iii. 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, 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 Benares (Varanasi); educated in the Hindu College, Benares.

1902-1904 Jul  When the Maharajah of Ettayapuram visited Benares, 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.


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.


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.

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.


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 Bharata-Shakti through the medium of “silence,” as he puts it in his poem *Nivedita Devi Thudi*.

Bharati called Nivedita as his *Gurumani*, and dedicated his *Swadesa Githangal* to her. “Like Sri Krishna showed his *Visva 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, Vijayanagar, 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 and 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 20th and the other on the 21st of December. In Bharati’s group, there were about 30 people, including his 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 Aurobindo Ghose was charged by the British Government for writing in the magazine *Vandemataram* in a “sedious” manner. Although the British charged Aurobindo for “sedition,” they couldn’t prove Aurobindo’s connection with the magazine. Pal was invited as a witness to prove Aurobindo’s connection with the magazine. 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. 10

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.
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.

*Janma Boomi* (Swadesa Githangal – 2nd part) was published.

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

Also, he became the editor for the daily newspaper *Vijaya*, in Pondicherry. Propreitor: Mandayam Srinivasachar

Bharati dasan (Kanaga Subburathinam), the great Tamil poet met Bharati in an unusual event; Bharati dasan writes about this meeting: Subburathinam had not yet met Bharati in Pondicherry, but had seen him, admired his handsome appearance, and thought he was like the *Paramasivan* (Lord Shiva) painted by Ravivarma.

At the wedding of Venu Naicker, a friend to both Bharati and Subburathinam, Subburathinam sang a few of Bharati’s songs, without realizing that the writer of the songs, Bharati, was sitting at the audience. At the end of the concert, Venu introduced the two poets. Subburathinam was shocked, and was happy that the relationship was going to continue.

Subburathinam got involved in Bharati’s life and poetry and became one of the members of the family.

His literary works may be placed in Tamil literature along with Bharati’s. He wrote on various themes, political, social, Tamil language, and purely literary. He wrote plays, short stories, essays and film scripts.

Editor for *Karma Yogi*, a Tamil monthly. This was Bharati’s own journal.

Proscription in British India for *India* and *Vijaya*. 
1910 Mar. – Apr. Both *India* and *Vijaya* stopped publication from Pondicherry.

*1910 Apr. 4* British issued a warrant to arrest Sri Aurobindo for writing an article in his magazine *Karma Yogan*. Sri 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 Sri 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.
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 verandah 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* 1st edition was published by Parali Su. Nellaiyappar, a friend of Bharati, Editor of *Lokopakari*.

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 siri*) at the fools 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* 1st edition was published by Parali Su. Nellaiyappar.

1918 Nov.

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

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* 2nd 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 this 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 tuned 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,” and “blessed” Gandhiji’s “new Movement,” and left the group.

Apparentiy, Mahatma asked the group who the man was, and Rajaji answered, “the man was 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 so, 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 first, and explains the quality and greatness of his own poetry, then, asks him for 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. He finally agreed out of consideration for others, and love for his daughter.

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 Pottalpudur, 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 at least 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%
pere month, in view of my large profits. . . . .”

Nothing came out of this.

**Chennai**

1920 end of –  Again, life in Chennai.
1921 Sep. 11  Sub-Editor of “Swadesamitran,”Chennai.

1921  Bharati was living in Triplicane, 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, as he had become “mad” and disoriented, was tied and kept inside the fence. Bharati jumped inside the fence, in spite of people warning and shouting at him. As Bharati approached closer to the elephant to feed him the bananas that he had brought, he pushed him down with his trunk. Bharati fell under the four legs of the elephant and became unconscious. In the mean time, Kuvalai Krishnamachari, Bharati’s disciple, jumped inside the fence, carried Bharati 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 had 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 Karungalpalayam 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, he became very weak and his bodily existence came to an end.