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Subramania Bharati and the Rhetoric of Enthusiasm

ABSTRACT This article identifies the rhetoric and sentiment of enthusiasm as a certain specifically Tamil historical-aesthetic-political conjuncture that operates in both an affective register and as a structure of publicity. The “people,” who emerge as a subject of politics within the crucible of the swadeshi movement, are both “the masses” (a populist political subject) as well as the anticipated citizens of a future sovereign democracy. To distinguish the Tamil conjuncture from the histories of European populism, Part I outlines the political implications of public enthusiasm in the European Enlightenment. Kant, in his articulation of enthusiasm as a form of reason, is the critical figure here. Whereas in English poetry enthusiasm was domesticated and contained, Bharati’s writings and their impact exemplify its very different trajectory in colonial India. In Part II, Bharati’s poetry is analyzed under three heads: the enthusiasm it manifests, its language and rhetoric, and its focus on nationalism and social reform. Part III describes the communicative technologies and the formation of Bharati’s public and then the colonial conjuncture in which his work encountered censorship and prohibition. The conclusion underlines the significance of Bharati’s writings and the relevance of the political enthusiasm they generated—and still do.

KEYWORDS Bharati, Tamil poetry, enthusiasm, Kant, colonial politics

Part I: Introduction

I found a fledgling spark of fire
And placed it in a hollow in a forest nearby.
The forest blazed, the fire died down—
When a fire rages
What does “spark” or “blaze” matter?
—Subramania Bharati, “A Spark of Fire” (my translation)

In the early decades of the twentieth century, Subramania Bharati (1882–1921) electrified a generation of Tamils with his outpouring of writings as

journalist and poet. To understand the extent and nature of the impact of his writings in his time (and beyond), I take recourse to the concept of enthusiasm, understood as both sentiment and rhetoric. The operation of enthusiasm as a “trans-subjective force” has considerable explanatory value for a reading of the political and cultural history of southern India at the height of British rule (Ventrella).¹

This is not to claim that Bharati’s example as poet, nationalist, and reformer was unique in late colonial India. Enthusiasm is a component, arguably even an essential component, of many anticolonial and nationalist movements. Nor is Bharati’s poetry exceptional for its fervor or the heightened emotions it sought to communicate and inspire. The identification of poetry itself with inspiration, divine afflatus, and madness goes back to Plato, whose fear of the poets led him, as we know, to expel them from the Republic. Nevertheless, Bharati’s life and work, in making visible the connections among poetry, religion, nationalism, and social revolution, exemplifies the coming together of aesthetics, ethics, and politics in ways that are historically and culturally specific to the Tamil region. Enthusiasm, as both spirit and concept, defines this historical conjuncture.

In an important way, Bharati’s poetry anticipated and prepared the ground for the emergence of the people as the subject of politics in his part of the world: not only as the “masses” who would be called on, through the weight of their numbers and their participation, to constitute a nationalist movement that was beginning to gain momentum in India at the time but also as the anticipated citizens of a free democratic nation in the making. In its very origins as religious, aesthetic, or political affect, enthusiasm operates through the structure of publicity by generating an interactive space for its manifestation. The extent of Bharati’s intimacy with his Tamil public can be gauged only by following the conceptual work of enthusiasm in defining the new politics and poetics that it brought into existence. The outpouring of these emotive and propagandistic songs was directed at rapidly politicizing the Tamil people, thereby bringing the freedom movement to the Madras Presidency, which Bharati felt was lagging behind other parts of the country such as Bombay and Bengal.² He was convinced that publications such as the magazine *Swadesamitran* (where he served as assistant editor) played a significant role in creating a nationalist consciousness in the region (*Chosen* 419).³ By successfully drawing the vast mass of the people into becoming readers, listeners, followers, interlocutors, singers, and the very source of its language and music, Bharati’s work brought into existence a modern Tamil public that would eventually be drawn into the national mainstream. The communication—we could justifiably call it the contagiousness—of the

poet's enthusiasm contributed to the political mobilization of a people, a phenomenon sometimes described as an "awakening."

Enthusiasm in this sense necessarily draws on the significance the term carries in European, and somewhat differently in British, history and political thought, thereby opening up an inquiry into the civility of the passions, while at the same time also imbuing it with a different colonial genealogy. The primary associations of enthusiasm with poetic and religious inspiration transfer with little change—but with considerable irony—to the context of anticolonial politics. This article is an attempt to follow enthusiasm and its destinies into the colony by way of Bharati's poetry and its rhetoric; the emergence of a Tamil reading, listening, and reciting public; and its concurrent nationalist awakening. Using enthusiasm as a theoretical explanatory frame serves two distinct but linked purposes: the first, to name and describe an attribute of Bharati's appeal within swadeshi nationalism, and more broadly within the formation of what Bernard Bate has called a "Tamil modern" ("Bharati" 5); and the second, to detect its instrumentality in the operation of the paired terms *populism* and *pedagogy* that have so conspicuously shaped anti-colonial nationalism and postcolonial democracy in India.

In what follows, I expand on the uses of the terms and their conceptual charge and connect them to the rhetoric and reception of Bharati's poetry in a rapidly changing and politically resurgent Tamil society in the early decades of the twentieth century.

ENTHUSIASM'S GENEALOGY AND ITS TRAVELS

To clarify at the outset: the genealogy of the term is not uniquely European. Enthusiasm and its cognates obviously do exist in other cultures, with similar sources in religion and poetry, and in the form of such similar affective experiences as spiritual ecstasy, religious passion, or military heroism. But the political implications of public enthusiasm in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, at a time of revolutionary historical change, sparked philosophical debates that have contributed, unlike elsewhere, to the shaping of a universal political modernity.

Widespread, collective enthusiasm was met with approbation by some Enlightenment philosophers and with dismay and disapproval by others, depending on how they judged the political effects of publicly manifested emotion.⁴ Kant developed a distinctive position on the enthusiasm that the French Revolution aroused by locating it in distant onlookers like himself rather than in the active participants. Identifying in the former "a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm," Kant read in this identification with the other proof of a "moral disposition within the human race" ("Contest"

182). What mattered to Kant was “not the revolution itself nor its course, nor even its spirit,” but rather the view that “disinterested spectators like he himself took of these events from the outside” (Reiss 262). The ethical dimension of enthusiasm is summed up in Kant’s definition of it as “an idea of the good with affect” (Reiss 262). “True enthusiasm,” Kant held, “is always directed exclusively towards the *ideal*, particularly towards that which is purely moral (such as the concept of right), and it cannot be coupled with selfish interests” (“Contest” 183).

So despite its being primarily a spontaneous feeling (or affect, which Kant is careful to distinguish from “passion”), enthusiasm acts to produce ethical and aesthetic effects that to him are entirely in consonance with reason, and indeed are required by reason. It is in the careful discrimination between enthusiasm and what it closely resembles, the much-derided *schwärmerei* (religious fanaticism), that we see the fear that it evokes as the other of reason. The potentially “anarchic nature” of enthusiasm, the likelihood that its “infectious communicativity” might not remain within “the circumscribed sphere of the enlightened public” but might instead “give rise to a riotous crowd,” is an ever-present one (Gailus 66–67). The political impact of enthusiasm is mediated by its affective, moral, and aesthetic response to the spectacle of revolution, even as it is moderated by obedience to institutional norms.

These ambivalent and qualified responses to enthusiasm on the continent were reflected in its shifting status in the intellectual and political history of England from roughly 1600 to 1800, a history that has implications for its subsequent manifestation in the colony. Caught between “desire and disavowal” (Mee 2), enthusiasm was similarly initially feared and condemned as religious fanaticism in England (e.g., consider Locke’s statement that “it takes away both reason and revelation”) and as a threat to the sovereign power of the state, and then somewhat rehabilitated by Shaftesbury as a “sociable passion, founded in the desire to join with others, and ultimately with God.”⁵ The revolution in France would provoke fresh deliberations on enthusiasm as a political sentiment. Burke articulated the conservative position most eloquently: as J. G. A. Pocock notes, he “lost no time in diagnosing revolutionary zeal as a form of enthusiasm . . . even though atheist,” a political condition where “nothing rules except the mind of desperate men” (27). Pocock sums up the relationship of enthusiasm to the Enlightenment as that of an “anti-self” (27) or, as Jon Mee puts it, “the monstrous alter ego of eighteenth-century civility” (28). Enthusiasm returned as a secular aesthetic of Romanticism, although not entirely free of its religious or political histories, in the visionary poetry of Blake and Christopher Smart, in the Wordsworthian egotistical sublime, and in Byron and Shelley’s effusions.

But if it was domesticated in English poetry, as Mee suggests (17), and thus contained in English politics, this was far from being the case in the colonies. In India, especially in the early decades of the twentieth century, enthusiasm, as manifested in discourse—in poetry, journalism, pamphlets, and speeches—was inflammatory; and in politics it took the shape of revolutionary nationalism. That imperial Britain would confront in the colonies the revival of the enthusiasm it had thought to have outgrown in its own political evolution is one of the more intriguing ironies of colonial history.⁶ In a letter that Bharati wrote to the English daily, *The Hindu*, in 1911, he defiantly declared his lack of political decorum: “I am aware that on account of your ingrained love for temperate language and dispassionate logic, you do not give publication in your columns to correspondence couched in violent language [such as his own], even in cases where such language might be the result of a feeling of righteous indignation” (*Karuvooram* 41). The native poet’s recognition that the languages of reason and civility did not easily accommodate his “righteous indignation” then becomes the impetus for his turn to the resonances of the vernacular and the resources of his own tradition in search of greater rhetorical freedom.

Native anticolonial speech and writing was as dangerous to the colonial state as popular religious inspiration had been to the authority of the Church in England. Shaftesbury had recognized as much in eighteenth-century Britain when he noted how the “self-authorizing passions of the Dissenting tradition” contributed to “the enthusiastic self-authorization of the modern subject” (Rosenberg 480). Colonial administrators were quick to intuit poetry’s enabling effects on the emergence of a modern political subjectivity in colonized people.

The political ambitions of this subject would expand quickly. The formation of the citizen-subject was set in motion under the stimulus of such self-sanctioning freedom and the removal of constraints on the creative imagination. As a representative subject of this moment in colonial India, as well as a spokesman who articulated its desires and demands in his pioneering role as poet, Bharati is a key historical figure.

POPULISM, PEDAGOGY, AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

If in the first of these roles Bharati appears as a populist figure, a man of the people, in the second, he emerges as pedagogue, a figure of the vanguard. Under the pressure of (his) enthusiasm, however, the distinctive and even opposed functions of populism and pedagogy are reconciled in his poetic persona. Enthusiasm’s effects are most fully realized through sociality, in a communicative or transsubjective mode, effecting a cognitive, perceptual, and imaginative expansiveness of thought within an ever-widening circle of

interlocutors. This, we recognize, is the modality of populism and pedagogy as well. Populism, in the most limited and neutral sense, is a politics of the people, and pedagogy refers to the process of (their) (political) education.⁷

In colonial and postcolonial India, discussions of populism have been closely related to the process of constituting a people and a public, as it took shape first in the context of anticolonial nationalist mass mobilization and then in the evolving space of democracy and electoral politics once independence was won. The “people” is, first of all, a concept formed by interpellation and address. In liberation struggles, the inhabitants of a colonized territory who had until then borne the identity only of subjects (of a sovereign empire) or “natives” (of their own territories), had to be recast as a “people” and imagined as future “citizens” of a free nation. At a time when people and public were concepts being newly forged in the imminence of mass mobilization (and through its instrumentality), the egalitarianism on which the concepts are founded had itself to be promoted, primarily through pedagogic means. In India in the late nineteenth century and increasingly through the course of the twentieth, this was done—paradoxically but necessarily—through the leadership of a vanguard class. Independent India’s leadership, armed with projects for the development and education of the masses, pinned its faith on their political common sense, most notably by endorsing universal franchise.

The preliminary enterprise of collective self-fashioning, a task that is best described as pedagogic, was undertaken therefore by an indigenous elite who viewed it in terms of consciousness-raising, education, and reform, for a populace whom they perceived as lacking any sense of themselves as a national citizenry. A well-known passage in Jawaharlal Nehru’s *Discovery of India* will serve as an example. Nehru describes his travels through India trying to inculcate this new sense of national identity and destiny in the poor rural masses. His audience had to be taught that India was more than the *dharti* or soil of the land they tilled:

I would . . . explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and the rivers of India, and the forests and the broad fields, which gave us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land. Bharat Mata, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people, and victory to her meant victory to these people. You are parts of this Bharat Mata, I told them, you are in a manner yourselves Bharat Mata, and as this idea slowly soaked into their brains, their eyes would light up as if they had made a great discovery. (60–61)

Other leaders shared Nehru's conviction that their followers had to be inculcated with the consciousness of being Indian if they were to join the fight for independence and progressively, for other rights.⁸

Bernard Bate shows how a dynamic recasting of the very idea of "politics" occurred in the first two decades of the twentieth century, providing the essential impetus for a mass movement ("Persuade" 145). It was in this period, Bate explains, that the indigenous elite, the educated class, began, for the first time, "quite pointedly to direct their utterances toward people they had never bothered with before as politically relevant" (145). He attributes this "interpellative transformation" in the Tamil region to the new communicative medium of oratory (147). Identifying three successive political flashpoints in the emergence of a "Tamil political"—the swadeshi movement, the Home Rule movement, and the labor movement—Bate notes that the elite leaders at their forefront turned toward people "utterly unlike themselves" to "persuade them into speech and action." This "universalization" of politics, as Bate terms it, is what "enabled the masses, as it were, to become the people" (148–49).

Bate emphasizes another new and notable feature of mass politics in the Tamil region in this period, namely the use of the vernacular for communication, particularly in public oratory, in a marked shift from the predominance of English in elite discourse until then (149). Partha Chatterjee notes that the Congress formally acknowledged the importance of the regional languages as the "medium of mass political communication" in its decision to "reorganize its provincial committees along linguistic boundaries" in 1919–20. Echoing Bate, he concludes that it is by means of these "vernacular histories" that "'the people' was mobilized as a political subject in different parts of India" (Chatterjee, *I Am* 88).

It is within this dense conjuncture of the rise of mass politics and the "people-nation," alongside the growing importance of language and communication, that I place Bharati and his poetry. Although his political allegiance, like that of many of his contemporaries, would shift in later years toward Gandhi and his revolutionary spirit would be subdued by exile, imprisonment, and censorship, his role as populist and pedagogue, nationalist and reformer, was forged in the crucible of swadeshi where his enthusiasm found full play and acquired historical meaning.

Part II: Bharati and His Poetry

Bharati's historical role, it is important to remind ourselves, was that of poet—a literary figure—not a political leader. Language is of course an indispensable tool of politics whether in poetry, oratory, or journalism. And given Bharati's involvement in the tumultuous events of swadeshi nationalism

and revolution, it would be difficult for his writings to escape the framing of the political. Despite this, however, Bharati was known by his words and music, his public identity uniquely that of poet. I consider Bharati's poetry under three heads: the enthusiasm it manifests, its language and rhetoric, and its thematic focus on nationalism and social reform.

BHARATI'S POETIC ENTHUSIASM

Subramania Bharati was a prolific and versatile writer, attempting every kind of genre in prose and verse in Tamil and occasionally in English. But it is as a Tamil poet that he is remembered above all, celebrated for his pioneering prosodic experiments; his forging of a simple, new, and colloquial literary idiom; and the composition of his poems for music. His poetic range is dazzling in theme, form, and meter. (Most compilations of his writings group the poems by one or other of these.) He wrote patriotic as well as devotional poems, with much overlap in their idioms, two long poems (the devotional *Kannan-pattu* and the fantastical fable *Kuyil-pattu*), short lyric poems, lullabies, rhymes for children, songs for women's dance (the *kummi*), nature poems, love poems, autobiographical fragments in verse, reflections, prose poems in experimental meters, and the poetic drama *Panchali Sapatham*, among numerous other works.

Although produced and first disseminated within a short period in the early decades of the twentieth century, Bharati's poems continue to resonate in the Tamil-speaking world, across partisan divides. To this day, they can be heard in song in devotional forums at home and in temples, performed in classical music concerts, popularized by Tamil popular cinema, declaimed in political oratory, and taught in schools. Anyone who has spent any significant time with Tamils (not only in Tamilnadu but also in Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and the Tamil diaspora) cannot fail to be struck by how spontaneously they take recourse to Bharati's writings in their own speech and thought in the form of song, quotation, or even wholesale recitation. The corpus of his work now constitutes an archive of Tamil cultural memory, a testament to his vast and enduring popular appeal.

A key to this kind of literary fame, one that is both contemporary and enduring, can be sought in the enthusiasm from which it is generated and which it in turn generates. Bharati's enthusiasm is a characteristic easy to deduce from his writings, and it is equally pronounced in almost every account of his personality and behavior that has come to us from his contemporaries.⁹ It was evident in his unflagging energy and curiosity, his zest, his joie de vivre, his fervid hero worship, his religious fervor, and his ceaseless poetic innovation. Bharati's granddaughter Vijaya Bharati describes the

poet as being frail in body but incandescent in spirit, a combination that all those who knew him remarked on (S. V. Bharati 16–18). In several of his first-person poems, Bharati outlines a philosophy of life and living compounded of bravado and the poignant consciousness of human limitations, as in the following famous manifesto:

What: scrambling for scraps to eat,
spreading petty gossip,
worrying and brooding,
hurting others by my actions,
turning old and grey,
bearing the cruel burden of the years
and ending up a clown
like most men
—Is this how you thought I would live my life? (from “Yoga Siddhi”; my translation)

The poet is not “like most men”; his life will be consciously extraordinary.

But the enthusiastic person is more than a characterological type: he is almost always an emblematic product of a time of profound change and consequence. C. N. Annadurai emphasized this aspect of Bharati’s life and times in his 1948 eulogy:

Bharathi was born on the frontier of two eras—the feudal order was in full force in his homeland, Ettayapuram . . . age-old castes were still in power, he himself was a Brahmin by birth. But side by side with feudalism and sanathanic order of society, modernism was peeping with sorrowful and scornful eyes, and there was challenge in the look of the new era . . . In such a land of paradoxes and perplexities Bharathi was born. (Annadurai n.p.)¹⁰

A certain kind of intellectual sensibility responds to the perception of such momentousness with an acute sense of destiny. The critic K. Kailasapathy observes that Bharati “clearly felt the experience of living through a new social process at work. In him we find a sense of his own modernity, and an awareness of transition” (3). The experience of colonialism as a rupture—as a definitive break with the old and the precondition for the inauguration of the new—is not unique to Bharati. We know from well-documented accounts of the so-called Bengal Renaissance that for some colonial subjects the encounter with the West and its forms of modernity could be intellectually exhilarating and culturally renovative. This was no gradual process of change that could be internalized in measured terms, but rather a frenzy of discovery and radical self-fashioning.

Bharati's identification as a revolutionary poet offers a point of entry into a discussion of the enthusiastic content of his writings. The earliest such influence on him was literary: Bharati read the English Romantic poets as a young man in Benares, and they left a lifelong mark on his poetic themes. For Bharati, "Romanticism meant rebellion, pure and simple," Kailasapathy notes (13). Shelley was a particularly potent influence. Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that the "European inheritance" of Romanticism was a component of the anti-colonial movement and has contributed to the "strongly populist aspects" of present-day Indian democracy (93). Citing literary texts in Hindi, especially those produced in the 1920s and 1930s, he identifies the figure of the idealized peasant who appears in them as marking the "romantic-populist origins of Indian democratic thought" (99–100). In the Tamil region Bharati was an important representative of such a Romanticism-inspired political imagination, marked by religious exaltation, revolutionary fervor, and republicanism.

Bharati's work has also been viewed within the Tamil *Saiva Siddhanta* religious tradition, a devotional philosophy that has an inherent potential for expressing revolutionary political ideals. The work of the early Saivite saints was marked by "democratism, humanism and secularism," rather than any fanaticism of faith, according to Kamil Zvelebil, who places Bharati within this tradition (20). It bears other prominent features of enthusiasm's rhetoric. Christine Frost argues that the "Saiva bhakti tradition . . . displays certain dynamic features that make it ideally suited for redeployment in the cause of political liberation" (154). These are "first, conversion; second, renewal; next, full-blooded affirmation of life; then, defiance of conventionality, passionate devotion, an experience of *arul* (divine grace) that energizes the soul and body of the recipient; and, finally, song lyrics that draw inspiration from the Tamil landscape and the social customs and pastimes of Tamil society, especially the world of women" (154). Frost shows how Bharati made use of the "thematics of conversion and energization by the Siva Sakti godhead" as a means of fueling his "bardic call to the nation to awake from stupor" (159).

Although it is not incorrect to read Bharati's self-described shift from "Shelley-dasan" to "Sakti-dasan" ('dasan': slave, or devotee as here) as a "conversion"—from "Eurocentric, facile romantic" to "indigenous firebrand" (Frost 159)—it is a reading that identifies him in terms of a primary Hindu identity, however radical and revisionist that identity might itself be in its genealogy. Bharati's recourse to the religious idiom of the Tamil siddha and bhakti traditions for his poetics does not compete with or supersede his Romantic revolutionary rhetoric as we might expect; instead, it merges with it. At work here is an ongoing process of cultural and epistemological translation from one discursive regime to another, not unlike what happened in the

early vernacular novel in many parts of India (Kumar, “Seeing”). Nevertheless, Frost’s anxiety about Bharati’s appropriation for a contemporary politics of religious nationalism (165) is an understandable one, and it remains an issue that we will have reason to revisit later in this article.¹¹

The twin literary influences of English Romanticism and Tamil Saiva bhakti tradition on Bharati’s poetic formation was reinforced by his exposure to the swadeshi movement then at its height in Bengal. Bharati’s visit to Calcutta in 1905, when he met Sister Nivedita and other Bengali nationalists, was a transformative event; he returned exalted by the radical ideas about the nation’s freedom through revolutionary struggle and the emancipation of women, with his eyes newly opened to the stirring events in the larger world. For swadeshi was not a parochial revolution that turned only to the indigenous past for inspiration. On the contrary, as Kris Manjappa notes, in the years from 1903 to 1921, there was no shortage of distant “mirrors” in which “swadeshi activists saw their own revolutionary pursuits reflected” (55). The poets also drew inspiration from the political upheavals happening in other parts of the world. The first Russian Revolution was closely followed by Tilak and the extremists in the nationalist struggle, and Bharati wrote in ardent support of it in 1906. In 1917, he composed “The New Russia,” hailing the fall of the Czar as follows:

Maa-Kali, Parasakthi
Turns her glowing eyes towards Russia
Behold there the revolution of the Age
Rises High.
. . . O people of the world,
Behold this mighty change!

The poem ends with the celebration of a new historical epoch:

In one brief hour arose the people’s
Rule over people’s life; a great republic
Has been proclaimed. All fetters shattered,
All men free. . . . The golden Age has now begun. (*Chosen* 54–55)

Whether it was the Russian Revolution, Italy’s unification struggle led by Mazzini, “Asia’s awakening,” or the First World War, Bharati was of course only a distant observer, watching from the sidelines. Even so, writing about “India and the War” in 1915, he declares his partisanship: “from whatever philosophical height one may choose to survey the momentous struggle now going on in Europe, one cannot help taking sides unless one ceases to be human. The thing is so grand, so terrible, so tragic, so human” (*Chosen* 417).¹²

It is in terms strikingly similar to this that Kant and the Enlightenment philosophers wrote about the French Revolution, as we saw. No less than the actors on the stage, those “obscure and distant spectators” who watched the revolution with enthusiasm and “made distinctions between what is just and not” were operating, in Kant’s view, “under the *sign of history*” (Lyotard 29).¹³ It is in this Kantian role of morally discriminating spectators that Bharati sought to bring Indians living under colonial rule too under the “sign of history.” But if for Kant the revolution was essentially a moral revelation produced as spectacle, for Bharati and his kind, revolution elsewhere served as a model, an affirmation of the politics of the possible and an occasion for the expression of solidarity.¹⁴

The enthusiasm for world events that finds expression in such effusive language is a key constituent of Bharati’s populist appeal. However, there is another point, a pedagogic one, to Bharati’s interest in events happening elsewhere in the world: that of stimulating the public imagination and inciting it to action. C. N. Annadurai draws our attention to the novelty of Bharati’s paeans to freedom. Unlike the “poets of a bygone age,” Bharati was not a moralist but a creative artist who drew vivid pictures of the world that existed outside the one he inhabited. He did more than merely “point out ancient scripts in support of freedom”; he drew on the power of modern examples. He pulled the masses, Annadurai insists, into the orbit of politics envisaged as an interconnected transnational movement by placing before them “world events of importance, the freedom movements of distant lands,” by “announcing to them the dawn of freedom in Italy through the marvelous resurrection of the masses, thanks to Mazzini the patriot”; “he painted in glowing colours the picture of France after the revolution; and placed before them a brand new picture of Russia, freed from the shackles of Czardom. Free Belgium, free France, Red Russia—these were the pictures” (n.p). Bharati’s concern clearly was to draw the Tamil people from their obscure location in the colonial periphery into a cosmopolitan frame (to invoke another Kantian term), enlarging their political sympathies by widening the bounds of their knowledge and the horizons of their participatory imaginations.¹⁵

Kant had earlier identified this kind of exalted enthusiasm as a modality of the sublime, an “affect” in which “the imagination is unreined” (*Critique* 157). The sublime is “a stretching of the powers through Ideas, which gives the mind a momentum that acts far more powerfully and persistently than the impetus given by sensory representations”—so much so that “without it nothing great can be accomplished” (154). The sublime in precisely this Kantian sense constitutes a central aesthetic of Bharati’s poetry. In his devotional poems addressed to the Goddess Kali, the goddess’s dance of destruc-

tion (“As the worlds mightily clash / and crash in resounding thunder”) presents an astounding spectacle: “Mother / you have drawn me / to see you dance” (“Oozhi-k-koothu” or “Dance of Destruction,” translated by Prema Nandakumar as “In Time of the Breaking of the Worlds”). The sublime is evoked also as the dominant effect in his magnificent prose poems on nature, inspired, A. K. Ramanujan tells us, as much by Tagore and Whitman as by hymns from the Vedas (342). In the following poem, for instance, Bharati extols the wind as a destructive force, blindly ruthless in its primal energy:

Desert,
 Sand, sand, sand, for miles and miles the level sands in all four directions.
 Evening.
 A caravan of merchants on camels moves through the desert.
 The wind arrives, the rogue, the villain.
 The sands of the desert whirl in the sky.
 An instant of death’s agony. The entire caravan perishes in the sand.
 The wind is cruel. He is Rudra, the Howler. His sounds terrify.
 His acts are savage.
 We praise him. (“Wind 4,” in Ramanujan 334; translation by Ramanujan)

As in the poem on the forest fire, Bharati calls forth admiration for the amoral destructive forces of nature to which humanity submits mutely and worshipfully. And, as in the poems addressed to Kali, it is the calm that follows the clamor that reinforces the sublime effect:

When Time and the Three Worlds
 Have been cast in a ruinous heap,
 When the frenzy has ceased
 And a lone splendor has awakened,
 Then auspicious Shiva appears
 To quench your terrible thirst.
 Only now you smile and tread with him
 The blissful Dance of Life!
 (Bharati, “In Time of the Breaking of the Worlds,” *Poems* 100; translation by Nandakumar).

Ideas of destruction and renewal, fear and elation, humility and pride, alternate with one another and are held in tension. The sublime effect renders the spectacle of transformative world historical events continuous with the imagined spectacle of cataclysmic nature (Kant’s “dynamically sublime”; *Critique* 143), as in the simile that describes the culmination of the Russian Revolution: “The mighty Czar collapsed as if / The Himalayas should tum-

ble down” (“The New Russia”). In the effort to convey through the sublime the enthusiasm that is the primary communicative force of his poetry, as of his politics, Bharati creates an aesthetic entirely novel to Tamil literature.

BHARATI'S RHETORIC

This writing, revolutionary in inspiration and sublime in expression, required the invocation, if not the invention, of a rhetoric that could communicate the energy, urgency, and insistence of Bharati's ardor. The illocutionary force of his poetry comes to be its most notable feature, and I focus here on how the rhetorical modes of the poems, although multiple and varied, are united in generating response of one kind or another from readers and listeners. The hoped-for response was ideally a revolutionary praxis, and at the very least a change of attitude in its interlocutors. What follows are a few examples from some of the most popular of Bharati's poems.

If understood in the light of declarations, whether of rights, freedom, equality, or the welfare of the people—made precisely when these entities were most conspicuously absent or lacking under colonial rule—the poems and songs have a double address, the British authorities as much as the Indian people. Judith Butler has argued that “‘declaring’ becomes an important rhetorical movement” in such situations, “since it is [itself] the very freedom of expression for which it calls or, rather, it is the very call of freedom.” The declaration “becomes the exercise of that freedom, showing what that freedom is or can be”—although she admits that “whether or not that freedom is efficacious is another matter” (Butler and Spivak 48). To make the assumption of freedom, in other words, is to be already free.¹⁶ The rapturous “Beat the Drum” (“Murasu”) is a powerful denunciation of caste, framed as a prophetic proclamation of the *end* of caste:

Beat, O drum, to proclaim victory
In all the eight directions!
To all the world let this message sound:

.....

Fools are they who speak of several
Gods and kindle fires of hate;
The one sole Being among all beings, the one Single life in all that lives,
That and that alone is God.

.....

Sound, drum, the message of unity.
Proclaim, “Flourish in love.” Proclaim

Welfare to all mankind on this
Our vast and variegated planet.
(Bharati, *Chosen* 56–59; translation slightly modified)

Here the poem's rhythm alternately rises frenziedly and falls hypnotically like the beat of the drum, to which the words are accompaniment. This is the performative aspect of poetry, its aspiration to attain to the condition of speech-act. The bombast, bravado, and wish-fulfillment that characterize Bharati's writings, however aesthetically defective as literary attributes, reflect the extent to which he was writing against the grain of the times. They reflect his straining to achieve a transformation of social and political conditions by the force of words alone.

If many of the declarative poems are performative utterances, speech-acts in the most literal sense, others are addressed as pleas or take the form of resolutions (oaths, vows), assertions, or demands. In every case, the addressee in the poem, who is either an apostrophized Higher Power or the directly interpellated reader/listener, is a potent presence; and action provides the impetus. But just as frequently the communal "we" is the subject in the poems, acting simultaneously as persuasion of the readers/addressees and as expressive of implicit solidarity with them. Thus, exhortation is one of the forms that Bharati's poetic iterations takes, sometimes accompanied by vigorous pleading with the addressees, or even scolding them, with the end of inciting action. In the poem "The past is past!" ("Senradhu Meeladhu," translated as "The Dead Past" by Prema Nandakumar), the speaker mocks as "fools!" those who fall into the "pit" of the past and struggle to extricate themselves. Think of "today" as a new birth instead, he urges; "eat, play, and live to the full" and thus vanquish the evils of the past (*Poems* III; Nandakumar translation slightly modified). In another poem, "An Address to Death" ("Kaalannukku Uraithal," lit. "Address to Yama, the god of death"), expressing his faith in God's powers to save the true devotee (himself), the poet issues a challenge to death itself: "Death! You are no more than a piece of weed that I spurn!" The contemptuous apostrophe (in Tamil the second person "you" used in the singular and with the addition of the suffix "da" expresses familiarity or disrespect), the taunts ("you fool!"), and the commands ("I hereby order you," "Come closer to my feet so that I may step on you") are rhetorical devices deployed to convey and spread the poem's message of confident faith and consequent fearlessness ("To Death," *Poems* 108; Nandakumar translation slightly modified).

The poems that are framed as prayers apostrophize a God in terms that are in turns familiar, cajoling, bullying, or supplicating, and in tones that

ring the changes on pathos, bravery, anger, and sorrow, such as the well-known odes to freedom, “When will this thirst for freedom be quenched?” (“Enru thaniyum indha swatanthira thagam?”), which mounts a series of rhetorical questions ending with a resounding appeal to the “Brave warrior, Aryan lord” to lead us to victory (Bharati, *Poems* 73; Nandakumar translation slightly modified) and “Freedom’s Plant” (“Suthanthira payir”): “Was it with water, O lord, that we raised this crop? No, it was with tears. And can we then bear to see it wither?” in which a succession of stanzas represent the plight of an enslaved people, ending with the forceful challenge: “If you and the reign of dharma be indeed true, grant us our boon of freedom ere long” (*Poems* 70; Nandakumar translation, slightly modified).

In poem after poem, Bharati calls on a rhetoric of authoritative assertion, command, or prophesy to communicate his vision of a new world and a new humanism. Thus, in the marching song “Freedom” (“Viduthalai”), which begins with the rhythmic beat of the chant “Freedom, freedom, freedom,” the exalted state that he envisages is of a nation in which the lower castes (“the Parayas, the Tiyas, the Pulayas”), the laboring poor, and women are released from oppression (Bharati, *Poems* 87–88).¹⁷ A similar rousing rhythm and reiterative chanting of the magical word as mantra is to be found in the pronouncement of “fearlessness” in “Achamillai, achamillai.” It is difficult to frame an English equivalent for the subject-less Tamil construction of the condition described by the word “achamillai”: it could equally be a first-person boast as in “I do not fear” (a series of tribulations), or a plural “we” interpreted as the imperative “let us not fear,” or praise of the third person “they” who show no fear, or an encouragement of a people addressed in the second person: “do not fear.” In all of these senses, the effect produced when the poem is recited or sung in chorus is that of a collective overcoming.

Bharati’s most Whitmanesque flourishes are to be found in his poems about the self, written in the first person, in which he forges a universal soul, a brave new subjectivity for a colonized and socially enslaved people that is counterintuitively revolutionary, defiant, and filled with aspiration. Thus, the poem titled at once simply and grandiloquently “I” (“Naan”) is a claim of Godhood, beginning with the declamation, “I am all the bees that swarm in the firmament” and going through a list of the elements, the life forms, the emotions, the works of humanity, to the cosmic: “I am the creator of the illusion of myself / . . . I am the flame that brings together the knowledge of all things ever created.” Our reading of the “I” of the poem in the sense of an overweening selfhood should be qualified by Bharati’s gloss on the word “Naan” elsewhere in his writings: “The Tamil first person *Nan* is used by the occultists to denote the third person singular *avan*, meaning ‘He,’

‘the unique God,’” he explains. “And for this audacious monism, the occultist gives the justification that he really intends the Tamil word *annan* which, as every one knows, means ‘He’—but he merely drops the prefix *an* by a sort of occult license” (*Agni* 124).¹⁸ Bharati thus attributes the occult interchangeability of pronouns in his poems to a “longing for the realization of . . . spiritual unity” (125).

The discussion of address and reference in Bharati’s poetry can be usefully extended by taking note of the range and eclecticism of symbol and allusion that is evident in the language of his poems. His poetic vocabulary, as we saw, is a mix of the indigenous cultural resources he so fulsomely had at hand—Vedic texts, Puranic myth, Tamil Saiva poetry—with the Romantic idiom of sublime nature. As A. K. Ramanujan points out, Bharati, like many other Indian writers of the colonial nineteenth century and after, was a product of at least three linguistic traditions: the mother-tongue, a pan-Indian language (Sanskrit or Persian), and English. Ramanujan reads this as a sign of an “Indian modernity” that is shaped as “a response not only to contemporary events, but at least three pasts” (333). So we find that, even as he takes easy and frequent recourse to the tropes of everyday religion through devices such as the invocation of the names of deities, the expression of *bhakti*, the allusions to myth or the play of philosophical ideas such as *shakti*, even in poems that are not exclusively devotional, Bharati introduces modern ideas and idioms into the universe of his poems without any self-consciousness yet accompanied by a palpable sense of discovery.

Rather than weigh in on a categorization of Bharati’s thought as separate and distinctive zones of the traditional and the modern, therefore, it would be more productive and interesting to read the multiple inheritances of the vernacular poet as interactive with one another, and to explore his negotiation of their convergences and contrasts. Udaya Kumar has urged (in his reading of early colonial prose in Malayalam), that in such instances the point would rather be to describe “the dynamic of a transformation, the re-configuration of earlier elements, the introduction of new elements, and finally the reassignment of values that this process entails” (“Self” 262). Thus, we find that Bharati often undertakes explicit comparison between the *bhakti* effect on the one hand and modern, scientific, and secular phenomena on the other. For example, in the autobiographical fragment, “Bharati sixty-six” he composed a series of meditative stanzas on life, death, and immortality in which a section on “patience” begins with praise of the god Murugan at Tirutani (the word “Tirutani” means “divine patience”). He juxtaposes to this the scientific benefits of maintaining calm: “The cause of death / If you want to know / Says that great botanist / Jagdish Chandra Bose / Ripe in

wisdom and experience / Is ‘shock to the nerves’” (*Chosen* 141). In this case, it is congruence that he finds and marks between traditional wisdom and scientific logic. Whereas science is usually pitted against enthusiasm as a stand-in for secularism versus religion, in Bharati they come together as an enthusiasm *for* science. At the same time, there are numerous instances of his alertness to the significant incongruences between distinctive cultural worldviews. For example, between the superman and the “siddha” lies the difference, according to him, between the West’s “will to power” (over another) and “our” (Hinduism’s) will “pure and simple,” the attainment of which is a matter of discipline and cultivation of the self through a variety of different means. The difference is not, however, one of immutable essence but a historically inflected one. “Meditate, for a moment, on any important and vital word of a people’s language and it will reveal to your mind something of the modes of thought, something of the historic reminiscences and of the spiritual aspirations of that people,” he advises (“The Siddha and the Superman,” *Chosen* 409).¹⁹ Bharati was ceaselessly engaged in seeing language and the world comparatively and multiply, in terms of newness, difference, and alterity.

With his characteristic perception, A. K. Ramanujan reads these effects of modernity in Bharati in terms of an aesthetic of “shocks and surprises” (334). This is not to be conflated with the modernist ethos of shock, as seen for instance in a Baudelaire (Benjamin 210). On the contrary, it is the revelation, intensity, and transcendence of the ineffable that constitutes its typical affect. In “Nandalala,” for example, Bharati’s justly famous lyric addressed to the child Krishna, the poet moves from experiencing God in the hallucinatory blackness of the crow’s wing, the greenness of massed trees, and the music of all sounds, to the culminating shock of “touching you,” which he compares to the ecstasy of a finger thrust into fire. The rhetoric and language of Bharati’s poetry—the response it seeks to evoke, and the radical cultural and epistemological translation it performs through allusion and reference—exemplifies the communicative urge of enthusiasm, its characteristic bridging of “psychic and social life” (Gailus 63).

BHARATI: NATIONALISM AND REFORM

A quick account of the historical trajectory followed by the nationalist movement in the early years of the Indian National Congress might be helpful in placing Bharati’s political ideas. In 1907, the Moderates and the Extremists of the Congress had formalized their split, with the moderates taking the helm. The split was the culmination of an ideological conflict between proponents of what Mukul Kesavan describes as “two different sorts of nationalism.”

While “the Extremists take their cues from handy versions of European nationalism, based on the idea of a homogeneous People seeking self-determination and self-rule. . . . The moderates are best understood as Radical nationalists, who brilliantly imagined into existence a pluralist nationalism” (“Congress”). Bharati’s identification with the extremists was unequivocal for most of his life, although he was generous in supporting Gandhi’s activism first in South Africa and later in India. Although Gandhi is rightly credited with creating a national independence movement by mobilizing the vast mass of the Indian people, he and the Congress party that he led did not in general favor conducting politics at a high nationalistic pitch. Kesavan holds that their brand of nationalism was “unique” and “original” in “its near-complete freedom from mystical and mystifying notions such as blood, soil, or national essence which are the stock-in-trade of narrower [European] patriotisms” (*Secular* 32). Tagore’s aloofness from the hyper-nationalistic swadeshi movement is well known. His aversion to the character of Sandeep in the novel *Ghare Baire* (*Home and the World*) is not only an expression of ideological opposition but also a response to the temperament—the charismatic enthusiasm—that in his view characterized those involved in nationalist politics. The contrasting figure of Nikhil, the paternalistic zamindar, with his sober, reasoned, and dispassionate ethical commitment to the well-being of his community, divides revolutionary nationalism from social reformism as incommensurate projects in the novel’s schema.

An investment of this latter kind, in reason, civility, and reform, is justifiably regarded as elitist, in contrast to the spontaneous populist enthusiasm that is usually thought to propel mass movements, especially nationalist movements. But nationalism, even in the most basic sense as a sentiment of national belonging, thought to be innate in a people, had to be inculcated in them by educated elites. Radical demands for social equality did not always emerge spontaneously from the oppressed, either. Like nationalism, movements for reform (caste and gender) or revolution (class or tribal) were fostered by elite persuasion and pedagogy, even as they grew to be popular mass movements. There is a reason that the two kinds of politics, kept apart so fastidiously by Tagore, converged in practice despite being distinct in principle.²⁰ Anticolonial movements that tend to be read exclusively in terms of the struggle for political independence (especially in the field of postcolonial studies) served as purpose and pretext for a broader political agenda—at a fundamental level that of mass mobilization (the precondition for nation formation), and more extensively that of realignments of power within the polity (both the impetus for reform and its corollary). Thus, many large-scale movements had overlapping agendas of national liberation and social transformation.

Bharati's poems, vast in number and diverse in range though they are, never stray far from nationalist and reformist concerns, even when their thematics and idiom appeared to be religious, philosophical, or spiritual. Bernard Bate, following Christine Frost, demonstrates how the language of bhakti (devotion) is "polysemous, refracting several possible senses at once," so much so that Bharati is able to mine even the familiar erotic songs of longing of the *gopis* (milkmaids) for the lord Krishna for nationalist purposes. In his famous long poem, "Kannan pattu" ("The Song of Kannan"), the poet himself plays the role of *gopi* while the fickle lover Krishna is cast as "The People," who could, "if only they willed it so, shake off the shackles of British rule in a day." Bate reads this as an allegory of Bharati's longing to lead a potential "democratic movement" constituted of three hundred million people ("Bharati" 3).

Bharati's early patriotic songs and poems are more conventional. They include translations of Bankimchandra Chatterjee's "Vande Mataram" and the "Marseillaise," apostrophes addressed to Bharat-mata (Mother India) and to personified Freedom, rhapsodies about the greatness of India, odes to the great historical heroes and nationalist figures of the time, and celebration of the Tamil language, people, and culture.²¹ Patriotic poetry typically condenses and consolidates the nation into the personified figure of the Goddess (Bharat-mata, Mother India) and subsumes the people into a single and indistinguishable mass of devotees. Bernard Bate views such figurations as "feminine signs" that "emblemize an organic consanguinity among a new citizenry" (*Tamil* 184).

A different kind of political fervor, but unmistakably a product of the same sensibility, is expressed in Bharati's poems calling for radical social transformation by bringing about women's equality, the abolition of caste, and the emancipation of the laboring class. The instrumentality of enthusiasm is as much in evidence in these writings as in the poems inciting nationalist fervor. Bharati's attacks on religious orthodoxy, social conservatism, and the people's blindness to the need for progress are vehement. It might appear that the poet's unrelenting emphasis on divisions within the social fabric would render his unified nation-figuration inappropriate. But the recuperative strategy of portraying difference as diversity was one that Bharati resorted to freely as a way of reconciling the two conflicting agendas.

Bharati's insistence on female emancipation was both emphatic and frequent, and the terms in which he envisaged it might be considered advanced for his time.²² Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble), disciple of Vivekananda and associate of Aurobindo in Bengal, is credited with being the direct mentor of and inspiration for Bharati's feminism, especially in terms of Goddess-inspired shakti. This initial eye-opening lesson was reinforced for him by

other sources he found, in Saiva bhakti poetry, contemporary reform novels in Tamil (those relating to widow remarriage in particular), and reigning ideas of feminism and the New Woman in Europe. While the exalted religious ideas of womanhood in terms of shakti, female virtue, or the personification of nation, language, and community are undeniably present in his writings, Bharati's more enduring championship of women lay in his unequivocally modern, direct, and nonmystificatory ideas about their capacities and entitlements. He produced a feminist manifesto, "Penn viduthalai" ("Women's Liberation"), in which he set out ten terse commandments relating to women's age of marriage (not before puberty), freedom of choice (including the choice to remain single), widow remarriage, inheritance, sexual freedom, education, jobs, and participation in public life. Notable also are his promotion of the ideal of companionate marriage; his delineation of the strong, independent woman in figures such as Draupadi; his celebration of women as a collectivity; and his creation of voice and space—literally—for women through his compositions. This last is visible in Bharati's vivid expression of women's liberation in the cultural idiom of the traditional group dance performed by women known as *kummi*, marked by vigorous physical movement and rhythm. His awareness of the experience of freedom as a somatic condition before it is anything else is at once intuitive and culturally resonant. As women sing his words, "Let this land of the Tamils ring with our dance," and clap in accompaniment to their movement, their sharp criticism of patriarchy in the words of the song rings with confident assertion. We can safely assume that Emma Goldman, who famously said "If I can't dance I don't want to be part of your revolution," would have wanted to be part of *this* revolution. The repertoire of songs Bharati created for women's performance has not only had profound appeal for Tamil feminism but also has left a lasting impact on the culture as a whole.

Bharati's utopic society was to be attained by imagining rather than enacting revolution. The mind had to be first prepared for social change, and it was the poet's enthusiasm that kindled the desire and provided the vision for it. But this enthusiasm was qualified in ways that are typical, again, of the Kantian understanding of its ideal limits. As Andreas Gailus points out, for Kant, "enthusiasm's affective excess must be contained within a legal-political framework, its rapturous spontaneity converted into the slow pace of gradual reform" (67). Revolution was a valued moral lesson and a sublime aesthetic experience when mediated by distance, but Kant disapproved of the means employed by the actors who actually engaged in it (Clewis 453). Bharati reveals a similar ambivalence about revolution at home, a response noticeably at odds with both his ideal of total transformation and

his advocacy of revolution abroad. He reflects uneasily about socialism, for instance, worrying about the antagonism between workers and capitalists, peasants and landlords, and its potential for violence. In an article titled “The Workers,” he advocates recognition of the “dignity of labour” as a way of averting conflict (*Chosen* 240–44); and in another, “Wealth” (265–72), written in 1917 during the Russian Revolution, he writes with insight and passion about the plight of the poor, but takes a stand against violence. He proposes instead that landlords agree to treat their workers fairly and ensure that there is no starvation. Love rather than justice must motivate change (and avert revolution). The means to overcome adversity is through self-correction, determination, and fortitude rather than attacks on the enemy. Bharati never recommends, indeed fears, revolutionary praxis in terms of an overthrow of regimes or a violent usurpation of power. The strenuous energy of the poems derives from their pedagogic rhetoric rather than any populist incitement to violence. Even the most overtly radical of his poems, the famous “Bharatha samudayam” (“Indian Commonwealth,” 1921), is a poem of resolution rather than revolution.

In the stirring lines of this late poem, Bharati leaps to a utopic imagining of a free India as a socialist imaginary that has become, or will soon become, a model for all nations. Embedded in the heart of the poem are these explosive lines in which it is humanity itself that is at stake:

Today we make a law and shall
Henceforth for ever enforce it:
If a single mouth goes without food
The world we shall destroy! (*Chosen* 39–40)²³

In such a manifesto, the nation as political abstraction is replaced by concern for society (or “commonwealth,” as “samudayam” in the poem’s title has been rendered in some translations) in the envisaged new order, one that aspires to the condition of universal brotherhood. Sunil Amrith identifies the theme of hunger in Bharathi’s poem as signifying a newfound sense of “social consciousness and social solidarity . . . a willingness towards sacrifice.” Amrith detects the rise of such an awareness in a “small but vocal Indian elite” being formed under the circumstances of the time. Moreover, “underlying this concern of all with the hunger of any one was a vision of the nation . . . communicated in the language of family and kinship, articulating a vision of social solidarity that transcended the divisions of caste and community.” Amrith adds that when Bharati declares that “all of us are kings in this land,” he is gesturing toward “a new kind of popular sovereignty, a power that resided in the population itself” (Amrith 1015). The threat to

“destroy the world” that appears in the middle of the poem might sit uneasily with the profound humanism of the poem, but the people’s newfound consciousness of equality (rendered as “all are one, all are Indians”) and rights (the natural wealth of India is meant for everyone) grounds it and bridges the different sentiments.

The question of priorities becomes another site of dissensus in the colonial context: Should reform be shelved until freedom is won (a plea typically addressed to and internalized by women during nationalist struggles), or is freedom meaningless until the nationalist leadership addressed the internal problems of the nation-to-be? Very early in his writing career, Bharati came out strongly in support of the social reformers (whose critiques could be, and in fact were, attacked by their opponents as antinational): “Without social reform our political reform is a dream, a myth, for social slaves can never really understand political liberty” (*Karuvooram* 30). As we saw, he was expressing the same sentiment in even more emphatic terms in a poem written sixteen years later, never having stopped reiterating it in the intervening years.

As a result of this double focus in his writings, Bharati’s recuperation in Tamil history is split between the labels of nationalist and revolutionary poet as well as conjoined by the same terms. His work strikingly exemplifies the contrary pulls of an anticolonial nationalist political mobilization that required on the one hand the unification of the people through a transcendence of differences, and on the other the restructuring of social relations within the proto-nation, thereby exposing social antagonism. If, therefore, enthusiasm promotes political allegiance in the form of civic engagement—in this instance to the putative nation—it is also the affective counterpart to critique—here of a status quo that reflected backwardness, slavery, and hierarchy. In the years since his death, the two strains of Bharati’s thought have pulled his critical reception in opposite directions, with implications for a politics of (mainstream) nationalism that is considered recuperative, as against a (sectarian) reformism that might be viewed as destabilizing. In Tamilnadu, C. N. Annadurai, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhaka (DMK) leader, went so far as to suggest that the build-up of Bharati’s posthumous reputation as a nationalist poet has been a conspiracy intended to defuse the full import of his radical populist ideology: “There is an attempt by interested parties to enlarge the portrait of Bharathi the National Bard, not entirely because they love that portrait but because they think that portrait’s immensity will conceal from the public eye the other portrait of Bharathi, that of the people’s poet” (Annadurai n.p). Annadurai’s appraisal must be read in light of the dominant Dravidian politics of the Tamil region, which has been ideologically inclined to pit the poet’s partisanship of the Indian nation against his

fidelity to the Tamil region and pose his Brahmin identity as an obstacle to his appeal to non-Brahmins. It is therefore entirely likely that Annadurai's recuperation of Bharati as a "people's poet" was a political strategy intended to claim him for the regional Tamil Dravidian side, as Sumathi Ramaswamy has suggested (201-2). As a party leader, he may have felt that Bharati was too potent and populist a figure to be boycotted by the DMK on the grounds of rigid regional-linguistic or caste ideological correctness. Bharati's unreservedly radical thought explains the motivation for Annadurai's rehabilitation of the poet's reputation as well as the success of his move.

Part III: The Spaces of the Public and the Political

Bharati's poetry, like much other news and opinion, prayer, and polemic of the time, depended for its dissemination on technologies of communication, both new and traditional. Together, the message and the medium shaped the emergence and defined the limits of the public, and were reciprocally shaped by it. At the same time, and not incidentally, Bharati's work also attracted the attention of a different entity, the colonial government, for whom it was primarily mediated by its public reception. In this, the final part of the article, I consider first the communicative technologies and the formation of Bharati's public, and then the political climate in which his work encountered censorship and prohibition, as contingent factors that allow us to understand the mode and extent of its impact.

BHARATI'S PUBLIC: COMMUNICATION AND ITS CONDITIONS OF POSSIBILITY

Print has been of course the primary medium of creating a public in the modern world. Bharati's journalistic career (roughly contemporary with Gandhi's stint as editor of *Indian Opinion* in South Africa) was a notable one, and it is closely allied to his literary output. Between 1904 and 1910 and intermittently thereafter, he was an energetic newspaper and magazine editor, sometimes of several publications simultaneously. He was a voracious consumer of the news and an enthusiastic purveyor of it, and he voiced his political opinions fearlessly, even recklessly, in editorials and poems for which the print media provided a forum. Bharati's influence as a journalist carried over into his fame as poet.

But print was not the only technology responsible for the emergence of a public in this part of the world. Somewhat ahead of Bharati's poetic revolution, the Tamil region had already witnessed the emergence of public oratory as an important aspect of the formation of a public sphere and a political community. About oratory, Bernard Bate makes this important point:

Whatever else it may be, that which we call the political is largely composed of *communicative practices*. Oratory, like print capitalism, is associated with the development of large-scale political entities such as publics and nations. Both print capitalism and oratory share certain dominant analyses: both have been viewed as centrally productive of particular forms of social and political consciousness, and both have been seen as communicative modes of the production of certain sociological formations. (“Arumuga” 470)

The development of “public languages” such as oratory brings into view, he suggests, “new models of interaction, new kinds of political action” (*Tamil* 66). Modern Tamil political oratory conspicuously employed a rhetoric that communicated enthusiasm—not for any particular ends but seemingly simply for politics as such. One of the subjects of Bate’s book on Dravidian politics in Tamilnadu, Kavitha, tells him: “When we hear the voices of the great leaders we develop enthusiasm for politics” (“Kavita’s Love,” *Tamil* 151). Bharati was an inheritor, or at least a beneficiary, of the spread of oratory in the Tamil world.

We might add to oratory the part played by popular theater in the early twentieth century. Theater historians report that theatrical productions of the time, especially the Boys’ Companies in Tamil Nadu, made songs central to their performance and employed lyricists called *vatiyars* (teachers) to compose them. The songs were intended primarily to educate the audience on current political topics and promote nationalist sentiments. Yoshio Sugimoto draws attention to the influence of Bharati, whose songs on “the Tirunelveli Sedition Case, the confrontation of radicals and moderates in the National Congress, and other subjects” would become “a model for later poets” (Sugimoto 233; see also Bhaskaran 30–31).

While Bharathi’s unfamiliarity with and lack of interest in any of the “new media,” especially the gramophone and cinema (which had arrived in his lifetime), is attested by A. R. Venkatachalapathy, after his death his popularity soared in large part as a result of the dissemination of his songs through these very media (*Who Owns that Song* xix–xx). But the technologies of communication are not only those that involve inventions and new forms of machinery such as print, radio, cinema, gramophones, loudspeakers, and the like, but also more contingent spatial and everyday conditions of possibility such as the organization of leisure, the spaces for gatherings, the dynamics of public interaction between speakers and audience, the relations of gender, the management of crowds, and such other factors. Modern politics in India has been significantly dependent on the physical spaces of mass gathering, usually in the open (streets, public squares, playgrounds,

maidans, temple courtyards, the beach), where interactions between leaders and audience-crowds take place via sight-speech and response; this continues to be so despite other media now being available. (This is particularly true of the city of Madras where the famous Marina, reputed to be the second largest beach in the world, is a key venue for mass political gatherings.) Such forums constitute the material conditions for the cultivation of intimacy between speaker and public of a kind unimaginable in different conditions, an intimacy constitutive of charismatic politics.

It is worth speculating on the role that oral culture in the form of speech and song has played in this phenomenon. Kamil Zvelebil is emphatic in attributing to Bharati the credit for modernizing Tamil and “making it adequate for all literary expression,” for “journalism as well as bhakti-type lyrical poetry, short story as well as patriotic songs, politically and philosophically-oriented essay as well as epic poetry” (Zvelebil 286; see also Venkatachala-pathy, “Subramania”). Bharati’s programmatic invention of a simple, colloquial poetic idiom, as stated in the manifesto that serves as preface to his dramatic poem *Panchali Sapatham*, and as demonstrated in the language of that text (as in the rest of his work), was an important means to making poetry in Tamil a medium of popular communication. The task of the literary in thus making a language supple, up-to-date, versatile, and demotic is familiar in other vernacular contexts as well. In the case of Tamil, it was Bharati who in the early years of the twentieth century undertook it with spectacular success for public and political ends.

Bharati’s poetry was disseminated in another way than that of reading or recitation, one that might be considered traditional rather than modern: through music. He set his words to tuneful, catchy melodies that made them available to a public that was as yet largely illiterate (Bate, “Bharati” 2). The fact that Bharati often spoke at large public meetings, that he composed and sang songs at them for special occasions, and that his songs were sung by others in meetings and processions, gave his words tremendous reach and immediate access to a receptive public, of the kind few other poets have commanded. Bate describes two such occasions. In 1908, Bharati sang his famous “Enru Thaniyum indha Suthanthira Thagam” (titled by Bate as “Psalm to Sri Krishna”) on Marina Beach, the occasion being the celebration of Bipin Chandra Pal’s release from prison. The second was at a procession in 1919, during the first satyagraha in Madras. The narrator of the incident, one Thiru Vi. Ka, imagined that Bharati himself was present and led a song addressed to the Lord Muruga, even though Bharati was known to have been elsewhere at that time. Bate attributes Vi. Ka’s fantasy to the “collective passion” of the moment, commenting that “such enthusiasm . . . was the

modality in which the political—the modern national popular—would be danced, sung, imagined” (“Bharati” 4–5).

To a considerable extent, the easy and vast reach of Bharati’s songs is the result of their insertion into popular musical traditions through his adaptation of folk genres and tunes for his lyrics, or his setting them to well-known Carnatic and occasionally Hindustani classical music ragas. The customary interpretation of Bharati’s adaptation of the popular-folk as a kind of condescension on the part of the literate and literary poet who stoops to make his work accessible to the illiterate masses via the oral medium, or as a strategic popularization of his message—in other words, solely as a pedagogy or propaganda from above—leaves out of the account the dynamic transactional nature of this communication. I find suggestive the critic Venkat Rao’s theorization—in quite a different context, admittedly—of the work of Gaddar, the People’s War Group singer-poet in Andhra Pradesh. Gaddar’s immense popularity derives from his practice of rewriting the song cultures of the Telengana region, a borrowing that Rao reads as symbolizing “acts of community” (255). In recycling tunes that in a sense and first belong to the people, and then returning them to the people as songs with different, topical, and radical content—songs of protest, mourning, and liberation—Gaddar “breaks down the boundaries between the gift and its return,” observes Rao (254–55). He cites Jean-Luc Nancy: “This is nothing other than the question of literary communism . . . something that would be sharing of the community in and by its writing, its literature” (Rao 264–65; quoting Nancy 25–26). By no means am I suggesting that Gaddar’s contemporary Naxalite cultural praxis is identical in content or context with Bharati’s anti-colonial nationalist-reformist endeavors of a century ago. Nevertheless, by highlighting the poetic process—which involves listening to and learning from the songs of different groups, regions, and occupations and creatively hybridizing them—Venkat Rao’s reading of Gaddar gives us valuable clues to envisaging a different sense of the public sphere: as a scene of exchange and mingling between poet and populace. What returns to the folk by its exit from them comes to figure a trope of vitality and value, which is less sharing than the important boomerang of circulation as an image of value and recognition.²⁴

To sum up, the public, both as an entity and as a space of the political, is dependent on communicative technologies and genres, those of modern mass media as well as existing oral cultures of oratory and poetry/music; in the Tamil region, it was shaped in a profoundly dialectical relationship with Bharati’s literary production. The next section is an exploration of how poet and public as colonial subjects encountered the power of the state—in

brief, by provoking “the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” that lies “at the very heart of the power relationship” (Foucault 221–22).

THE POLITICAL SPHERE: CENSORSHIP

The community forged by Bharati’s extensive following was an incipiently nationalist one. Consequently, it came into existence within the constraints imposed by colonial censorship—indeed, both despite and to a considerable extent enabled by those limits. As Andreas Gailus observes, manifestations of enthusiasm invariably meet with prohibition. Against the backdrop of “a highly repressive political system, one that denies its citizens the right to free speech, enthusiasm does not simply manifest itself publicly but rather forms a community of free agents. In going public with their feelings, the diverse spectators create a public sphere,” Gailus explains (64).

In the colony, poetry that was read, recited, sung, or otherwise disseminated in public space expectedly caused a significant “disruption . . . within the field of power” (Butler, “Performativity” xiii). In such politically volatile situations, the symbolic significance of *who* sings and *where* demands consideration as well. Judith Butler has commented on the collective iteration of song when, on the occasion she describes, it signaled the fact not just of the collectivity but also of plurality—in this case linguistic plurality, since the singers were illegal Mexican immigrants rendering both the Mexican national anthem and the American national anthem in Spanish on the streets of Los Angeles (Butler and Spivak 58). Bharati translated the Bengali Bankim’s rousing “Vande mataram,” the putative not-yet national anthem, into Tamil, thereby multiplying its message for a heterogeneous populace. The transgressive, translated versions of these illicit performances stand in striking contrast to the rituality and unisonance of the prescribed rendering of the nation-state’s anthem.²⁵

Butler does not tell us if the singing of the anthem(s) was performed spontaneously by the immigrants as a group, but implies that this was so. In the Indian freedom movement, however, collective singing was arguably a site where elite pedagogy and the popular performative converged. Although the singing of *bhajans* was frequently a manifestation of collective enthusiasm spontaneously begun and spread (as on the occasion Bate discusses), on other occasions, its specific affect could be and often was controlled by the leader who conducted it. Christine Frost draws parallels as well as significant contrasts between Bharati and Gandhi in illustration of this. While both adapted the bhakti mode of prayer and chanting in communion for broadly nationalist political purposes, they sought different effects according to their

reading of the people on the ground, as it were. She points out that Bharati adopted the emotive language and music of the Saivite tradition to “galvanize the nation to political awakening.” In other words, he sought to forge the singular nation-collective. Gandhi’s practice of beginning his public meetings with the *bhajan* “Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram,” on the other hand, was intended to “induce tranquility and tolerance,” using “the syncretistic message of that song to defuse communal rivalries in a volatile crowd”—in other words, to manage the diverse nation-collective (Frost 152–53). Each of these different effects and consequent approaches is dictated by the perceived need of the place and the hour, the Southern region of Tamil country in the swadeshi era in the one case and, in the other, the diverse locales of the cities that Gandhi traveled to as the mass nationalist movement picked up momentum later, in the 1920s and after.

The very fact of collective singing, then, could be insurgent. In this instance, there was in addition the strikingly novel aspect of mass mobilization that Bernard Bate has drawn our attention to: “for the first time, authorities saw something they had never seen before, which angered and frightened them: meetings in the vernacular, often with thousands of attendees, and often directed not only at students and vakils but also at farmers, laborers, and others outside the traditional caste/class boundaries of the Western-educated elites” (“Persuade” 150). The British government understandably perceived the populist use of language and the widespread enthusiasm in response to it as potentially dangerous.

These externalities were not all. The content, too, of several of Bharati’s poems and editorial pieces was undeniably inflammatory. Here, as an example, is a poem in which Bharati directly addresses colonial oppression to express his outrage and incite patriotic sentiments, written in his early period as editor of the weekly, *India*. To be clear, it is one of only a handful of Bharati’s poems to convey such directly confrontational anticolonial sentiments. The poem is in two parts, “The British Lord [District Magistrate] Wynch’s accusation” and “Patriot Chidambaram Pillai’s retort,” structured as a dramatic face-off between a colonial administrator who would come to be a symbol of excessive official zeal and tyranny, and V. O. Chidambaram Pillai (V.O.C), the Congress nationalist who founded a swadeshi shipping company in 1906 to defy the British shipping monopoly on Indian seas. The poem was written in 1908 following V. O. C.’s arrest for leading labor strikes and organizing political meetings and his harsh sentencing by the court, which aroused widespread protest. The sentence was reduced on appeal, but it still included brutal hard labor in prison. Wynch, the speaker of the first poem, denounces Chidambaram Pillai for his fiery speeches and his entrepreneurial

zeal and utters fearful threats against him. Bharati exploits the inevitable double coding of colonialist speech. What is sedition to the British official is patriotism to the Indian nationalist. Thus, the accusations against V. O. C. that Bharati attributes to Wynch: “You fanned the desire for freedom in the country . . . roused cowards to courage . . . stirred those content with their slavery with new ambition . . . set them on the path to enterprise . . . sowed the seeds of freedom and transformed the mouse into a roaring lion,” is heard, in the rousing Tamil of the poem, as a paean of praise by readers instead. In his reply in the voice of Chidambaram Pillai, Bharati mounts a series of rhetorical questions challenging his arrest by asking if the expression of the natural human desire for freedom can ever be wrong? Bharati keeps the language elevated and abstract, repudiating slavery and asserting the right to free speech: “We shall no longer be slaves in our own land. . . . Would any nation tolerate such injustice? Or any God watch silently? . . . Are we—thirty crore [300 million] peoples of this land—dogs or pigs and you alone human beings? . . . Is it a crime to love one’s land, or wrong to wish to end our slavery?” (my translation).

Nowhere in this poem (or indeed anywhere in his speeches or writings) does Bharati advocate or justify violence (unlike fellow revolutionaries, who were even then plotting the assassination of Collector Ashe in revenge). But Bharati’s intervention on behalf of Chidambaram Pillai in this poem, as in several other forums, was impolitic. The official response of the British administration in India to the volatile effects of rhetorical enthusiasm and its perceived dangers took the form of vigorous and prompt censorship of all writing suspected of being seditious, and the arrest and imprisonment of writers and speechmakers. It would seem that the colonial government was at first content to remain marginal to the world of Tamil publishing, unlike in northern India where it was assiduous about censorship. “Although a few individual books were proscribed, banned or expurgated by government order, few individual writers were persecuted,” observes Sascha Ebeling (169). Among the exceptions was, of course, Bharati. In passing its orders to seize or ban Bharati’s writings, the government described them formulaically in terms of the Indian Press Act of 1910, as “containing matter that has a tendency to excite disaffection towards the government” and “bring [ing] into hatred or contempt the Government established by law in India” (Venkataraman 338, 402). In 1910, the government passed orders against Bharati’s love poem “Kanavu” and his social reform pamphlet, “How to bring about the national unity of Indians.” A letter from the CID to the chief secretary of the government of Madras expressed the grounds for the ban as follows:

A Tamil pamphlet “How to bring about national unity of Indians” with translation furnished by the Tamil Translator to Government is submitted for perusal. It has been printed in Pondicherry and it is possible that it is in circulation now, though we are not aware how far its circulation has extended. The pamphlet deplores the want of union among the Indians consequent upon the existence of different castes and creeds in India and the mutual hatred between the different communities and exhorts the people to be united. The tone of language is very objectionable and it is necessary that the power to stop its circulation in this presidency be exercised as soon as possible. (Venkataraman 403)

By describing writings such as Bharati’s as “exciting disaffection” and “bringing into hatred or contempt” the government, colonial law was resorting to a terminology of affect that turned the rulers’ ostensible sense of grievance (hurt, betrayal) into the objective crime of sedition.²⁶ While it may be only too obvious to us why unity among the Indian people should have been considered “objectionable” or dangerous to an alien government—or indeed why any putative reform of the Indian people, even one as seemingly unexceptionable as overcoming their internal divisions of caste and creed, would come to be regarded as inseparable from the politics of national liberation—the ban on his poem baffled Bharati. He seriously underestimated the impact of his own writing when he wrote to protest the proscription of these “innocuous” pieces—and went on to demand justice “in the interests of what little freedom of the press is left to us in British India” (*Karuvoolum* 49).²⁷ The demand reflects the genuine belief he held that liberalism’s founding premise of universal free speech extended to the speech of colonized subjects. In the Wynch-VOC poem and elsewhere, he went so far as to seek endorsement of his belief that the patriotic Indian was the ideal colonial subject: “all right-minded English people will agree with me that only those Indians who live and strive for Indian autonomy are the true sons of the Motherland” (Bharati, “Free Speech,” *Agni* 102).²⁸ However naïve or misplaced this faith, it made visible the contradictions of liberalism and posed a significant challenge to the legitimacy of British rule.

A more intense surveillance of Bharati’s movements and his writings followed in the wake of the assassination of District Collector R. C. Ashe in 1911. In one of the numerous references to Bharati in the British CID records, there is a note that states that “On 15th August, 1912, a meeting was held at the house of Arabindo [*sic*] Ghose, in celebration, it is believed, of his fortieth birthday. The meeting was attended by V.V.S. Aiyar, C. Subramania Bharati, a well-known writer of sedition, against whom a warrant is out for complicity in the murder of Mr. Ashe, and a few other revolutionaries.”²⁹ Although

there was no question that Bharati was innocent of any active complicity in the conspiracy, there was equally little doubt that his songs were a powerful inspiration to the young revolutionaries who planned and executed the murder. The irresistible impact of his stirring patriotic poems was used by Justice Sankaran Nair, one of the Indian judges on the bench at their trial, to explain and excuse the actions of the accused in the Ashe assassination case. In his eloquent dissenting judgment against their conviction, Sankaran Nair translated into “excellent English” the famous patriotic song written by Subramania Bharathiyar, “Endru thaniyum intha suthanthira dhaagam”—“When will this thirst for freedom be quenched”—to make his point (Guy).³⁰ Bharati protested his persecution by the British, based as it was solely on the familiarity some of the conspirators had with his work, and questioned the consequent assumption of his complicity based on that association. “The only charge which the Police could maintain against these acquitted men was that they were found in possession of books published by *me!* And, of course, I was guilty because *they* had my books! Q. E. D.,” he concluded, sarcastically (*Karuvoalam* 55–62).³¹

Nevertheless, after this scare Bharati was sufficiently intimidated to give up writing overtly political poetry. After being jailed briefly in Cuddalore and then released conditionally, and after some time spent in his wife’s hometown, he was able to return to his editorial job in Madras.³² His dramatic poem *Panchali Sapatham*, written in 1912, ostensibly drew on the Hindu myth, but it was a transparent political allegory for a subject people seeking to overthrow a despotic power. The plot of the play—based on the well-known episode from the *Mahabharata* that narrates the Pandavas’ loss of their kingdom and of their joint wife Draupadi in a game of dice, the subsequent public humiliation of Draupadi by the Kauravas, her prayer to Krishna, and her famous oath to be revenged on the Kauravas—is of course inherently open to such a reading, being richly “polysemous” in the same way that Bate suggests devotional songs were at the time (“Bharati” 3). Draupadi’s plight also echoes the general dishonor that women experience in society and becomes a powerful feminist plaint in Bharati’s treatment. Both the anticolonial allegory and the feminist meaning are familiar, easily de-codable messages delivered by the episode. Political unfreedom often opened up other modes of writing for the nationalist poet, both in evasion of censorship as well as in genuine exploration of alternative genres or themes.³³

Conclusion

Kristin Ross outlines the thesis of her landmark work on Rimbaud and the Paris Commune thus: “I want to show how the expansive, centrifugal energy

of Rimbaud's brief production not only resists a purely linguistic analysis, but opens up onto a whole synchronic history of his particular moment" (37). Replace the poet Rimbaud's name with Bharati's, and the sentence would sum up my own ambition in this article. I have described the similarly "expansive, centrifugal energy" of Bharati's equally brief poetic production as a rhetoric of enthusiasm. The equivalent revolutionary moment in this instance is the first two decades of intense political ferment in twentieth-century British India, inseparable in the Tamil region from the resonance of Bharati's voice.

Short-lived and utopian though they were, it has seemed worthwhile to rescue poet and period from irrelevance—or worse, nostalgia—and attempt to restore literary significance to the one and historical meaning to the other. I am conscious that the Kantian ethico-theological-political-aesthetic category of enthusiasm that I have called on as the conceptual framing for Bharati's poetry and its impact carries historical baggage that might seem outmoded today, when the predominant political affect is xenophobic hate, and when the term populism has been hijacked for right-wing politics and pedagogy is reduced to propaganda. Reading global politics in light of a more emancipatory understanding of popular passions, however, Solange M. Guénoun urges us to "rethink the possible role of 'enthusiasm' in a political revival," as a corrective to both state-led racism and melancholia among the left. As a "collective and dissensual force" enthusiasm, she argues, animates people's movements expressing solidarity and demands for equality, justice, and freedom (10).

The resurgence of enthusiasm in popular protest and resistance that we are witnessing today, whether it be the anti-CAA protests in India or Black Lives Matter in the United States, as well as their dissemination as spectacle and example globally, give substance to what Guénoun calls a "concrete and contextualized enquiry" (11). It is not surprising that in India we are hearing the songs of Bharati and Faiz once again, in new iterations and with renewed enthusiasm. At the conclusion of his most recent book, *I Am the People: Reflections on Popular Sovereignty Today*, Partha Chatterjee offers the minimal "lesson" of his analysis of contemporary right-wing populism: that "rational critique" is insufficient to counter it, and that "an alternative narrative with the emotional power to draw people into collective political action" is called for instead. "Social transformation" requires the "critique, imagination, and pedagogy" of the intellectual, he concludes (151).

Critique, imagination, and pedagogy are the very qualities that Subramania Bharati offered to the Tamil people at a crucial historical juncture. The combination of pedagogy and populism in Bharati's poetic message produces

a particular revolutionary affect for which I would invoke, warily but with a sense of its precise political connotations, the word that has so far eluded us: “love.” “At the risk of seeming ridiculous,” Che Guevara wrote, “let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love” (225). ■

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NOTES

When I cite from a poem for which a readily available translation in English is available, I have provided a reference to its published source. Poems that I have translated myself are given only a working title and not listed in the Works Cited. Since Bharati's writings are available in a variety of editions and no authorized version has yet been established, I have not relied on any single textual source.

- 1 The phrase cited here appeared in the call for submissions for the special issue of the journal *Parallax* edited by Francesca Ventrella.
- 2 “Presidency” was the term applied to administrative divisions in British India.
- 3 See the article, “Political Evolution in the Madras Presidency from 1905–1918,” which was not published in Bharati's lifetime. Original in English.
- 4 The French Revolution would trigger a widespread emotional response, both at the time of its occurrence and in retrospect; but enthusiasm for it was often qualified or mixed with trepidation. Hegel's rhapsodic praise of its impact and significance is well-known (*Lectures on the Philosophy of History* 447), even as he cautioned elsewhere that “ecstatic *enthusiasm* which starts straight off with absolute knowledge, as if shot out of a pistol,” cannot serve as the basis of “genuine knowledge” (*The Phenomenology of Mind*, Preface, Section 27, emphasis mine).
- 5 Locke, cited in Ventrella 1; Shaftesbury, cited in Mee 38.
- 6 Although British rule might itself be associated with enthusiasm—as a “mood . . . consonant with all the triumphalist and progressivist moments of imperialism,” and seemingly expressive of “the very mentality of imperialism itself”—Ranjit Guha challenges this perception by uncovering the concealed anxiety that lay beneath the narrative of empire (489).
- 7 Populism has of course grown to be a much more fraught phenomenon in contemporary politics than this bare definition conveys, and in most instances, it carries a vast negative charge. At the very least it has generated disagreement across this

definitional divide. In colonial and post-Independence India, the agenda of removing social inequities of class and caste (and gender) impels the kind of left populism that has taken the form of reform and revolution, while nationalism's idiom has been conspicuously cast in terms of a right-wing cultural-ethnic-religious populism. On this, see Partha Chatterjee (*I Am the People*).

- 8 The view that the Indian masses were thereby instrumentalized in the freedom struggle by a bourgeois, elite nationalist leadership (and that the consequences of this are reflected in the way democracy operates in India today) has long been an influential one. The question therefore relates to the autonomy and agency of the people in political struggle, as against an involvement instigated and exploited by opportunistic leaders. What cannot be gainsaid is that while the contradictions inherent in an elite-led mass movement could be managed when the ruling class was an alien race, in an independent nation they become more difficult to reconcile. This is the basis of Partha Chatterjee's influential thesis that a subalternized "political society" is distinct from state and civil society (and is often antagonistic to them), and that it must be regarded as the only authentic agent and site of democratic politics (*Nationalist*).
- 9 For instance, "His manner of speaking emphasized as it is by tremendous thumpings, sudden gettings-up, and sudden collapses, appeared to me a bit artificial," writes a correspondent of *The Hindu* in "A Visit to Pondicherry," September 22, 1916 (Bharati, *Karuvoalam*, 125).
- 10 Bharati's life was a short and tumultuous one. Born in 1882, he was precocious as a child, and the name "Bharati" was bestowed on him in recognition of his prodigious talents. He was sent to Benares for his studies as a young man, and there he learned ferociously and quickly, acquiring facility in English, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Bengali, and later some French. Far from home, he was drawn into the turmoil of extremist swadeshi politics in Bengal. On his return to Madras a few years later, his stature as a nationalist figure grew rapidly through his writings as a journalist and poet spreading the message of swadeshi. Very soon thereafter he became a marked man in danger of being arrested and was forced to flee to Pondicherry for refuge. Bharati spent ten years in exile in that French territory, and it was then that he became the friend and disciple of Aurobindo Ghose and V. V. S Iyer, both at the time also living in exile there. There he also wrote most of his major poetry. Despite censorship and persecution, he managed to be heard by way of his writings. But trapped in the political fallout of the Ashe assassination, and unable to make a living with the cessation of his magazine *India*, he decided to return to British India, risking arrest. After being jailed briefly in Cuddalore and then spending some time in his wife's hometown, he was able to return to his editorial job in Madras. He died shortly afterwards, in penury, at the age of only thirty-nine, as a result of an accident involving a temple elephant.
- 11 There is a case to be made that connecting religion to a nonprogressive politics in this way is to deny any consideration to the possibility that the two have not always or necessarily been in the same kind of tension in which we find them today. I am grateful to Constantine Nakassis for pointing this out. Bernard Bate reads the religious idiom in which the political (or "the modern national popular," as he terms it) is expressed in Bharati's poems along the same lines of noncontradiction, maintaining

- that “these kinds of austerities and passions would be a part of the formation of the Tamil modern from the beginning of mass politics into the Dravidian movement and beyond” (“Bharati” 5, 3).
- 12 Original in English. In 1914, at the start of the war, inspired by the bravery of “gallant little Serbia” in repulsing Austria’s invasion, Bharati felt impelled to translate into English “The Heroic Songs of Serbia” compiled by the French poet Alphonse de Lamartine (Bharati, *Karuvoalam* 85).
 - 13 Lyotard holds that Kant’s entire thinking on the “historico-political” is condensed in this discussion of enthusiasm (28).
 - 14 There are historical counterfactuals to Kant’s view of revolution-as-(only)-spectacle, as Kant scholars have been quick to point out. Andreas Gailus, for instance, poses the question: “What happens if the spectators are situated not in relative cultural and geographical proximity to the events but, say, in a French colony such as Haiti, where the revolutionary discourse of rights takes on a radically different meaning?” (71). This possibility clearly applies to other colonies and colonial situations as well.
 - 15 See similarly Nehru’s concern to make his peasant audience think of “India as a whole, and even to some little extent of this wide world of which we were a part.” Consequently, he writes, he “brought in the struggle in China, in Spain, in Abyssinia, in Central Europe, in Egypt and the countries of Western Asia. I told them of the wonderful changes in the Soviet Union and of the great progress made in America” (60).
 - 16 Bharati’s assumption that freedom is the birthright of an enslaved people as much as anyone else’s, reminds us also of Kant’s similar argument in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, about the conditions of freedom: “I cannot admit the expression used even by intelligent men: A certain people (engaged in elaborating civil freedom) is not yet ripe for freedom; the bondmen of a landed proprietor are not yet ripe for freedom; and thus also, men in general are not yet ripe for freedom of belief. According to such a presupposition freedom will never arrive; for we cannot ripen to this freedom unless we are already set free—we must be free in order to be able to use our faculties purposively in freedom [and] we never ripen for reason except through our own efforts, which we can make only when we are free. . . . [To maintain that people who are subject to bonds] are essentially unfit for freedom . . . is to usurp the prerogatives of Divinity itself, which created man for freedom” (quoted in Arendt 48). Arendt cites this passage in the context of Kant’s distinction between action and judgment (in this instance, of revolution).
 - 17 We find “freedom” identified in Bharati’s poems by different words: by the Tamil “*Viduthalai*” in some contexts, and by the Sanskritized “*swatanthiram*” in others. Although both are routinely translated as freedom, *viduthalai* has also the less abstract and more literal sense of “release from confinement” or “breaking free of shackles.” In the famous *viduthalai* poem, it refers to the removal of caste- class- and gender-oppression.
 - 18 Original in English.
 - 19 Original in English.
 - 20 The argument could also be made that rather than view the two kinds of nationalisms that Kesavan typifies as opposed political modalities, we might more usefully consider them as historically sequential and connected stages. The swadeshi move-

- ment following the partition of Bengal in 1905, which represents the extremist phase of Indian nationalism, in many ways served as preparation for Gandhian mass politics, however different their respective ideological investments may be, and many who began as adherents of the first became mainstream Congress nationalists under Gandhi's sway, like Bharati himself.
- 21 Originality was not of course necessarily the point: the translations were acts of homage, as also a sign of Bharati flexing his poetic muscles through the exercise.
 - 22 It could be argued, however, that they are not as radical and far-reaching as those of his non-Brahmin contemporary, E. V. Ramaswami's. The contrast between Bharati's romantic enthusiasm and EVR's rationalist ideas would be an interesting inquiry to pursue, in addition to their respective ideas about gender.
 - 23 A note in this edition speculates that this may be "the last ever song composed by Bharati and was sung by him at a public meeting in Triplicane Beach, Madras, in July 1921" (*Chosen*, 39).
 - 24 I am indebted to Constantine Nakassis for this formulation.
 - 25 "Unisonance" is Homi Bhabha's term borrowed from Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, to describe a nation's "cultural cohesion connecting its national subjects through the undifferentiated simultaneity of an 'aural' imaginary" (Bhabha 94).
 - 26 Tanya Agathocleous has examined at length the implications of this terminology in the colonial public sphere.
 - 27 Letter to *The Hindu*, October 8, 1912.
 - 28 Original in English.
 - 29 See "Political Situation in Pondicherry 1910–1915," from the archives of the Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry.
 - 30 For more on the Ashe assassination and its political fallout see Sivasubramanian; and Venkatachalapathy, "In Search."
 - 31 "Police Rule in India: A Letter to Mr. Ramsay Macdonald, MP" in *The Hindu*, February 10, 1914.
 - 32 The record of the arrest in the Cuddalore district jail states: "C Subramania Bharati, age 36, brahmin, criminal, a political agitator detained in custody under the Ingress into India Ordinance 1914, detained on November 24, 1918." He was released following a letter of apology addressed to the Governor of Madras Presidency, in which he "renounced every form of politics" and promised to be "ever . . . loyal to the British Government and law abiding" (Bharati, "Humble").
 - 33 Bharati's poems were once again banned in 1928, after his death. In the preface to his English translation of some of the freedom-songs published that year, C. Rajagopalachari protested the fact that the Burma local government had "under the powers given by repressive legislation recently declared the books to be seditious," and had ordered the police to seize two thousand copies from the publisher's office. Rajaji complains, "nothing . . . however has since been done by the Madras Government to undo the wrong" (2). S. Satyamurti brought an adjournment motion on the seizure of copies of the banned books in the Madras Legislative Council, and he and some other members sang poems from the banned volumes in the assembly in defiance of the ban. Satyamurti made an impassioned speech: "You may ban the printed book . . . but even as the sacred Vedas were transmitted from generation to generation for eons without a single piece of writing, by the memory of our ancient Hindu

ancestors, Bharati's songs will remain a priceless heritage so long as the Tamil language lives." He asked rhetorically: "Does not your pulse beat quicker, your blood run warmer in your veins, when these magnificent, soul-stirring songs are sung?" The Government lost the vote on the adjournment motion (Sundararajan 61).

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