

as envisaged in India. The Commission is as clear in its mind as Baarathi himself that what is needed is a revolution. This revolution starting with educational methods, and systems, planning and training will in turn set in motion, the much desired social, economic and cultural revolution.³⁶ It would seem therefore that the poetic and patriotic vision of Baarathi had already foreseen what was necessary for our land, half a century and more before we have been able to even begin to put his concept into operation.

The wisdom of the wise men of all times, fertilized by the conscience of humanity, has blossomed into the UNESCO. May we on this occasion pledge ourselves to further its objectives, namely—

- to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations, through education, science and culture.....
- by collaborating in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples.....
- by giving a fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture.
- by collaborating with member states....in the development of educational activities;.....by maintaining, increasing and diffusing knowledge;.....by conserving and protecting the world's inheritance of books and works of art.....
- by encouraging co-operation among the nations in all branches of intellectual activity

with a view to preserving the independence, integrity and fruitful diversity of the cultures and educational systems of the nations, as the above is in full consonance with the concept of universality deeply rooted in the literature and culture of the Tamil people.

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- (33) Ibid. pp. 256 : 30. (34) *Bharati in English Verse* by S. Prema (1958) p. 67. (35) *Baarati* op. cit. pp 189-90.
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படிப்பகம்