

# Bharathiyar and Translation

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## ABSTRACT

Subramania Bharathiyar emerged as a remarkable translator and poet, bridging Tamil literature with global literary traditions. A polyglot, he mastered Tamil, English, Sanskrit, Telugu, Bengali, Hindi, French, and Chinese. Bharathiyar translated literary works from other languages into Tamil and his own Tamil poems into English and French, making them accessible to a wider audience. His translations are marked by literary finesse, clarity, and cultural sensitivity, reflecting themes such as Tamil welfare, Indian freedom, women's liberation, and the rejection of caste discrimination. Through his translation work, Bharathiyar enriched Tamil literary expression while fostering cross-cultural literary exchange, establishing himself not only as a poet but also as an outstanding translator and social thinker.

**Keywords:** Bharathiyar, translation, multilingualism, Tamil literature, world literature, social thought, literary richness.

## INTRODUCTION

Subramania Bharathi is a treasure bestowed upon the Tamil language and the Tamil people. Language, at its core, is born for dialogue among individuals. Bharathi stands as a shining example of how language, when handled with grace and mastery, can bring about tremendous social transformation. Even though more than a century has passed since his lifetime, it is essential that we continue to recall the greatness of his linguistic prowess; only then will the present generation draw inspiration from it.

When a person speaking one language wishes to communicate with another person speaking a different language, translation becomes essential. The foundation of Bharathi's excellence in translation lies in his multilingual proficiency. His early life spent away from home, and his experiences living in diverse linguistic environments from Ettayapuram to Kasi, and later Calcutta, Chennai, and Puducherry significantly enriched his knowledge of multiple languages.

### Multilingual Proficiency

Bharathiyar was a multilingual poet who, apart from his mother tongue Tamil, had knowledge of many other languages. Because of his father's admiration for English, Bharathi received his education through the English medium, which enabled him to acquire strong proficiency in the language. His stay in Kasi helped him learn Sanskrit and Hindi. During his years in Pondicherry, he gained familiarity with French and Bengali. When the First World War began, he also showed interest in German, Latin, and Urdu. While living in Chennai, he learned Telugu as well. It is known that he had exposure to about twelve languages including Arabic and Malayalam. Among these, he had reading and writing proficiency in seven languages, while he could understand the rest when spoken to him. He deeply enjoyed reading English poetry, especially the works of Byron, Keats, and Shelley. It was from the poems of Shelley flowing with a yearning for freedom that Bharathi first experienced a powerful sense of liberation. He was well-versed in Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Bengali, Hindi, English, and French. This is affirmed by his own statements:

**"I am acquainted with four or five languages; yet none possesses the strength, skill, and emotional bond that Tamil has."** (Bharathiyar Katturaigal, 'Tamil', p.167) and