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# Cultural Elements of Resistance to Colonial Imperialism:

## A Study Based on Bharathiyar's National Poems

**T. S. Jeffry**

Department of Language Studies

The Open University of Sri Lanka

**Abstract**

After the Renaissance, European colonial powers expanded their rule across many regions, and British colonisation in India and Sri Lanka gave rise to several freedom movements. Subramania Bharathiyar poet, writer, journalist, freedom fighter, and social reformer lived within this turbulent period, and his poems played a key role in shaping public thought in British India. Although his works are often read primarily as expressions of political resistance, Bharathiyar's deeper aim was to unite a culturally fragmented society and cultivate a sense of indigenous cultural nationalism that could strengthen the freedom struggle. This qualitative study examines twenty of his national poems to explore

how cultural elements of resistance to colonial imperialism emerge in his writing. Using sociological approaches and content analysis, the research identifies how Bharathiyar promotes national consciousness through themes such as defining national boundaries, integrating regions, encouraging trade, supporting technological progress, strengthening rural development, reinterpreting myths, and unifying India's social diversity through culture. He also draws on philosophical traditions to highlight the moral responsibility of the people in resisting colonial power. The findings show that Bharathiyar used culture as a powerful tool to inspire patriotism, foster social unity, and prepare the nation for the freedom struggle. His poems reveal the depth of his vision and his commitment to resisting imperial domination through cultural awakening.

***Keywords:*** *Bharathiyar's Poems, Colonial Imperialism, Resistance Literature, Nationalism, Tamil poetry*

## Introduction

In any society facing oppression, voices of resistance naturally emerge. These voices often take the form of counter-ideologies that challenge injustice, and literature becomes one of the strongest mediums through which such resistance is expressed. Although literature is commonly viewed as the personal expression of an individual, every writer is shaped by the society they live in. For this reason, literary works are deeply connected to social experiences, and they reflect the political, cultural, and economic conditions of their time.

This close relationship between society and literature is called social-literary interaction. Through this interaction, literary production becomes an active force in the struggle for freedom. As long as exploitation exists, resistance will also arise. As Sivasekaram (2000) notes, throughout history, resistance and struggle have often been voiced through artistic and literary forms. In this way, "struggle literature" becomes a developed and purposeful expression of resistance, guiding and inspiring collective action.

Among all literary genres, poetry is especially powerful. When poems arise from a community's lived realities, they capture the emotions, frustrations, hopes, and movements of that society. They document the spirit of resistance that grows against domination and injustice.

During British rule, Indian society faced severe political, cultural, and social oppression. It is within this environment that Subramania Bharathi's nationalist poems emerged. His writings encouraged awakening among the colonized people and prepared them to imagine themselves as part of a united nation. For Bharathi, nationalism was not only a political idea; it was rooted in India's cultural traditions and spiritual heritage. His vision of Indian nationalism was built on cultural unity.

In this context, the central problem addressed by this study is how Bharathi used Indian cultural elements in his national poems to promote unity and resist British imperialism. Although much research has focused on themes of patriotism and feminism in his work, fewer studies have examined how he conceptualized

nationalism, what social forces shaped his ideas, and how he used poetry to influence public opinion. This research therefore explores the cultural foundations of resistance in Bharathi's national poems and analyzes how his poetic voice contributed to India's broader struggle for freedom.

## Literature Review

The existing scholarship on Subramania Bharati can be organized into Six major thematic strands that reveal how his poetry functioned as cultural resistance to colonial imperialism.

### *Bharati as an anti-colonial national poet*

Scholars consistently position Bharati as a central figure in South Indian anti-colonial culture: his poems fuse political urgency with cultural renewal and social reform. Popular and academic accounts highlight how his verse mobilized affect (enthusiasm, pride, anger) to create a public language of resistance that mixed classical Tamil forms, modern diction, and pan-Indian imagery. Contemporary overviews emphasize his role in shaping Tamil public life and nationalist sentiment (Rahul Mishra

& Yanitha Meena Louis, 2021) R. Sunder Rajan's work on "the rhetoric of enthusiasm" treats Bharati's poetic energy as a deliberate rhetorical strategy that channels mass affect toward anti-colonial ends; this approach foregrounds form and rhetorical performance rather than only content. Sunder Rajan argues that Bharati's stylistic choices — rapid cadences, exclamatory lines, and public recitation — are integral to how his poems performed resistance. This reading is useful if you want to analyze how cultural forms produce political effects (2021). Together, these studies show that Bharati was not only expressing resistance but actively shaping a collective emotional energy against colonial rule. They also suggest that his poetic style played a crucial role in forming the cultural foundations of early nationalist consciousness.

### *Resistance and struggle in literary forms*

A number of scholars explain that resistance is not only a political act but also a cultural and literary expression. Sivasekaram (2000) emphasises that literature has always carried the voice of resistance, stating that "Resistance and struggle have always expressed themselves in history

through artistic and literary forms. Struggle literature is the developed and developed form of resistance literature. It has clear goals of struggle. It shows the way for struggle." This perspective helps us understand why poets like Subramania Bharathiyar turned to poetry as a powerful medium to guide society, build political awareness, and inspire a collective will to resist colonial domination. It also shows how cultural creativity becomes an active part of social movements, especially during periods of foreign control.

***Cultural symbols and mythic language as resistance***

A number of studies examine Bharati's use of symbols motherland figures (Bharat Mata), rivers, temples, and folk idioms showing how these are repurposed as anti-colonial symbols. The literature shows him transforming religious and cultural signs into civic and political resources: the sacred becomes a language of freedom, but repurposed away from narrow ritualism toward social emancipation and anti-imperial dignity. This strand helps explain how cultural memory and everyday symbols were mobilized to contest colonial legitimacy

(Dineskanth.S, 2022) These interpretations reveal how Bharati connected cultural memory with national struggle, making familiar symbols speak a new political language. They also highlight how cultural identity becomes a form of resistance when it is reinterpreted in the context of colonial oppression.

### *Nationalism and internationalism: cultural scope of resistance*

Several writers stress Bharati's nationalism as both assertive and cosmopolitan. He linked local cultural references (Tamil myths, rivers, goddesses) to broader anti-imperial imaginaries — framing Tamil identity within a pan-Indian and even international moral claim against colonial rule. This dual orientation allowed his poems to function as both a local rallying cry and a claim to universal justice, which is important when studying the cultural reach of his resistance (Rahul Mishra & Yanitha Meena Louis, 2021). By linking local cultural pride with international ideals, Bharati's poetry shows that anti-colonial resistance was not only a regional or political struggle but also part of a larger human battle for dignity.

This approach widened the impact of his writings, enabling Tamil cultural identity to dialogue with global anti-imperial movements.

**Reception, public sphere, and institutional afterlives**

Work on Bharati's reception shows how his poems entered schools, journals, and public rituals; later, his corpus was *nationalized* and widely disseminated, which amplified his cultural impact. Studies on reception point to processes through which anti-colonial poetry becomes national cultural capital and how institutions (presses, schoolbooks, commemorations) transform poetic resistance into enduring public memory (Rajesh Venkatasubramanian, 2025). These findings indicate that Bharati's influence did not end with his lifetime but continued to grow through public institutions. They also show that the cultural power of his anti-colonial ideas depends not only on the poems themselves but also on how society adopted and reproduced them.

### *Thematic and interdisciplinary work*

Recent journal articles and conference papers expand the field: examinations of spirituality in Bharati's poems; ethical and personality studies; comparative readings with other regional anti-colonial poets; and digital humanities projects collecting and analyzing his corpus. These works often combine literary close reading with Socio Historic contextualization and show promising new methods for this study (Menaga Selvam & Ravindaran Maraya, 2023). This expanding scholarship demonstrates that Bharati's poems remain relevant to modern academic debates, especially those exploring identity, culture, and resistance. It also shows that studying Bharati through multiple disciplines provides deeper insight into how his poetry functions both as literature and as social thought.

Overall, these studies show that Bharathiyar's poetry was not just a literary achievement but a powerful form of cultural resistance that inspired people, shaped social awareness, and promoted nationalist ideas. Yet, there is still a need to explore in detail how these cultural

elements work together across his national poems, which is the focus of this study.

## Research Problem

During British colonial rule, Indian society faced political, cultural, and social oppression, which sparked widespread resistance movements. Literature, and poetry in particular, became a powerful medium through which voices of opposition could be expressed, shaping public awareness and inspiring collective action. Subramania Bharathiyar, as a poet, writer, and social reformer, used his national poems not only to oppose colonial domination but also to foster a sense of cultural unity and national consciousness rooted in India's traditions.

Although much Studies on Bharathiyar focuses on his patriotic fervor or social reform themes, there is limited study on how he systematically used cultural elements such as myths, folk symbols, philosophical ideas, and regional imagery to promote national integration and resistance. This research seeks to fill that gap by analyzing twenty of his national poems, showing how Bharathiyar's poetry transformed cultural expression into

a tool for anti-colonial resistance and the building of a shared national identity.

## Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research approach to understand how Subramania Bharathiyar expresses cultural resistance, national consciousness, and social unity through his poems. Since the study focuses on meaning, interpretation, and cultural context, qualitative analysis is the most suitable method. A sociological reading and content analysis were used together to explore how Bharathiyar connects cultural identity with resistance to British colonial rule. These methods helped to interpret the symbolic, emotional, and ideological layers in his writing.

The analysis was carried out through a close reading of twenty national poems: *Vantē mātaram, Jaya vantē mātaram, Nāṭṭu vaṇakkam, Pārata nāṭu, Pārata tēcam, Eṅkaḷ nāṭu, Jayapārata, Pārata mātā, Eṅkaḷ tāy, Tāyiṉ maṇikkoṭi pārīr, Pārata janaṅkaḷiṉ taṟkāla nilaimai, Veṟi koṇṭa tāy, Pōkiṉṟa pārata mum varukiṉṟa pārata mum, Pārata camutāyam, Centamiḻ nāṭu, Viṭutalai, Mājiṉiyiṉ*

*capatam piratikkiṉai, Pūpēntira vijayam, Cutantirap paḷḷu, and Catrapati Civāji.* These poems were organised by themes such as nationalism, unity, cultural pride, moral responsibility, and freedom. The researcher coded recurring ideas and cultural symbols, then interpreted them within the social and historical background of colonial India. This systematic process ensured that all findings were grounded in the text and supported by clear evidence.

## Results and Discussion

It is necessary to understand the underlying politics of Bharathi's songs in the context of that time, rather than viewing them as simply arising from his devotion to the Indian nation. India's ethnic language was diverse; many things were said and done. First of all, Bharathi needed to transform the people of India into a people of one mind. Bharathi expresses this through the following poem

*Muppatu kōṭi mukamuṭaiyāḷ - uyir*
*moympuṟa voṉṟuṭaiyāḷ - ivaḷ*
*ceppu moḻi patiṉeṭṭuṭaiyāḷ - eṉiṟ*
*cintaṉai oṉṟuṭaiyāḷ (Eṅkaḷ tāy)*

(She has thirty million faces but one life –

she speaks eighteen languages and has one mind.)

In this situation, Bharathi had the idea that if freedom is achieved, it should be available to everyone, which is expressed in the song

*Muppatu kōṭiyum vāḻvōm - viḻil*
*muppatu kōṭi muḻumaiyum viḻvōm (Eṅkaḷ tāy)*

(If we live, we will live with three hundred million people.

If we fall, we will fall with three hundred million people.)

**Providing a sense of nationalism to the people of India**

The people of India lived their lives very harshly after colonialism. The freedom fighters often reminded the people that their own country was their own country. In that way, Bharathi records in his poems that you are the indigenous people of India.

*Entaiyum tāyum makiḻntu kulāvi*
*iruntum in nāṭē - ataṉ*
*muntaiyar āyiram āṇṭukaḷ vāḻntu*
*muṭintatum innāṭē* (nāṭṭu vaṇakkam)

*(My father and mother were happy*
*in this country - their ancestors*
*lived in this country for a thousand years.)*

Through this poem, Bharathi makes the people realize the origin of the country of India and creates a feeling that the real owners of the country are the indigenous people and awakens them. He states that the mothers and fathers of the people living now lived in this country and that the generations before them lived on this land for 1000 years.

*ākkattilē toḻil ūkkattilē - puya*
*vīkkattilē uyar nōkkattilē*
*kākkat tiṟalkoṇṭa mallartam*
*cēṉaik kaṭaliṉilē uyar nāṭu* (pāratanāṭu)

(A country with a high army of warriors
capable of defending, in creation,
in industry, in physical strength, in high purpose)

In this poem, it is seen that the national consciousness is created among the people by mentioning the special features of India. It is seen that Bharathiyar, who reveals that there have been many Mallar (Very strenthen solgure) armies in the rich cultural history of India, has the intention of creating such an army of Mallar against imperialism. Bharathiyar makes the people aware of the history of Indian culture in order to provide national consciousness to the people of India.

**Nation-building**

Building a nation is not an ordinary task. There must be a policy for it. All sectors such as economy, politics, society should operate according to that policy. Indians living in British India opposed foreign impositions from the very beginning. Protests against British Westernization such as Salt Satyagraha, burning of foreign clothes, and Quit India were carried out by

Mahatma Gandhi and others. In such a period, Bharathiyar, who thought that nationalist policies were the right ones to build the nation, proposed through his poems that the nation could be built in this way using the cultural characteristics of the Indian nation.

This includes demarcating the country's borders, Integrating other nations, Trade, Technological development, Diversity. Bharathiyar, who believed that the Indian nation could be built through the advancement of important issues such as..., shows in his poems the ways to achieve those issues through national cultural principles.

**Demarcating the country's borders**

*Veḷḷip* ***paṉimalaiyiṉ*** *mītulavuvōm*
***vaṅkattil*** *ōṭivarum nīriṉmikaiyāl maiyattu nāṭukaḷil payirceykuvōm*
***cērattut*** *tantaṅkaḷ paricaḷippōm*
***cintu natiyiṉmicai*** *nilaviṉilē*
***kaṅkai*** *natippuṟattuk kōtumaip paṇṭam muttuk kuḷippatoru* ***teṉ kaṭalilē***
***ciṅkaḷat tīviṉukkōr*** *pālam amaippōm*

***cuntarat teluṅkiṉiṟ*** *pāṭṭicaittut tōṇikaḷōṭṭi viḷaiyāṭivaruvōm*

(Pārata tēcam)

(Let us walk on the silvery snow-capped **Himalayan mountains** -

With the abundance of water flowing in **Bengal**

Let us cultivate in the **central countries**

Let us present ivory to the **Chera country**

On the **banks of the Indus**

Wheat is a commodity on the **banks of the Ganges**

Pearls bathe in the **southern sea**

Let us build a bridge to the **Sinhalese island**

Let us sing songs in the beautiful **Telugu**

Let us play in canoes)

The borders of a country do not only indicate its geographical location but also symbolize the resources of

the country. In his poem Bharata Nadu, Bharathi divides the borders of India into the Himalayas, Bangladesh, Kerala, the Indus River, the Ganges River, the South Sea, Sri Lanka, and Andhra Pradesh. When mentioning these borders in the poem, he identifies the diverse cultural ethnic groups living there. He does not only look at the resources in these border areas. It is clear that Bharathi's aim was to demarcate and unite the country through cultural nationality.

**Incorporating other countries**

Bharati inspired the people through his poems in whatever way he could strengthen the Indian nation. There is a custom of calling India a subcontinent. The reason for this is its vast land area. There is a belief that the countries of today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh were once part of India. According to this belief, Bharati had the intention of uniting and strengthening these with India. The following lines of poetry clarify this. *Vaṅkattil ōṭivarum nīriṉ mikaiyāl maiyattu nāṭukaḷil payirceykuvōm*

The Rama Bridge is considered very important in the history of Indian culture. It is said to have been built by Lord Rama to rescue Sita who was abducted by Ravana. It is also known as Sethu Bridge. He mentions in his poem 'Bharata Desam' that *'cētuvai mēṭṯuṟutti vīti camaippōm'* This raises the question of what Bharathi is trying to say. Furthermore, it is worth noting that Bharathi has made references to Sri Lanka in many places in his poems. For example,

***Ciṅkaḷam*** *puṭpakam cāvaka - mātiyatīvu*

*palaviṉuñ ceṉṟēṟi - aṅkutaṅkaḷ*

*pulikkoṭi mīṉkoṭiyum –*

*niṉṟucālpuṟak kaṇṭavar…* (centamiḻ nāṭu)

(**Sinhala** Putbagam Chavaka - Having gone

to the island of Madhya, Balavinun - there,

their tiger flag and fish flag stood,

and saw the homeland)

***ciṅkaḷat tīviṉukkōr*** *pālam amaippōm*
(Pārata tēcam)

(Let us build a bridge to the **Sinhalese island)**

The Chola invasion of Sri Lanka occurred during the reign of **Raja Raja Chola I** and his successor **Rajendra Chola I** in the late 10th and early 11th centuries. Bharathi plans to recall these historical and mythological cultural aspects and strengthen the connections that existed with Sri Lanka at that time. Bharathi has a geopolitical perspective.

**Trade Management**

Bharathi's main goal in preparing India against British imperialism was the development of the economic sector. Bharati proposes indigenous methods, including the barter system, which had been prevalent among the Indian people until then, to build up domestic trade in a traditional manner.

*Kaṅkai natippuṟattuk kōtumaip paṇṭam*

*kāviri* ***veṟṟilaikku māṟukoḷḷuvōm*** (Pārata tēcam)

*(We will exchange the wheat of the Ganges*

*for the betel leaves of the Cauvery)*

The following lines of poetry testify to Bharathi's desire to promote domestic production, produce indigenous clothing, establish factories, develop the pearl industry and establish gold mines

***cērattut tantaṅkaḷ*** *paricaḷippōm*

(Let us present ivory to the **Chera country)**

***paṭṭiṉil āṭaiyum pañciṉil uṭaiyum*** *paṇṇi malaikaḷeṉa vīti kuvippōm*

(We will make silk clothes and cloths and pile them up

like mountains on the streets)

***ālaikaḷ vaippōm*** *kalvic cālaikaḷ vaippōm*

(We will build factories, we will build educational Paths)

***muttuk kuḻippatoru*** *teṉ kaṭalilē,*

(Pearls bathe in the **southern sea**)

*veṭṭuk kaṉikaḷ ceytu* ***taṅkam*** *mutalāmvēṟu palaporuḷum kuṭain teṭuppōm*

(We will make cutting tools and mine gold and many other thing),

(Pārata tēcam)

Bharathi talks about the need to export indigenous products that are increasing in this way to foreign merchants and import their own products. This is shown in the poetic lines *"Eṭṭut ticaikaḷiluñ ceṉṟivai* ***viṟṟē eṉṉum poruḷaṉaittum koṇṭu varuvōm*** (Pārata tēcam) (Let us go to the eight directions and sell these and bring back everything we can think of.)" India needs ports to conduct these foreign trade activities effectively, which Bharati describes as a *"Natti namakkiṉiya poruḷ koṇarntē nam'maruḷ vēṇṭuvatu* ***mēṟkaraiyilē*** *"* (On the west coast).

Overall, it is clear that Bharati India's business management is structured around indigenous cultural background. Bringing products that are best grown in the region to the market and adopting indigenous methods in business practices show Bharati's cultural national ideology.

**Recalling the philosophical elements of Indian culture**

India's role in Eastern philosophy is immense. Indian philosophy is built on Buddhist and Saiva Upanishad ideas. The Indian people are also influenced by it. Bharathi composes a poem to unite the people who follow this thought and raise their voice against Western theism.

***Pūraṇa ñāṉam*** *polinta naṉṉāṭu*

***puttar pirāṉaruḷ poṅkiya nāṭu***

Eṅkaḷ nāṭu paṉṉarum **upaniṭanū** (eṅkaḷ nāṭu)

(A good country full of perfect wisdom

A country overflowing with the grace of the Buddha)

Through this, Bharathi unites the people in terms of indigenous philosophy and ideology, and also opposes other foreign philosophical and cultural elements.

**Reconstruction of the Myths**

The epic mythological beliefs and the Indian people are so intertwined with the people that it is impossible to separate them. Among the characters in the two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Rama, Indra, Ravana, Arjuna, Karna and Krishna are seen as the ones who destroyed unrighteousness and established dharma in the Indian nation. Bharathi reminds the people of these. He portrays the British imperialists as the perpetrators of unrighteousness and the people of India as the dharma. He brings the ways in which the above-mentioned epic heroes destroyed unrighteousness in his poems and gives courage to the people. The following lines of poetry clearly show this.

*Muṉṉai* ***ilaṅkai arakkar aḻiya*** *muṭittavil yāruṭai vil?*

***Intira cittaṉ*** *iraṇṭu tuṇṭāka eṭuttavil yāruṭaiya vil?*

***Kāṇṭivam*** *ēnti ulakiṉai veṉṟatu kallotta tōḷ evar tōḷ?*

*Cākum poḻutil* ***irucevik kuṇṭalam*** *tantatu evar koṭaikkai?*

*Pōrkkaḷattē para* ***ñāṉa meykkītai pukaṉṟatu*** *evaruṭai vāy?*

(Pāratamāta)

(Whose bow was the one used to destroy the demon of Sri Lanka?

Whose bow was the one that Indra Siddha broke into two pieces?

Whose shoulder was the one who carried the bow called Kandivam

and conquered the world?

Whose hand was the one who gave the two-eared Kundalas as a gift

at the time of death?

Whose mouth was the one who spoke wisdom on the battlefield?)

**Addressing cultural shortcomings of Indians**

Bharathi wanted to unite Indian society through cultural nationalism, not only by focusing on its positive aspects, but also by identifying its negative shortcomings and bringing people out of them. People were also plagued by shortcomings such as fear, superstition, religious conflicts, caste divisions, and lack of principles. For this reason, cultural issues were put forward. Bharathi has mentioned the voice against this in many places in his poems. If people continue in this state, divisions in society will increase. Bharathi warned that this will lead to defeat in the struggle against imperialism. Bharathi records this in great detail in the poem 'The Current Situation of the People of India' *(Pārata jaṉaṅkaḷiṉ taṟkāla nilaimai)* (The current situation of the people of India)

**Añciyañcic cāvār** - ivar

**añcāta poruḷillai** avaṉiyilē

mantira vāti eṉpār - coṉṉa

māttiratti lēmaṉak **kilipiṭippār**,

**yantira cūṉiyaṅkaḷ** - iṉṉum

cāttiraṅkaḷ oṉṟum kāṇār - **poyc**

**cāttirap pēykaḷ** collum vārttai nampiyē

kōttiram oṉṟā yiruntālum - **oru**

**koḷkaiyiṟ pirintavaṉaik kulaittikaḻvār,**

āttiraṅ **koṇṭē ivaṉ caivaṉ - ivaṉ**

**aripaktaṉ eṉṟuperuñ caṇṭaiyiṭuvār**.

(He will die in fear - he is afraid of nothing in the world

He will be afraid as soon as he is told,

he will not see any magic or magic spells or scriptures –

he will believe in the words of false scriptures and demons,

even if they are of the same caste –

he will despise those who are divided,

he will fight with rage saying this one is a Saiva

and this one is a Vaishnava)

Overall, the analysis shows that Bharathiyar used cultural identity as a strong tool to guide people during colonial oppression. He did not only praise India's past but used cultural symbols, myths, philosophy, and daily practices to build confidence among the people. By presenting unity, economic self-reliance, moral strength, and national pride, his poems encouraged ordinary citizens to see themselves as active participants in the struggle against British rule. Through this cultural awakening, Bharathiyar transformed poetry into a public force that shaped collective thinking and prepared people emotionally and socially for freedom.

## Conclusion

This study shows that Subramania Bharathiyar used culture as a powerful form of resistance during British rule. Through his national poems, he did more than express patriotism he rebuilt confidence among people who lived under colonial oppression. By drawing from familiar cultural symbols, myths, philosophical ideas, and the shared history of the land, he encouraged unity among India's diverse communities. Bharathi also highlighted practical nation-building ideas such as economic self-reliance, border identity, trade, and social reform, showing that cultural strength and national progress must grow together.

Overall, his poems helped ordinary people see themselves as part of a united nation capable of resisting imperial domination. Bharathiyar's cultural vision not only strengthened the freedom struggle of his time but also continues to remind us that culture can be a source of courage, identity, and collective power in fighting injustice.

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## Biographical Note

T. S. Jeffry is a Lecturer (Probationary) in the Department of Language Studies at The Open University of Sri Lanka and a Visiting Lecturer at the Buddhist and Pali University of SriLanka. He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) degree in Tamil from the University of Peradeniya and a Master of Arts in Tamil from the same university. He is currently reading for an MPhil in Tamil at the Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya. His research interests include Tamil literature, socio-cultural studies, linguistics, folklore, and interdisciplinary approaches to language, literature, and society.

# Urban Life through Moments of Poetry: A Probe into Sarathchandra Walpola's *Es Dolahak Haya Widihak*

**Associate Professor Indira Mawelle**

Department of English and Linguistics

University of Sri Jayewardenepura

## Introduction

The veteran writer Sarathchandra Walpola's new poetry collection *Es Dolahak Haya Widihak* ('Twelve Eyes, Six Dimensions'), a Silika Publication of 2024, unfolds diverse perspectives on contemporary urban social experience. This collection which consists of thirty-four (34) poems, depicts different aspects of Colombo-centred life (වෙඩිවර්ධන, as cited in වල්පොල, 2024, p 9) as its central theme, as viewed mainly from a modernist point of view. In doing so, the author has employed a free-verse style with natural speech rhythms, with a choice of an informal vocabulary, particularly those commonly

found in the city. He appears to have responded to the peculiar appeal in city life with its dreary, mundane existence with its joys and sorrows, the beauty and the crudeness, as inherent to humankind. Suffering is a fundamental sensation to humanity that pervades life in both the village and the city alike. In comparison with life in the village, there may be more corruption and hypocrisy in the city. It may not have the scenic beauty of the village. It is this life of the city that Walpola portrays in his anthology.

**Review Method**

Textual analysis has been employed as the key method in reviewing this collection of poetry, while archival research in the form of published biographies of, and interviews with, the author, have been used to a moderate extent. By using these methods, the present review intends to make a nuanced interpretation of the entries in the text, and thereby to make an attempt to add to the understanding of the impact of the text as a whole.

## Analysis

As stated earlier, the entries in this collection of poetry are focused in the direction of a deep exploration of life in Colombo city and its varied related aspects of existence. The poet does this by surfing through diverse zones of the lives and experiences of people belonging to various different strata of urban society.

### Monologue into Dialogue

The writer mentions in his opening notes to the book (වල්ගොඩ, 2024) that he opts to remain silent between the dialogue and the monologue. As Buber (2002) argues (as cited in Mizdrak, 2018), dialogue completes the space between one individual and another, forming a bond of reciprocity. Walpola's statement thus becomes significant in that each of the entries in the collection of poetry has originated as the poet's own monologue which instantly starts a dialogue with the reader. This is so because these poems are creations which directly address the society where we live, enfolding the reader with empathy for the suffering of fellow humans. At the hands of the reading public, the poems do not remain

monologues anymore. In the poem *Swayam Nirodhayanaya* ('Self-Quarantine', p. 64) the poet sensitizes the reader to the depressingly drab uncertainties of life, referring to the Covid-19 pandemic as the context, where life had to be imprisoned in self-isolation on encountering a totally unforeseen threat to human health. He does this by drawing parallels between the urban surroundings and life amid the pandemic.

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කල් තියා සකස් කළ න්‍යාය පත්‍ර නැති

(ස්වයං නිරෝධායනය, p. 64)

Though a scorching noon

Life, a bleak wretched cave

Without pre-determined schedules

(Translation mine)

**Social Critique through Imagery**

Conservative opinion, when felt as detrimental to society, is problematized by the author. *Kolu Petiyek Upadinakam* ('Awaiting a Baby Boy', pp.29-31) which implicitly questions, and also subverts, a patriarchal social order, is one such instance. He uses evocative imagery and metaphors to communicate these ideas and invoke strong feelings in the reader, which can be frequently seen in the poems of this collection.

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ඒ ඇඳ උඩ හුස්ම ගනී

රෝස පාට කවියක්

(කොලු පැටියෙක් උපදිනකං, p.31)

From ward to ward

Blossoms of milky fragrance

Her bed, too, smelling of milk,

On that bed, breathing

A poem, roseate.

(Translation mine)

Walpola's use of novel imagery can be described as capable of expanding the bounds of poetic imagination. For instance, in the poem *Mathrukawak Nethi Rachanyak, Wedikawak Nethi Naluwek* ('Essay without a Topic, Actor without a Stage', pp.102-103) he alludes to the frequent flooding at Athuraliya, a rural area of southern Sri Lanka, through a metaphorical analogue of the plight of an ever surrendering, ever helpless human.

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(මාතෘකාවක් නොමැති රචනයක්

වේදිකාවක් නොමැති නලුවෙක්, p. 103)

River of the Matara crocodile hatchling

Flooding unrestrained

To all the waters of strong-tea hue

Athuraliya, that surrenders, with both hands up

(Translation mine)

**Foundational Liberal Values**

The liberal Marxist principles (Pitts, 2020) which the poet seems to uphold permeate through the entries in this anthology. Poems such as *Sapatheru Wiyamana* (‘Cobbler’s Weave’, p. 32), *Curtain call* (original poem by the same name p.33-35), *Gramiya Kirulapone Nagarika Moda Ela hewath Kaka Sandesaya* (‘Rural Kirulapone Urban Canal or The Raven’s Message’, p.79) can be cited as some examples for this. The marginalized groups of the society who are without power and thus without a voice, are regarded with empathy in the poem *Sapatheru Wiyamana* (‘Cobbler’s Weave’, p.32).

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මහන්නට නොලැබෙන

නන් වර්බල් මිනිස්සු

(සපතේරු වියමන, p. 32)

Torn, chipped and peeling

Life, put together with glue

Unfit to mend

Non-verbal people

(Translation mine)

In a world where everything, including the freedom of speech, is decided by power, those who do not own capital – neither economic nor social – are bound to remain voiceless.

## Perception and Misinterpretation

As each individual person carries a social-cultural baggage, different people may regard a phenomenon with diverse perspectives. Concurrently, there can also be a majority perspective on certain occurrences in life, which makes many people view phenomena in pre-conceived

ways. In the poem ‘Curtain Call’ (the name of the poem in the original collection) the author/poet depicts the traumatic experience of the one person who chooses to take a totally different stance from the majority. Out of sheer spontaneous joy on viewing a play, this person offers his worn-out pair of slippers to its female dramatist when others shower her with elaborate tokens of admiration and appreciation.

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(Curtain Call, pp. 34-35)

Bouquets of flowers

Mementos elaborate

Offered to her in many

the privileged in the audience

….

He owned

a blooming heart

A pair of threadbare,

crooked-strapped slippers of rubber

which, faithfully removing,

taking in both hands,

offered he,

to the creative genius.

She, in attempt to

hide disgust

(Translation mine)

Using ordinary words, but carefully chosen to denote human emotion, the poet creates a strong impression on the reader of the disparity between the affluent and the poor, lack of empathy of the masses and the misinterpretation of honesty.

## Contextual Use of Language

The language in Walpola's poetry, like his subject matter, is not bound by conventional constraints. He constantly adapts his language to fit the emotional and social experiences he depicts in his poems. The inherent flexibility of the language in poetry has been emphasized and adopted by literary figures across the world, postulating that poetry should contain language that constantly evolves to make it fit enough to express

shifting human emotions and complexities (Szymborska, 1996).

## Conclusion

When considering the contemporary Sinhala poetry, works that articulate the urban pulse are a rarity. The very attempt to produce poetry that centres around Colombo life can be viewed as a bold move, and to produce impactful poetry in the chosen setting is a commendable move. Thus, the anthology *Es Dolahak Haya Widihak* ('Twelve Eyes, Six Dimensions') penned by the contemporary poet Saratchandra Walpola can be situated in the current literary scenario as a mature rendition of urban identity with its pleasures, agonies and sensations depicted through a multi-dimensional approach.

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**Biographical Note**

Indira Mawelle is attached to the academic staff of the Department of English and Linguistics of the University of Sri Jayewardenapura. Her areas of interest are Psycholinguistics, Sociolinguistics and Language Disability Studies.