

Portrayal of Postcolonial Voices in Subramania Bharati's "Panchali Sapatham"

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Abstract

Subramania Bharati's 'Panchali Sapatham' is a mere reflection of the famous Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*, which symbolically represents the British Colonisation and their oppression meted out to the natives of India.

Though it is a religious text, it really aims to manifest the conspiracy and perennial exploitation of the British over the indigenous people of India; and also ends with the furious agitation of native people against the British colonisation. In addition, Panchali, the wife of Pandavas in the *Mahabharata* has been typified as the Mother of India (Bharat Matha). Pandavas are portrayed as the native people of the country who have been victimized and fooled by the conspiracy and diplomacy of the colonizers, whereas Gouravas are portrayed as the colonizers, who have exploited and plundered the natural resources of the country and enslaved the Bharat Matha over centuries. Having been demeaned and disgraced by Gouravas, Panchali (Bharat Matha) utters her vow like that of uncontrollable flames against the oppressors (colonizers). Subsequently, the enslaved and fettered Pandavas (native people) also vow against Gouravas (colonizers) one after the other.

Subramania Bharati was a journalist, freedom fighter, social reformer and patriotic poet who voiced boldly against every inequality, class discrimination, slavery of women and other kinds of oppressions which were/are prevalent in India. Though he was born in a Brahmin family he fought for the emancipation and rights of women and the underprivileged class people. He fought not only for the rights of the oppressed community and women but also fought for the freedom of India. The country had been colonized and enslaved by the British over centuries. As he was a scholar and poet he fought for the independence of his country through his powerful and provocative poems.

In addition to that, he worked as a journalist and sub-editor of the Tamil daily newspaper, *Swadesamitran*, in the early twentieth century. As this daily failed to accommodate his fiery patriotic writings he had to join in a new Tamil weekly, *India* which was condemned completely by the British officers as it propagated anticolonial provocations among people. In order to escape from the British's trap, he fled to Pondicherry which was colonized by the French rulers. Subsequently, he got the acquaintance of great personalities such as Sri Aurobindo, V.V.S. Iyer, Subramania Siva and other patriots who took refuge in Pondicherry. It was there he got good ambience to produce his most prominent works such as "*Kannan Paatu*", "*Kuyil Paatu*" and "*Panchali Sapatham*".

As the British government started to ban any kind of literary work or pamphlets which contained the theme of freedom struggle, Bharati had to defamiliarise his patriotic works in terms of religious text and mythical stories. At this juncture, he brilliantly incorporated the theme of freedom struggle and metaphorical agitation in the myth-based work of “*Panchali Sapatham*”, which overtly picturizes the vow of Panchali from the *Mahabharata* (popular Indian myth).

However, it is purely a symbolic representation of colonialism as well as indigenous people’s agitation over the perennial oppression and injustices of the British colonialism. The significance of the work is that it was considered as that of a quite religious story and hence it was not caught the attention of the British officials. Disseminating the work across various parts of Tamil Nadu during religious festivals, Bharati was successful in fueling the spirit of patriotism among people against the colonizers indirectly. Thus, the proposed paper aims at disclosing the postcolonial voices in Subramania Bharati’s remarkable work “*Panchali Sapatham*”.

The work “*Panchali Sapatham*” represents Panchali, wife of Pandavas, as a mere personification of India (Bharata Matha) who had been enslaved and exploited brutally by the colonizers for more than two centuries. And Pandavas (Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva) are portrayed as indigenous and working class people of the nation who had been victimized by the conspiracy of the colonizers. Ultimately Gouravas (Dhuryodhana, Dushasana, and his brothers) are portrayed as the British colonizers and the capitalists who had ruled and ruined the native people of the country over centuries.

As Gouravas were inferior to Pandavas in terms of bravery, intelligence and honour, they were unable to defeat Pandavas honestly in the battlefield. Hence, having been driven by the uncontrollable wrath and jealous over Pandavas, Gouravas decided to assault them through conspiracy and unrighteous means. Subsequently, they invited Pandavas for a feast and also induced Yudhishtira to participate in the treacherous game, i.e., *Pakadai* (a royal game of dice) by which they planned to enslave Pandavas and their belongings. However, they had accomplished their long-awaited dream of enslaving the Pandavas through their conspiracy and became victorious in fettering and capturing the Pandavas’s wealth.

Therefore, the theme of “*Panchali Sapatham*” is quite suitable to British colonization since they enslaved and captured the mother India through their conspiracy in terms of commerce and trade. In other words, initially they did not enter India with the intention of colonizing it, rather they wanted to do trade with India as they found enormous and immeasurable natural wealth spread everywhere across the country. As they lacked honesty and courage they started to exploit the natural wealth of the country gradually by the disguise of trade and commerce. Later, they planned to demolish the unity of the natives by introducing their religion, i.e., Christianity, beside that they wanted to form their comprador class among the natives. Moreover, they planned to colonize the whole country by spreading English education through Christian institutions initially across the nation in order to rule the native people by the same blood itself. While strengthening the English education they first got superiority over the Indian languages and gradually they grew to admonish the local kings to pay their taxes in monthly basis. That was how they acquired kingdoms and regions of small kings through their

diplomacy and various agreements, despite the latter's firm repugnance and resistance of some brave Indian kings namely, Veerapandia Kattabomman, Tipu Sultan, Hyder Ali, etc. against the former. Over the years, they started to colonize the entire nation by capturing the administration, judiciary, education, and law and order of the country. This was how the British had enslaved the mother India as well as her children and had been plundering the natural wealth of the nation; and also had been exploiting the manpower of the nation for the betterment of their country for more than two hundred and fifty years.

Pandavas in the Mahabharata, having been deceived and disgraced by the Gouravas, each of them took his/her vows against their counterpart, one after the other with utmost rage. Especially, the uncontrollable wrath of Panchali towards the Gouravas as well as her husband Yudhishtira was most significant in the poem. She accuses her husband for having mortgaged herself blindly as well as participated in the treacherous game and lost everything including himself, despite knowing the fact that it is against the dharma. However, her vow swerves off the whole assembly as well as the whole universe for the occurred injustice against the female community. It is since Panchali's chastity which has been defamed by the Gouravas, the great Kurukshetra war occurs in the history, in which each of the evil doers and bestial Gauravas would be avenged cruelly by the furious Pandavas and the war ultimately results in the annihilation of evil-minded people. After the war, it is revealed that the dharma would win one day or the other though it is prone to face various misfortunes and setbacks. In other words, the oppressed people would react against the perennial injustices and conspirators like that of violent flames and would burn every imposter into ashes.

The deceived Pandavas and disgraced Panchali are used as symbols in the work, which represent the Mother of the nation and its indigenous people. The resentful Panchali is being personified as the Bharata Matha (Mother of India), because she was also humiliated, strangulated, oppressed and plundered by her enemies (Britishers). The words that are uttered by Panchali in the work are seemed to be spoken by the Bharata Matha herself against her perpetrators. It is Panchali's vow which is very significant among the Pandavas's vow because, it is the voice of oppressed and subaltern women who still suffer a lot in the male-chauvinistic society deprived of social, economic and cultural independence. Her accusation against the human predators as follows:

*Pendir thamai udayeer pengaludan pirantheer!
Penpaavamandro? Periavasai kolveero?
Kanpaarkka vendum! (465).*

English meaning of these lines:

You live with women, were you born with women?
Is it not a great sin against women?
How can you face the consequence?
I must witness your terrible end.

Moreover, she voices not only against the colonial rule but also against the every socio political inequality, injustice, caste and gender discrimination, capitalism, and exploitation of both human and natural resources prevailing in the society. Ultimately, she speaks as the universal consciousness of oppressed women for their emancipation from the perennial oppression.

The poem ends with Arjuna's optimistic words:
"Tharumathin vaalvuthanai shootu kavvum;
Tharumam marupadi vellum"
Karumathi menmelum kaanbom indru
Kattundom, poruthiruppom. Kaalam maarum
Tharumathai appothu vellak kaanbom,
Thanuvundu kaandeevam athanper (467).

The above words of Arjuna are in positive tone which asserts that *Atharma* (Unrighteousness/ Injustice) may swallow the *Tharma* (Righteousness/Justice) but one day or the other justice would triumph certainly, as that is the law of the nature. Similarly, the plight and pitiable condition of the country would also change after great victory (Independence) against the unlawful agencies. In order to attain that fruitful freedom each and every individual of the country should express his/her resistance and agitation against the colonizers at all costs, until the independence is acquired.

This is how, as the patriotic poet, Bharati made use of the plot of Panchali's Sapatham from the *Mahabharata* as a tool or background for his freedom struggle. It had really changed the inferiority complex of the indigenous people and thereby instigated the people to take part in the freedom struggle of the country. By this poem he could awake the people who were sleeping in the perennial ignorance of darkness for centuries. It was his intense love for his Bharata Matha (Mother of India) and her children made him write many emotional and sensible literary works and articles against the colonial rule, despite the repeated warnings of the British officials. His contribution to the freedom of the country is immeasurable. In addition to that, he not only fought against the colonizers but also against the caste and class system of the society; and he was the first man to raise his voice for the emancipation and basic rights of women as well. Having been born and brought up in a Brahmin family, he consistently fought for the liberation and equality of the underprivileged people, who had been ill-treated, segregated, and ostracized by the conventional societal rules.

Through this work Bharati expected the citizens of the country to strive for the freedom of their Mother India from the perennial clutches of British colonialism. Despite having acquired the freedom from the foreign colonizers sixty years ago, still the Mother India has been suffering much more from the internal colonization that is being carried out by evil agencies such as capitalists, politicians, corporate companies, and multinational companies and so on.

The most condemnable thing is that the nation has been affected extremely by the internal colonization than the British colonization. In other words, the colonizers exploited the physical wealth and human wealth of the nation to some extent alone, whereas the leftovers are also

intensely being exploited by the indigenous perpetrators right before the eyes of the citizens, in terms of international politics, industrialization, privatization, scientific developments and various business agreements with the capitalist countries. As a result of which, rich becomes richer, poor becomes poorer; cultivation lands are abruptly transformed into multinational and corporate companies. Due to over exploitation of natural resources even the abundant renewable sources are also nowadays getting decreased day by day, which may lead to deficiency of fundamental natural resources such as drinking water, fresh air, and peaceful environment. Consequently, the whole world has become materialized where there would not be liveliness and humanity in human life; there would not be any integrity among people in the heterogeneous and multicultural and multilingual country like India. Eventually, today's scientific growth becomes a menace or threat to the harmonious and conventional society despite its remarkable traits in making impossible possible in the global world in a minimal duration.

Hence, the Mother India would get real independence from all its agonies, if only the above -mentioned antisocial and undesirable elements existing in the society uprooted out of the society. Unless or until this change occurs, the Mother India would never view the real independence, although it had got political freedom from the British colonizers years ago. It is this social independence that the country expects for. If Bharati had been in the present time, he must have sought for the freedom from this perilous 'internal colonisation' or 'neocolonisation' rather than the external (British colonisation) against which every "learned citizen" should fight for. That indeed might be the real independence for the nation as well as its citizens.

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