

Concept Note

“The Meaning of Bharat/ India with Special Reference to Modern South Indian Literature”

October 5-7, 2023

Raja Rao wrote that India is not a geography but a metaphor, it stands for things transcendental, Sachidananda is the goal. Right from the Rigveda the goal of Indian Literature has always been metaphysical. The Mahabharata and the Ramayana laid stress on dharma. The BhagavadGita is a metaphysical treatise synthesizing different philosophical traditions. Sri Aurobindo stated in *The Renaissance in India* – “India has been preeminently the land of dharma and the shastra . She searched for the inner truth and law of each human or cosmic activity, it's dharma; that found , she laboured to cast into elaborate form and detailed law of arrangement its application in fact and rule of life. Her first period was luminous with discovery of the spirit; her second completed the discovery of the Dharma; her third elaborated in to detail the first simpler formulation of the *shastra*; but none was exclusive, the three elements were always present." Sri Aurobindo goes on to state that spirituality is indeed the master-key of the Indian mind; the sense of the infinite is native to it. In his essay, *BhavaniBharati*, Sri Aurobindo states:

For what is a nation? What is our mother-country? It is not a piece of earth, nor a figure of speech, nor a fiction of the mind. It is a mighty *Shakti*, composed of units that make up the nation, just as BhawaniMahishaMardini sprang into being from the *Shakti* of all the millions of gods assembled in one mass of force and welded into unity. The *Shakti* we call India, BhawaniBharati, is the living unity of the *Shaktis* of three hundred million people, but she is inactive, imprisoned in the magic circle of Tamas..

The great nationalist poet of Tamilnadu, Subramania Bharati wrote about *Mother India*:

Thirty crore faces hath She, yet

She hath only one body and soul.

Eighteen spoken languages hath She, yet

She hath only one thought.

The literature of Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Sister Nivedita, LokmanyaTilak, Veer Savarkar, Mahatma Gandhi, Subramania Bharati and a host of others endeavored for a political, spiritual, cultural, renaissance of India. The Mother from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, said that India will be the guru of the world.

At the time of the Vedic dawn, the Rishis envisioned *satyam-rtam-brhat* (the True, the Right, the Vast). Rishis like Viswamitra, Vashistha, Vamadeva, Bharadwaja and other seers poured out in mystic poetry about the Divine. In the next Age, the "Heroic Age" was the period of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which are eternally relevant. The classical Age of the Guptas witnessed the flowering of classical literature.

Then came the Islamic invasion. The challenge to it was the bhakti movement in Hinduism. Ramanuja, Madhwa, Chaitanya, Ramdas, Andal, Mira Bai, Nanak, Kabir, Surdas and many others took the message of the Vedas to the common people through the vernacular language. In Tamilnadu, from the 7th century AD, the Alwars (Vaishnavite saints) and the Nayanmars(Saivite saints) were spreading Sanatana Dharma through bhakti. All the Tamil saints venerated the Vedas. Tamil bhakti poetry is a golden mine of spiritual literature.

In modern times Sri Aurobindo, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Subramania Bharati, Tagore, Ramana Maharishi, Mahatma Gandhi and Vallalar have brought to the

new generation the ancient Vedic and Upanishadic message in the light of modern conditions and challenges.

South India protected Sanatana Dharma when it was under attack in the North. South produced the three Acharya of Vedanta- Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhwa. It produced innumerable Sanskrit scholars like Appaya Dikshitar, Nilakanta Dikshitar. The South protected the Vedas. The Tamil and Vijayanagara kings created brahmadeva lands where Vedas were recited and studied. Ramana Maharishi spread his spiritual light from Tamilnadu, Sri Aurobindo came to Pondicherry and did his sadhana. Subramania Bharati studied the Vedas under Sri Aurobindo. SidhaVallalar lived in Tamilnadu and produced spiritual masterpieces. King Krishnadeva Raya of the Vijayanagara Empire was a great patron of art and literature. He patronized Vaishnava literature. To this period belonged Kumara Vyasa(the pen name of Naranappa), a doyen of medieval epic poets and one of the most influential Vaishnava poets of the time belonged to this period. Kumara Valmiki (1500) wrote an adaptation of the epic Ramayana, called *Torave Ramayana*. This writing has remained popular for centuries. It inspired folk theatre such as the *Yakshagana*, which has made use of its verses as a script for enacting episodes from the great epic. AkkaMahadevi, Basaveswara, Kanaka Dasa and a host of others contributed to Kannada literature. In modern times Shivaram Karanth and MastiVenkatesha Iyengar inaugurated the novel and short story forms in Kannada. K.V. Puttappa ('Kuvempu'), who would subsequently become Kannada's first Jnanpith awardee, demonstrated his genius in writing blank verse with his *magnum opus Sri Ramayana Darsanam* (1949) Growth in poetic drama was inspired by B.M. Sri's *GadayuddhaNatakam* (1925), an adaptation of Ranna's medieval epic. While Kuvempu and B.M. Sri were inspired by old Kannada writers, Masti and later P. T. Narasimhachar ('Pu.Ti. Na') wrote about modern sensibilities in their *Yashodhara* (1938) and *Ahalye* (1940). Samsa completed his novels about RanadhiraKantirava, a Mysore king of olden times with his *Vijayanarasimha* (1936) and *Mantrashakti* (1938) The novel emerged during this period, with Karanth (*ChomanaDudi*, 1933), Masti (*Subbanna*, 1928) and Kuvempu ("SubbammaHeggadathi

of Kanur", 1936) producing notable works. Devudu Narasimha Shastri distinguished himself with his *Antaranga* (1931) and *Mayura* (1928). The latter work was a historical novel tracing the emergence of the Kadamba dynasty. Another high point of this period is Karanth's *MaraliMannige* (1942), the saga of three generations of a family, mirroring the social, cultural and economic developments of over a hundred years. UR Ananthamurthy also made some major literary breakthroughs. SL Bhyrappa is a prominent Kannada writer whose novels have strong roots in the Indian philosophical tradition. He draws inspiration from the Mahabharata and other texts from the *parampara* of Sanatana Dharma. GV Iyer's contributions to Indian culture through his spiritual movies must be recognized. RK Narayan and Raja Rao wrote books in English with a distinct Indic perspective.

The Vijayanagara Empire led to the flowering of Telugu literature. His rule in the 16th century is considered as the golden period of Telugu literature. Saint Thyagaraja's devotional songs are famous. In the modern period Kandukuri Veerashalingham wrote social novels. Acharya Aatreya was a playwright and poet.

In modern Tamil literature Madhaviah, SubramaniaBharati, Vallalar, Kalki Krishnamurthy, VVS Iyer, C Rajagopalachari, Jayakanthan, Sivasankari, Balakumaranand Janakiraman, Jayamohan interpreted the Hindu values according to the challenges of the times. They contributed immensely to the creation of a new Tamil social order based on the values of Sanatana Dharma. Jayakantan was a nationalist to the core and critical of divisive tendencies. His *Jaya Jaya Sankara* was based on the life of the Kanchi Paramacharya, Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati. It offers a spiritual alternative to the atheistic movement. Vallalar was one of the most famous Tamil Saints and also one of the greatest Tamil poets of the late 19th century and belongs to a line of Tamil saints known as "Siddhars". Through the notion of *SuddhaSanmargaSangam*, the saint endeavored to create an egalitarian social order. According to SuddhaSanmarga, the prime aspects of human life should be love connected with charity and divine sadhana leading to achievement of pure knowledge. He has contributed immensely to Tamil

mystic poetry. C SubramaniaBharati, the father of modern Tamil literature, studied the Vedas under Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and wrote nationalist as well as mystic/bhaktipoetry. Some notable modern thinkers and writers in Malayalam are Narayana Guru, Vaikom Mohammed Basheer, MT Vasudevan Nair, MalayatoorRamakrishnan. Narayana Guru was a great Adwaitic guru and social reformer. He wrote masterpieces on Vedanta in Malayalam and Sanskrit.

The goal is to showcase South India's immense contribution to Indian culture. Unity and Integrity of the nation can be established only when we link the different parts of the nation to the Vedas and the epics. A cultural Renaissance based on ancient wisdom and modern challenges is the need of the hour. A cultural renaissance is required in the South by throwing light on the modern writers who wrote with nationalism and spirituality as their sources of inspiration.

Mythology informs us that saint Agasthya shifted to the south to balance BharathVarsha. We can infer from this that the seer brought the Vedic tradition to the south. Ramana Maharishi, Narayana Guru, Vallalar were born in the South. Sri Aurobindo chose to migrate to the South. AcharyaSankara, AcharyaRamanuja and AcharyaMadhwa were born in the South and they shook the nation with their spiritual shakti. They wrote famous commentaries on the shastras. The South was also swept by the Gandhian wave as *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao testifies. In modern times, Bishop Caldwell introduced the venomous Aryan- Dravidian theory and sought to divide Tamilnadu. A new initiative is required to revive patriotism and spirituality in the South and give publicity to the links of this region to Bharat Varsha.

- A. The Seminar - presentations which will be duly edited and published by IAS Shimla- are expected to address the growing need to strengthen the consciousness of national unity and integration. It will promote new ways of critically examining how the south Indian writers have been writing about the hitherto neglected aspects of “local/ national” culture in their literary/ aesthetic representations that are grounded in the social, political , economic, cultural/ spiritual meanings of Bharat. The Seminar is also intended to make

a case for an innovative pedagogy and research wherein the inputs are also taken from South India. Moreover, the researchers/ participants will be required to apply a critical methodology that has some pronounced aesthetic ideas / theories drawn from the South Indian sources, to the texts

B. Research Questions to be addressed in the seminar:

- 1 How do the contemporary South Indian writers address the fissures and faultlines (caste, gender, class, language, region, ethnicity) that undermine the national integration of Bharat ?
2. How does the national” gets reconstructed in the works of the South Indian writers even as the writers write the “ local” in their works?
3. Is there a pan- Indian “ Civilizational, moral and aesthetic context” that integrates the diversity of “ représentations” coming from South India , into a distinct form of “ unity”??
4. How do the South Indian writers negotiate with the mutually exchangeable coordinates of tradition and modernity?

The seminar essentially and candidly foregrounds the need to strengthen the idea and value of “national unity and integration” - one of the primary objectives of IAS Shimla- according to its Memorandum of Understanding. As an academic activity, the Seminar seeks to explore how to re-explore and disseminate the sources of our national unity.

Objectives of the Conference

- A To discuss how literature is a tool for spiritual and cultural renaissance
- B To highlight on the social and spiritual messages in modern Tamil, Kannada, Telugu and Malayalam literature.
- C To show the link between the southern part of India and Bharat Varsha

Suggested themes:

- A Social reform and literature in South India.
- B Heritage of South India.
- C Spiritual literature of South India
- D National integration through Modern South Indian literature.
- E The concept of Bharat in modern South Indian literature

Call for Papers:

A limited number of participants will be invited for the Seminar. Those interested in participating should send (preferably by email) an abstract (500 words) of the proposed paper along with their C.V. (One page) to:

1. Dr Ramaswami Subramony, Associate professor and Head,
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3. Shri Prem Chand
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The last date for submission of abstract (500 words) is till 1st September 12:00 midnight. The Institute intends to send Invitation letters to selected participants by the 1st October, 2023. It is the policy of the Institute to publish the papers not proceedings of the seminars it organizes. Hence, all invited participants will be expected to submit complete papers (English or Hindi), hitherto unpublished and original, with citations in place, along with a reference section, to the Academic Resource Officer, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla– 171005 by 15th September, 2023.

The IAS, Shimla will be glad to extend its hospitality (**free hospitality is provided only to the seminar participant**) during the seminar period and is willing to reimburse, if required, rail or air travel expenses from the place of current residence in India, or the port of arrival in India, and back.

Note: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and the Institute reserves the right to cancel the selection/participation of a candidate found guilty at any stage.