CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Most of the Indian poets, during the Freedom Struggle, had derived their inspiration, theme and form from the English Romantic poets, especially from the revolutionary poets such as Shelley and Byron. Among the English Romantic poets, the revolutionary ideals, the egalitarian outlook and the humanitarian spirit of Shelley have captivated the mind of his Tamil counterpart Bharati.

- *The Harp and the Veena* (24)

When he touches on human life and the human heart, no pictures can be more faithful, more delicate, more subtle, or more pathetic.

- *Note by Mrs. Shelley* (184)

To comprehend clearly, to so speak that clarity
May inform; to rear many a blissful dream
That will soar in joy in the minds of them
That mediate;

- *The Oath of Pāncāli: Invocation to Vani* (154)

1.1. Shelley, Bharathi and Womanism 1
1.2. Comparative Literature 3
1.3. Shelley: Woman’s Warrior 9
1.4. Bharathi: Women’s Champion 12
1.5. Prophets of Women’s Freedom 16
1.6. Review of Literature 28
1.7. The Image 39
1.8. Aim, Scope and Methodology 40
1. Introduction

1.1. Shelley, Bharathi and Womanism

Percy Bysshe Shelley and C. Subramanya Bharathi\textsuperscript{1} are real champions of women’s liberation, women’s freedom and women’s empowerment. Shelley’s strong conviction was that ‘he was sent by God to assert the freedom of womankind’ (\textit{The Revolt of Islam}). And Bharathi strongly held the view that ‘the liberation of nation, to a very large measure, lies in the liberation of women’. (“Peṇ viṭutai” [Manumission of Women], “Peṇkaḷ viṭutalai kummi” [The Kummi of Women’s Freedom]). It is true that Shelley, the later romantic (poet) belongs to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and had a lightning-like short span of existence of just twenty-nine years (1792-1822). And Bharathi, the great poet who ushered in modern Tamil renaissance, belongs to the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, and in a similar way a thunder-like fairly short span of existence of only thirty-nine years (1882-1921), just a decade more than Shelley. Both Shelley and Bharathi died in the ‘green’ prime of their youth; but their contributions in respect of genuinely voicing the concerns of women have no parallels in literary history at all.

Although separated by exactly a century, as great revolutionary poets and as iconoclasts, there is a close similarity between the theme handled by the poets as dear to women’s causes and women’s issues. In the early part of

\textsuperscript{1} The name of Bharathi is not transliterated all through the study and is spelt as given in the title of the thesis in all chapters. The title of poems, books and characters are, however, transliterated with the exception of proper names, past and present personalities, including the contemporaries of Bharathi.
his poetic career Bharathi described himself as Shelley Dasan (a disciple, a follower, a devotee, a slave or thrall of Shelley), so much was the impact of Shelley on Bharathi. But just as Shelley, both ideologically and philosophically, differed from his mentor William Godwin in evolving his poetic vision and philosophy of life, Bharathi never hesitated to take to task Shelley, the poet he admired most, whenever he thought he was convinced that Shelley was off the track and that his views on ‘consentaneous love’ and as a logical corollary ‘free love’ was out of tune with the happy, harmonious evolution of family as the basic unit of society, solidly contributing much to its spiritual sustenance and emotional stability.

Put differently, despite the very close commonness that one could discern at the surface level between Shelley and Bharathi as Women’s poets and as people’s poets, there are deeper and deeper layers of strong differences in their perceptions as to the role, function and centrality of women in the poetic domains both have created for themselves.

At the same time, a strikingly surprising similarity is their avowal of the basic tenets of womanism, not necessarily in contradistinction with, but complementing feminism, in empowering and liberating women. It, therefore, may not certainly be an exaggeration to say that Shelley and Bharathi, in a small way, heralded and anticipated the onset of womanism, as a literary and socio-political ideology for the empowerment of women. Shelley’s clarion call for gender justice is sheer sham in the absence of men joining hands with women in throwing away, through non-violent means, the
oppressive structures that perpetuate the gender injustice. So did Bharathi’s
great proclamation, for breaking the shackles of women’s serfdom and
slavery, include both the sexes in ameliorating the pangs and pains and in
mitigating the sorrows and sufferings of women, through their liberation and
empowerment in a very peaceful democratic way.

As a result, the women images that Shelley and Bharathi project are
basically womanist in nature, although one could read a judicious blend of the
womanist and the (moderate/liberal) feminist streams of handling of the
themes related to gender issues. A comparative study, evidently implying the
contrast as well, of the handling of the woman images in the writings of
Shelley and Bharathi, is, therefore, very much in order from a womanist
perspective. The present study is, thus, devoted to a comprehensive analysis
of the works of Shelley and Bharathi in respect of women images from a
womanist perspective using the comparative tools of literary evaluation to
bring to light the underlying concerns and perceptual differences in their
treatment of women, women’s issues and the all embracing woman images.

1.2. Comparative Literature

Comparative Literature, or what is popularly known as Literature
across Cultures, basically aims at bringing into a unifying focus, certain
inalienable and universal features as reflected in different writers, in different
cultures, in different ages, in different social milieus and in different political
backgrounds. Comparative Literature, even as it transcends space and time,
does also, broadly speaking, situate two authors, two cultures, two epochs,
two periods, two ages, well within the spatial and temporal reality that would ultimately account for a meaningful critical evaluation of the underlying commonness and differences in the handling and treatment of the subject in variegated contexts.

Comparative Literature thus bridges the gap between nations and nationalities, countries and people, sex and gender and communities and ethnicities. Perhaps the greatest contribution of comparative literature is the unification of humankind. The human person, wherever he or she is, is after all a human person, in thought, in feeling and in emotions. But at the same time the local difference as brought out with the local cultural flavours, when viewed from comparative perspective, would help identify the deeply underlying commonness in consciousness and difference in perceptions.

In other words, Comparative Literature is a study in terms of comparisons and contrasts or similarities and dissimilarities of literatures and cultures of more than one country or region, in order to contribute to the mutual appreciation of the literary experiences of various people. This, as an intellectual field, arose in nineteenth century, a counterpart of the equally new fields of comparative anatomy, comparative law and comparative philology. Comparative Literature presumably acquired its name as such from a series of French Anthologies for the teaching of literature. Published in 1876, they were entitled *Cours de Literature Comparee*. It is the study of literature internationally, across national borders, across time periods, across languages, across cultures and across genres. It is a tool to analyze a work of art. As Rene
Wellek rightly points out, “One obvious objective of comparative literary study is to arrive at a universal view of literature independent of linguistic, national or racial demarcations” (203).

As a creative re-interpretation, Comparative Literature study makes a balanced approach of the writer’s camera throwing light on the strength and weakness of the writers, justifying the study from a literary perspective.

Comparative Literature, thus, in a way, may be rightly described as the gateway to the potential human writing bypassing the incremental differences, occasioned by in-land issues and in-land values. A comparative study is, therefore, always considered and looked upon as a powerful tool of evaluating or re-evaluating, orientating or re-orientating, interpreting or reinterpreting the perceptions written from two different perspective, so as to anchor itself on the common ground of oneness of humankind, which Bertrand Russel described as ‘one world one humanity and one race’.

Weisstein explains the aim of Comparative Literature in the following lines. “Comparative literature aims primarily . . . at studying the works of various literatures in their inter relationship” (15).

Another comparatist K. Chellappan, a comparatist with a conceptual difference, goes far beyond the limited goals of comparative studies set by the other theoreticians and holds that a comparative study provides a broader, mutual illumination and appreciation of literature.

Comparative literature as a study of literature independent of ethnic, linguistic and geographical boundaries has been a liberating and
humanizing force on literature itself by breaking the boundaries and focusing on the unity of human creativeness underlying the diversity of the literary events. But it is much more than a search for sameness or oneness by juxtaposing texts. It has provided a wider perspective by making mutual illumination of literatures possible. (1).

Henry H. H. Remak, a comparatist of global renown, strongly avers that Comparative Literature seeks to define the boundary by going beyond the boundaries.

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge, and belief . . . It is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression. (1)

V. Sachithanadan, on the other hand, vouches for the fact that the true value of a work of art can be estimated only through comparative analysis. And, therefore, comparative literature offers itself as a powerful tool of analysis of two different alternatives produced in two different countries with different cultures in objectively assessing their comparative merits and enduring values.

. . . as a work of art in spite of the individual traits that belong to different literary traditions; and like other works of art of the past and present, its fullest significance can be brought out only through comparison. (5)
Indeed differences in plurality, colour, complexion and creed relate to at once human living and human expression as well as perception of the vast panorama of life around which one finds eternal values in the fertile creative output of writing in all ages and in all nations. The strength of humanity is its inherent strength in looking for the unity in the midst of diversity. More the diversity (is), the more unity (is), is certainly not a dogmatic dictum, but a fact of perennial living reality. As Weistein comments: It is the personal that forms a pattern through a common creative process. “The meaning of literary work results from the poets personal experiences which form a kind of basic pattern for which he seeks a corresponding subject during the creative process” (126).

In addition, comparative literature offers new dimensions of perception and liberates literature from linguistic chauvinism and dogmatism. It not only enriches regional literature but seeks to establish the unity of literature and thereby the unity of the human person. As Wellek and Warren rightly say, “literature is one as art and humanity is one” (50). Hence an analogical study of the different aspects of the treatment of women characters in these two men writers bordering on the female psyche will pave the way for a meaningful understanding of the deep structured harmonious unity of the mankind, despite the threatening disturbance of the surface-structured man-made differences of color, creed, rank and so on.

The women characters of both Shelley and Bharathi may be looked at from varying possible perspectives to the larger extent that their texts would
inductively offer an appropriate comparative space for grouping the characters on solid grounds of thematic commonness and similarities. The central focus of the study is thus shifted from the author to the text, and it relates to the treatment of women characters in a well defined, mutually inclusive narration as manifested in the process of character exposition.

These fundamental similarities between the social and cultural factors as related to women’s concerns and both similarity and dissimilarity in their way of presentation of their women characters form the core of comparative study.

The present study fully subscribes to the views expressed by these comparatists and expresses the basic notion of arriving at a common or national view of literature, if not universal, cutting across the barriers of language and ethnicity. Conceptually the whole study is based on the perception that a comparative study offers more critical space in unravelling the quintessence of one book in terms of the other and vice-versa, especially in relation to the literary dimensions taken up for the comparative study. The present thesis “Woman Images in the Poetical Works of Shelley and Bharathi: A Womanist Interpretation” attempts to compare and contrast the woman images of Shelley, a British poet and those of Bharathi, a Tamil poet.

Shelley’s perception of woman may have been coloured by his immediate socio-political, religio-philosophic, and literary-cultural context. In a similar way, Bharathi’s perception of woman may have been coloured by his immediate socio-political, religio-philosophic, and literary-cultural
context. But the fact of the matter is how and how far have Shelley and Bharathi been able to get into the pulsatingly soaring and creative psyche of women and women’s issues as it affects them, as it helps them to grow and recognize themselves, their autonomy, independence, self-sustenance and more than anything else their liberation and empowerment. As a great womanist saying goes ‘all rivers ultimately flow into one ocean’. It is, then, only stating the obvious if we argue that although Shelley and Bharathi are products of different social milieus, the unified focus, one would find in them, would clearly bring to light the oneness and unity as well as the differences and dissimilarities within their perception of women as home-makers, as the beauteous and the brave, as liberators and as goddesses. The present thesis purports to investigate, interpret and evaluate to arrive at certain basic formulations of Shelley and Bharathi in their projections and presentation of women images in the larger canvas of their literary works. Despite the marginal or rather the peripheral differences one may encounter in any literary creativity, the apparent cosmic unconsciousness of the equally apparent commonness in vision and values would inevitably keep alive the profundity of thought and feeling of the works of the respective authors.

1.3. Shelley: Woman’s Warrior

The years since 1977, when the first edition of Norton Critical Edition of *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* was published, have witnessed a blossoming renaissance in Shelley’s scholarship and criticism, greater than any since the years 1870-92. Whether Shelley was a revolutionary or an atheist, whether

Shelley, whatever his ideology and philosophy of life be, when he came to women and women’s issues, he always reveals himself as championing the cause of women, being foremost in the vanguard, fighting as a committed warrior. Shelley, a late romantic poet, born in 1792, brought out a substantial body of poetry besides, novels, plays and criticism. Art Young, in his scholarly work *Shelley and Non-violence* (1975) provides a new dimension and shift in emphasis to Shelley’s criticism when he views the poet as the pioneer of non-violence, forbearance, and passive resistance in the early 19th century and in raising women’s issues as well (34). In the words of Jung, Shelley’s interpretation of history is remarkably similar to Gandhi’s (16). Again in the words of Duerksen,
“Shelley interprets history as a persistent struggle between dictatorship and liberty in which the general tendency is towards liberty” (25). Gandhi’s course of nature is very close to matured Shelley’s concept of necessity, an amoral force in time with which moral man aligns himself through an act of will to escape from the vicious cycles of history” (9).

A bit of logical extension would imply that in the case of women’s liberation and women’s empowerment, Shelley always perceived the process of evolution of liberty as a struggle between fossilized powers in the name of tradition, orthodoxy and obscurantism on the one hand and freedom, equality, dignity and empowerment on the other.

Shelley was one of the major English Romantic poets and is critically regarded among the finest lyric poets in the English language. A radical in his poetry as well as in his political and social views, Shelley did not achieve fame during his life-time; but recognition for his poetry grew steadily following his death. Shelley was a key member of a close circle of visionary poets and writers that included Lord Byron, Leigh Hunt, Thomas Love Peacock, and his own second wife, Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein* (1818). Shelley is perhaps best known for classic poems and also long and visionary poems. Shelley did not live to see success and influence, although these reach down to the present day not only in literature, but in major movements in social and political thought, particularly in Women Studies.
Shelley became an idol of the next three or four generations of poets, including important Victorian and Pre-Raphaelite poets such as Robert Browning and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. He was admired by Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russell, W.B. Yeats, Karl Marx, Upton Sinclair and Isadora Duncan. Henry David Thoreau’s civil disobedience was apparently influenced by Shelley’s non-violence in protest and political action.

Yet now nearly two hundred years after his untimely death, we see Shelley as a hero of liberation in general and women’s liberation in particular. His verses are full of lyricism and beauty pulsating with the vitality for love of freedom for all humankind, with a spirit of revolt against all violence and oppressions meted out to the womenfolk, and thus a champion of the women’s causes.  

1.4. Bharathi: Women’s Champion

Not surprisingly, Bharathi, while initiating himself into the poetic world of creativity and revolutionary thought, described himself, in no uncertain terms, as Shelley Dasan. The word *Dasan* may be interpreted as a devotee, a servant, a follower or even a slave, a disciple. Bharathi was living in an altogether different socio-political scenario. His country was reeling under the foreign colonial yoke against which Bharathi, both as a poet and as a nationalist, vigorously fought as a revolutionary. Like Mahatma Gandhi and Sri. Aurobindo, Bharathi was also tremendously influenced by Shelley, his
poetry, and more than anything else in his thoughts and ideology especially as this related to freedom of the human soul and liberation of the womankind.

That womankind or rather woman becomes the central focus of Bharathi’s world of creativity, is evident from the fact that he even goes to the extent of seeing the liberation of his country from the foreign rule as the liberation and empowerment of women. That single episode from *The Mahabharata* of Pāñcāli, the protagonist being enslaved, shackled, humiliated and derobed by Dushashana becomes the central image and focus of Bharathi’s reworking and reinterpreting and de-contextualising and re-locating of *The Mahabharata* in a larger national context into *Pāñcāli Capatam* (*The Vow of Panchali / Panchali’s Vow*) – Part I 1912 and Part II 1924 – clearly shows Pāñcāli is India. Pāñcāli’s freedom is India’s freedom and thus Pāñcāli, a woman, becomes at once an image and metaphor for unshackling his country from the British imperialism and for freeing the women from social orthodoxy and domestic oppression, providing them with self-hood, dignity and autonomy. Both in his poetry and in a major chunk of his prose writings Bharathi focused on the plights and predicaments of women and how women ought to be educated for their liberation and empowerment.

Even as Bharathi heavily draws on western writers in respect of women’s liberation, Bharathi simultaneously tries to evolve his own ideology and perception of women in the larger context of the Indian culture, tradition and spiritual heritage. Bharathi attributed freedom, autonomy and
independence to women, as well as a state of fearlessness (courage) as the pre-requisite and the most significant pivot on which women’s liberation would lie. Endorsing the views of G. Subramanya Iyer, Bharathi argues that whatever women need for their overall growth and development is freedom and independence rather than learning English and mastering music. In his own words:

What Subramanya Iyer\(^2\) has written is appropriate. Women are the mothers of the nation. If we made them the bonded labourers, the children they give birth to would also be, like their mothers, bonded labourers. These children, when they see the people of the foreign nations, become physically fearful and mentally confused. I don’t mean to argue that we should dispense with fine virtues of chastity, modesty, submissiveness, and morality they possess in larger abundance. My only prayer is that these women must more necessarily be trained to be self-reliant, independent, free, fearless, courageous and patriotic. (102)\(^3\)

Subramaya Bharathi was born in 1882, 25 years after the defeat of the First War of Indian Independence (1857) and three years before the Indian National Congress was founded (1885). He grew up in an atmosphere of

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\(^2\) G. Subramanya Iyer, perhaps one of the great national leaders from Tamil Nadu, was a member of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress and he is credited with moving the first ever resolution on the floors of the Working Committee for the full freedom of India. Like Bharathi, Subramanya Iyer boldly voiced women’s concerns, when it was viewed as a far cry, in the Indian national scenario.

\(^3\) All prose translations of Bharathi’s works included in the thesis are mine, unless otherwise stated.
darkness, despondency and despair: the Congress did not then show any promise of the militancy and clarity with which it was later to fight massive battles for freedom. But soon the middle classes were shaking off their age-old inertia and the vanguard among them were becoming assertive, ready to defy death in gay abandon in the sacred cause of national liberty.

Bharathi played an outstanding role in fighting for women’s freedom. He was for women’s cause. The child and architect of at once this historic and silent, national democratic revolution. He matured fast. Deeply rooted in his robust humanism and illumined by his uncanny imaginative insight into the future, he transcended the inevitable limitations of his epoch and wrote poems instinctively with prophecy. Thus he became the national bard of his Motherland India as well as the Tamil people; and his poetry has retained its immense relevance not only in the sense that great literature of any age is contextually ever relevant, but also in the sense that it is directly playing a paramount part as crusader, educator, and inspirer and mobilizer of the people.

He berates his countrymen from many social evils. He chastises them for a fearful and pusillanimous attitude towards the rulers. He made a clarion call for national unity, removal of castes and the removal of oppression of women. Bharathi advocated greater rights for women. To him, women’s liberation is national liberation and thus women’s freedom and country’s freedom are inseparably intertwined in the struggle for the freedom of the
humankind, as it were. He visualized a modern Indian woman as vanguard of society.

1.5. Prophets of Women’s Freedom

Shelley (who passed away at the age of 29), and Bharathi (who passed away at the age of 39), are prominent writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, who chose writing as their career. The unstinted love and compassion for the oppressed and the downtrodden brethren have compelled Shelley and Bharathi to compose a large number of poems on social, economic and gender equality more than any other Romantic poets of the contemporary literary milieu. Both have dreamt of a future world, an ‘idealized utopia’ where the tyrannical forces die away and all the living beings live in peace and prosperity without differences. The lyrics of Shelley not only voice the spirit of revolt of his time, but are also inspired by his love for humanity, love of freedom for all humankind, hatred of all oppression and a prophecy of a golden age. Loving all mankind, and wishing every human being to live a happy and free life, Shelley was a great devotee of liberty. Shelley’s humanitarianism, love of liberty, hatred of all oppression turned him into a rebel against all those established institutions, political, religious and social, which meant to suppress humankind in any part of the world.

Bharathi, like Shelley, wrote poetry with new words, new meanings, new messages and new music. He has earned a place in Indian Literature as the first Indian poet of national struggle for freedom in the real sense of the word. He is essentially a poet of freedom for the Indians, the Tamils and not
only for the freedom for the Indians and the Tamils but for the entire humanity as well. He is the poet of the humanity, poet of human freedom. Thus has Bharathi enriched the Traditional poetry.

The thoughts and ideals born of the French Revolution came to mould the revolutionary beings of both the poets. They were bewitched by the ‘catch words’ of equality, liberty and fraternity that were the slogans of the French Revolution. Among the English Romantic poets, it was Shelley who wholeheartedly sings about the French Revolution. This impassioned champion, the eloquent singer could not carry on far because of his premature death. Bharathi under the deep impact of the Indian Freedom struggle, like his English counterpart Shelley, utilized his whole creative fecundity to fight against social and political oppression. Shelley and Bharathi have remained passionate advocates of freedom from political tyranny, freedom from social institutions and freedom of the individual from social fetters. For them the human spirit is free and fearless.

Not only the thoughts and ideals of French Revolution and the Indian Freedom struggle influenced them, but also some important personalities who had deeply impacted their lives. Shelley was highly influenced by Mary Wollstone Craft Godwin’s\(^4\) *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). For Mary, women are human beings before they are sexual beings. And the women’s perfectibility is to go hand in hand with man’s and the rights of man and the rights of woman are one and the same thing. Shelley read Mary’s *A

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\(^4\) Mary Wollstone Craft Godwin was the wife of the philosopher William Godwin and the mother of Mary Godwin whom Shelley courted and married.
Vindication of the Rights of Women and this book very much nourished his imagination, expression and revolutionary views regarding women’s freedom.

Bharathi who called himself under the pseudonym, Shelley Dason was highly influenced by Shelley’s thoughts. His meeting with Sister Nivedita, the disciple of Vivekananda in 1905, was a turning point in his poetic career, since it sharpened and strengthened his ideas about gender equality more than before. When Nivedita asked, why he did not bring his wife for the Indian National Congress meeting, Bharathi’s answer that women were not taken out to public places, flared up Nivedita and she advised him that society cannot win freedom when the other half is enslaved; she also told him to hold her at his left hand and to praise her in his left heart as an angel (John Samuel 96). These words roused him to fight for the emancipation of Indian women.

These multifarious influences made Bharathi evolve a very clear perspective of the ideals of feminism or rather womanism, and thus he created revolutionary women characters, which Tamil Literature with her rich and hoary literary tradition had never seen till then. Though Shelley and Bharathi belong to two different nations, they resemble each other in their social vision and ideal of womanhood. Both of them have a thick corpus of more than three hundred poems to their credit.

Poems of Shelley and Bharathi offer new insights into women who are seen moving slowly but surely from subordination to autonomy, from patriarchal tyranny to personal goals and from silence to speech. Shelley’s

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5 A fine lady of blue blood from Ireland, she propounded the idea of ‘every woman as woman first and wife next’.
The Cenci and Bharathi’s Pāñcāli Capatam are classics cases in point. These two works of art present a powerful woman image of Beatrice and Pāñcāli (Draupati) assuming larger than life proportions of fiercely fighting against injustice, humiliation, slander and ignominiable indignity heaped on them. Beatrice in The Cenci rises to her full height, expands and grows with the approach of danger. Her sublime confidence in the justice and essential rightness of her action, the glance of self-assured purity with which she annihilates the cut-throat brought to testify against her, and her tender solicitude for the frailer Lucrezia, are used with wonderful dramatic skill for the fulfillment of a feminine ideal at once delicate and powerful (100). In the same way Bharathi’s Pāñcāli, the wife of five valorous Pandava Kings, is on the point of receiving the worst insult from the oppressor Duryodhana. Like Beatrice, Bharathi’s Draupati is an amiable and loving soul with genial spirit and good nature. She is very furious like Beatrice, when the courtiers kept silence at the brutal deed of Duryodhana (101).

Like Beatrice, Pāñcāli views Duryodhana as an incarnation of mischief, evil, cruelty and brutality. She furiously flared up that ‘if ghosts started to rule the country then even the sacred books will eat corpses’ (Ramachandran 89). She even argues that her husband Dharma has no right to lose her in the gambling since he lost himself before. Here Bharathi advocates his doctrine of gender equality through Vidhuman, who says that in antique past, probably in the matriarchal society, men and women were considered equal (74). These poems provide a glimpse into the minds of women-folk as
they live their lives in the patriarchal family set-up, bearing the weight of tradition and at the same time reacting to the pressures for change and modernity (74).

Shelley and Bharathi are very much aware of the problems faced by women in a highly discriminatory male-chauvinistic society, which confers a hypocritical, fragile, secondary status on women, all deceptively in the name of her honour and glory as ‘mother’. These two poets mercilessly expose the double standards practised in solely to continue the subjugation of women and herald the arrival of the new women. It is this new woman image that singularly marks the poetic universe of Shelley and Bharathi. They ensure her the long awaited autonomy, dignity, selfhood, freedom and participatory family moulding and nation. Bharathi in his: “Tom Tom” and “Muracu” proclaims that:

Would any put out one of the eyes  
And obscure the view?
If women become learned and wise  
The world will be rid of ignorance. (9-10)\(^6\)

The New Woman of Bharathi celebrates her autonomy, sovereignty, liberty, and esteem. She chants that the heavenly girl / woman is well born with natural traits like wisdom, virtue, freedom and courage. And they don’t have fear and shame of the dogs. They destroy all the heavy lies, raze down

\(^6\) All translations of Bharathi’s poems are taken from *Pārati Pāṭalkal (Bhārathi’s Poems)* a compilation of translations by different authors, edited by T.N. Ramachandran and published by the Thanjavur Tamil University Press (1989), except stated otherwise.
all the stupid blocks that men have done (so) for the women. She has the divinity and power of great Mother Goddess to transform and renew our world and to make all men immortal like gods. This New Woman is not ready to live in the house, which is like a hole; instead she is ready to travel all over the word to know the subtleties of life, and to learn the various arts and crafts. They proclaim that they have arisen to rule the realms, make the laws, to know the Truth and do the Right. The Song, “Glory of Womanhood” (“Penance”) is the proclamation of the victory that women attained. The singers sing, dance and praise that she is the protectress and creator of life. She is the life of life and soul of sweetness.

Bharathi’s Women refuse to yield any pressure of any kind whatever and find it difficult to compromise. Pāncāli openly protests against Duryodhana. As Prema Nandhakumar points out:

After the final insult to womanhood, Draupati takes her uncompromising vow on behalf of the oppressed womanhood.

Bharathi is no doubt forecasting a new chapter for Indian Womanhood, when every woman would become, not only a Mother, but Mother Might, the power that is indispensable for the life of man on earth. (106).

Pāncāli, in sheer ferocity, outsoars the vows of Bhima and Arjuna.

His Women put up a spirited fight against the hostile environment. His new women seek freedom to act, to change and to create options not available to them. They are determined to live with self-respect and dignity. Like
Pāncāli, they are aware of the injustice meted out to them; they rebel against the existing moral code. Bharathi always tries to make his women self-reliant, complete and credible. His women sing of their self-reliance in their “Kummi Dance-Sing” [Kummip Pāṭṭu]. Bharathi advises the emerging New Woman to reject tradition if it implies accepting repeated abuse and injustice within marriage and opt for modernity. His new women as in “The Kummi of Women’s Freedom” [“Peṅkal Viṭutalaik Kummi”], have creative role in the society and family. His woman becomes more and more conscious of her status and rights as an individual and begins to develop considerable social awareness. Bharathi, ‘with men, sings in “Glory of Womanhood” [Peṅmai] as “Let us rejoice in praise of womanhood / Let us dance to the cry of 'Victory to Women’” (1).

And thus Bharathi may be said to anticipate womanism as a movement, social, political and literary to secure women’s freedom in harmonious coordination with like-minded men, thus contributing to the nation of fighting against injustice as united members of a larger and extended family experience, cooperation and solidarity with one another. The image of women projected in his poems are not silent sufferers but courageous and bold women, engaged in a constant quest for her own identity. “The New Woman” (“Puṭumaip Peṅ”) is a long poem of the liberation of women. “Women too have the right to be free”, “Clothed in virtue, in woman’s form here / Is the very goodness, Our Mother”. They will learn “many and many lore” and “many and many a deed they will do”. They boldly proclaims in
“We Demand Liberation” (“Viṣṭulai Vēṇṭum”), “Let us fail not when Dark powers / Strike to make an end” (11-12).

Different reasons can be attributed to Bharathi’s treatment of women with respect and admiration. Sister Nivedita’s significant role in his life made a great impact on his mind. Even though there are submissive and helpless women like caged-birds, most of his poems threw up women fighting against social evil even single handedly. Pāñcāli and the New Women almost assert their rights as individual human beings. They are imaged as strong women. They make attempts to rebel against the social values and try to assert their individuality. When Pāñcāli “the Flowery Liana divine” (IV. 244), “the picture of perfection”, “the luster of grace”, the very life of sublime fancy”, “the earthly wealth” (IV. 213) was staked by Dharma, Bharathi asks, “Is there none to question this?” (IV. 245) and “Would any murder a precious child / to come by leather for a pair of slipper” (IV. 246). Dharma lost the game

And now came the time when dharma declined

And truth untruth becomes aye, truly false!

Famed austerities lost their name and became dirt. (IV. 252)

When Duryodhana ordered the charioteer to fetch Pāñcāli, Pāñcāli in unequivocal terms asserts her individuality with an unprecedented degree of authority, power and firmness and

. . . Straight came her reply:

“Who is he that hath spoken so?
Who hail from the hoary line of heroes?

Enter a gambling den? (IV. 108-11)

And again she boldly continues to proclaim the assertion that no force on earth can have any power over her, nor can anyone ever claim to have dominion over her, the least of all to conquer her.

... “Now go and return well-informed

Did my lord that lost his honor, lose me

... before he lost himself,

Or did he lose himself first to lose me next?

Learn this from court and then come to me”. (IV. 114-18)

For this the noble Pandavas and the “Other kings in that court sat speechless like them that are deaf-mutes” (IV. 131).

Shelley’s Cythna (The Revolt of Ismaili) stands parallel to Bharathi’s New Women. Cythna is described as a power. She was

To nourish some far desert: she did seem

Beside me, gathering beauty as she grew,

Like the bright shade of some immortal dream

Which walks, when tempest sleeps,

the wave of life’s dark stream. (870-73)

Cythna was “a spirit strong and mild”, “genius wild yet mighty”. She takes up the task of breaking the slavery. She earnestly says. “It shall be mine / This task mine” (xxxviii).

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7 All references to Shelley’s poetry (poems) are from The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Ed. Thomas Hutchinson. London: Oxford UP, 1914, unless otherwise stated.
Shelley and Bharathi are womanists in the true sense of the term for they voice with the women and like-minded men who struggle either in the family or in the society. Shelley, in *The Cenci*, stands with and sides Beatrice. Immediately after Cenci’s violation of her, she is almost berserk with grief and a sense of irreparable loss. Her words at this time are all violent exclamations, mirroring her jerks and jolts of her mind and the powerful emotional currents undermining her.

O, horrible!

The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls

Spin around! (III.I. 8-10)

. . . My god

The beautiful blue heaven is decked with blood!

The sunshine on the floor is black. (III.I. 11-13)

In a similar way, like Shelley, Bharathi too, is very sympathetic towards women. His poem “Tom Tom” [“Muracu”] captures the mood very well.

God’s external providence

endowed women with wisdom;

But some fools on earth

have blighted their perception. (9)

By the order of Duryodhana, Duhshasana seizes Pāñcāli by her hair and drags her off to the court and Pāñcāli,

. . . wept bitterly: “Is this My fate, Oh husbands?”
You married me according to Vedic rites;
Will you suffer me perish in disgrace
Before these evil sinners vile?”  (V. 26-29)

The Pandavas stand tongue-tied and again she questions

“In the court of kings you have dragged me
And scandalized me; there is none here
Man enough to bid you stop your misdeeds
What am I to do, alas?”  (V. 41-44)

According to the ancient laws of Vedic munis, men and women were held equal. But the present-day law makers have wrought havoc by tradition of judicious balance of conjugal and social equality by throwing women as non-existent objects outside the orbit of the family and everywhere.

. . . it is all old and obsolete,

In those days men and women were held equal;
It is no longer so; the present Sastras of law
Declare that women is not equal to man
A man can sell, his wife, or gift her away
To strangers;  (V. 64-69)

Thus Bhisma speaks and continues on the totally beastly practice. He says

. . . Present laws permit Dharma
To enslave himself. Yet own you as wife,
And then sell you as a slave;  (V. 70-72)
But the new woman-image finds its creative expressions of liberty and freedom through Pāṅcāli that they will not let these obscurants have their way, instead they will hold aloft the banner of equality and justice. Bharathi wants his women to come out of the bonds made by men. He foresees his women have come out successfully in their struggle for existence like the women in “We Demand Liberation” (“Viṭutalai Vēṇṭum”) and “The Kummi of Women’s Freedom” (“Peṅkaḷ Viṭuṭalaik Kummi”). His women fly into the world of joy, freedom, human dignity and autonomy. They “cry victory on our slaughters”, “Women too have the right to be free”, “All we women foster longing for liberation”, “Sakti created men and women equal.” Bharathi asks them and encourages them to “Stand firm to behold the star of morning” and exhorts them to ‘Do your duty, endowed with courage firm’ (5, 7, 9).

Several unmistakable autobiographical elements can be traced in the treatment of women characters in the poems of Shelley and Bharathi. The impressive personality of women who influenced the writers during their life time finds artistic revelation in their immortal creations. Using their extraordinary craftsmanship and marvelous vision these writers have succeeded in transforming purely personal characters into artistic entities expressing the fast emerging New Woman and hence Women Images. The impact of their extraordinary course in their lives is to such a greater extents that Mary Godwin and Sister Nivedita, in a way, become the ideals of womanhood in Shelley and Bharathi.
1.6. Review of Literature

There are many individual studies carried out separately on Shelley and Bharathi’s works in respect of women’s liberation and how as champions of women’s cause they register their severe attack on the double standards existing in society. According to them this hypocritical, double-standard is the major cause of women’s misery. But very few studies are done severally as well as comparatively on Shelley and Bharathi on the major themes related to women as handled in their poetic works from a thematological perspective.

Especially in the area chosen for the present study there have been very little studies on Shelley and Bharathi from a comparatist angle and the studies are few and far between. The review of literature undertaken in this section, therefore, mainly focuses on individual studies on both the poets relating to women’s issues and the other comparative studies between Shelley and Bharathi on the major themes, with special reference to women’s concern, handled in their written corpus. Few studies, however, are there that evaluate Shelley and Bharathi’s presentation of Woman’s Images from a comparative viewpoint.

*Sexuality and Feminism in Shelley* (1979) is one of the earliest full-length studies on Shelley’s views on women, love, life, sex, free-love and man-woman relationship. A well worked-out study, it focuses on Shelley’s dear theme of liberation of humankind from the clutches of dictators and oppressors, – religious, social and political – that obviously include that of womanhood as well, as an integral part of the process of total liberation.
The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley (1940) edited by Thomas Hutchinson, contains all Shelley’s ascertained poems and fragments of verse. This book has the ‘Preface’ of Mrs. Shelley - Preface to the first collected edition, 1839 and Preface to the volume of posthumous poems published in 1824. Shelley’s aspirations and struggle for human weal, his impetuous pursuit are all mentioned in the prefaces. Each poem in this edition contains either Preface by Shelley or Mrs. Shelley and also detailed notes by Shelley or Mrs. Shelley and they throw deeper light in Shelley’s woman.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: An Anthology of Recent Criticism, edited by N.P. Singh (1999), brings together contemporary responses to Shelley and his works whose critical fortunes have been on the rise in recent times. The collection of essays exemplify a variety of critical approaches including feminism, phenomenology, and hermeneutics as well as comparative, futurist and inter-textual analysis. What is remarkable about the collection of essays is that they offer a fresh evaluation of major aspects of Shelley’s works – the visionary, the futurist, the champion of women’s causes, the ardent supporter of anthropoic, and free love. From the womanist perspective this collection also receives detailed analysis and interpretations of Shelley’s poems The Revolt of Islam, Prometheus Unbound and Shelley’s only tragedy The Cenci as they relate to women and women’s concerns.

Shelley’s Poetry and Prose, edited by Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (2002), offers deep critical insights into Shelley’s views on women. This Norton critical edition series on Shelley include the most comprehensive
collection of all available Shelley’s writings together with a re-reading and reinterpretation of substituted body of Shelley’s writings relating to women. Each poetry and prose selection has been re-edited from the ground of critically focusing on the major themes that recur in the poetical and prose works of Shelley. The strength of the collection is that, together with all primary sources, an exclusive section on critical essays drawn from twenty-two scholar critics, that provide a deeper and incisive analysis on Shelley’s vision, his notions on love, sex, women, women’s freedom and gender justice. An excellent collection of primary and secondary sources in one volume, this edition of Shelley’s writings and on Shelley’s writing, provides the much needed source material on Shelley’s vision of womankind as an integral part of the voice of humanity.

*The Cambridge Companion to Mary Shelley* by Esthor Schor, published in 2003, has the contents and contributions by well known scholars on literary history, aesthetic, and literary culture, the legacies of her parents and also an analysis of her most famous work *Frankenstein*. The contributors also examine Mary Shelley as a biographer, cultural critic and travel writer and as a champion of women’s concerns. The text is supplemented by a chronology and guide to further reading.

James Bieri, in *Percy Bysshe Shelley: A Biography* (2004), draws upon his dual background as a Shelley scholar and psychologist to create a compelling narrative of Shelley’s multifaceted life. Shelley’s personality transcends any entreaty. He was continually creative despite intervals of
depression and periodic hallucinatory panic attacks. Fascinated by the human psyche, he incorporated into his poetry his own self-analysis, including a remarkably sophisticated theory of love that provided the title to his most powerful erotic poem, “Epipsychidion”. Bieri also probes Shelley’s numerous emotional, romantic, and familial entanglements in the backdrop of his relationship with women.

*Shelley: The Pursuit* (2007) by Richard Holmes, dispensing with the long-established Victorian picture of Shelley as a blandly ethereal character, projects a startling image of a darker, and more earthly, crueler and more capable figure. Shelley, a brilliant and uncompromising poetic innovator, whose life and work have proved an essential inspiration to poets as varied as W.B. Yeats and Allen Ginsberg, is also depicted as a prophetic voice of woman’s rights.

Ann Wroe’s *Being Shelley: The Poet’s Search for Himself* (2008) aims to turn the poet’s life inside out; rather than tracing the external events of his life, she trades the inner journey of a spirit struggling to create. In her quest to understand the radically unconventional Shelley, Wroe pursues the questions that consumed himself. Shelley sought to free and empower the entire human race, an integral part of which was woman; his revolution was meant to shatter illusions, shock men and women with new visions, find true love and liberty and take everyone with him. And for the first time, this passionate quest is put at the center of his life. The result is a Shelley who has never been seen in biography before.
*Recritiquing P.B. Shelley*, edited by Pradeep Kumar Patra and Amarnath Prasanth (2009), is an addition to Shelley scholarship by Indian critics. Shelley’s writings, in the present context, have a lot of enlightenment to offer. That enlightenment was neither on sea nor on land. It is the consecration of the poet’s dream afresh that gives the poet, a status, that status as an unacknowledged legislator of the world. This book, a collection of twenty-six individual studies on Shelley’s works, upholds the recent views and interpretations on Shelley in modern critical perspectives. All articles clearly show that Shelley is more relevant today than ever before. His concept of love, enlightenment and critique of tradition and convention as well as the central figure of women are noteworthy. These articles that deal with Shelley’s all inclusive treatment of women from the recent critical perspectives present Shelley both as a womanist and as a feminist.

*Note books of Percy Bysshe Shelley* from the originals in two volumes (available in the library of Wilke Bixby), originally published in 1911 and re-published in 2009 and 2012 offer, a hitherto not known, newer perception and fresh insights into the working of Shelley’s mind as related to his notions of love, beauty and sex in a larger context of women’s freedom and equality.

*The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* takes stock of developments in the study of a major Romantic poet and prose writer, and seeks to advance Shelley studies in new directions. It consists of forty-two chapters written by an international cast of established and emerging scholar-
critics. This *Handbook* is divided into five thematic sections, almost all sections dealing with one aspect or the other of women and women’s issues: Biography and Relationships; Prose; Poetry; Cultures, Traditions, Influences, and Afterlives. *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* brings out the relevance to Shelley's own work of his dictum that 'All high poetry is infinite'. This latest book was published by Oxford University Press, USA in 2013.

Prema Nandakumar in both her scholarly works and *Poems of Subramania Bharati* (1977) *Subramania Bharati* (1968) convincingly presents a series of arguements, text based and text supported, as to why Bharathi considered women’s empowerment a mundatary pre-requiste for the country’s freedom and peoples liberation.

S. Ramakrishnan in his book *Bharati: Patriot, Poet, Prophet* (1982) looks upon Bharathi as a revolutionary and woman’s warrior. Perhaps, as Ramakrishnan demonstrates, the greatest of all revolutionary that Bharathi believed in and mustered all his strength and creativity to usher in, was his championing the cause of women’s liberation, equality and gender justice.

*Paṃṇōkkū Pāvalan Pārati [Bharathi: A Multifaceted Poet]* by Mu. Vaithialingam (1982) was a publication that marked the centenary year of Bharathi. This is a collection of articles, contributed by eminent researchers, on Bharathi, Bharathi and feminism, Bharathi and women’s liberation, Bharathi and nation and most of the papers revolve around Bharathi as a champion of women’s freedom and equality.
*Pārati Pāṭalkal* [The Poems of Bharathi] edited by T.N. Ramachandran (1989), and published by the Tamil University contains the complete English version of Mahakavi’s poems as well as prose poems. A few poems are omitted as their authenticity is not established beyond doubt. Almost all the translators of Bharathi are represented in this compilation. Bharathi’s Tamil versions of the poems of Sri Arobindo, John Scurr and Rabindranath Tagore are also included in this volume.

Vijaya Asir’s *Pārati – Pāratitāsan Nōkkil Pūvaiyar [Women: Bharathi and Bharathidhasan’s Viewpoint]* (1990) has compared these two eminent writers’ views on women. Women in the works of Bharathi and the virtues of women in the works of Bharathidhasan are staple matters of analysis in this comparative study that lay bare the coverage in the sense of determination with which both these poets offered themselves to be in the forefront in fighting for women’s rights.

*Pārati Kavitai Nūlkāḷ: Oru Matippūtu [Bharathi’s Poetical Works: An Assessment]* by T. H. Issac Samuel Nayagam (1992), a chronological descriptive study by the author, is more than a mere bibliographic study. This annotated bibliographic critical study of Bharathi’s poetical works is very deep, comprehensive and throws much light on Bharathi’s perception of women as liberators, home-makers, and brave champions of national freedom. Although all critical studies on Bharathi’s works published in the late 1990’s and the first decade of the 3rd millennium do not fall within the critical purview of this study, for the simple reason that it takes into account the
publications only up to the end of 80’s, it is still one of the finest collections and an interpretive study of Bharathi’s poems in the larger context of Bharathi’s fight for securing gender justice for women.

_Pārata Panpāṭṭut Talattil Bharathi [Bharathi in the Cultural Backdrop of India]_ by A. Seenivasan, published in 1999, is a very scholarly analysis of Bharathi in the context of the Indian culture, and it seeks to present Bharathi’s views on women from a Marxist perspective. The analysis mainly focuses on the Marxian, Liberal and Radical feminist perception of Bharathi and the book demonstrates in ample measure how moderate ‘feminism’ or ‘inclusive womanism,’ to Bharathi, is not confined to women of the elite class or a particular nation or ethnicity, but women in common and that too with a critical leaning on the subaltern and the most disadvantaged sections of the community.

Manimozhi’s _Pāratiyin Peṇmaniyam (Bharathi’s Feminism/Womanism) _ (1999) is a critical study on women’s liberation. This book, among other things, deals with Bharathi’s glorification of womanhood, his New Woman, and Pāṅcāli’s war against male domination.

Pe.Cu. Mani’s _Camūka Cīṟirutta Varalāṟṟil Bharathiar [Bharathi in the History of Social Reformation] _ (2000) deals with Bharathi as a social reformer. This book also contains G. Subramanya Iyer’s ‘Principles of Social Reform’ and his intense devotion to reform Hindu Society Pe.Cu. Mani has viewed Bharathi as a feminist, and his voice for women in his poems, shortstories and essays. The author has also appended the original English
writings of Bharathi and Bharathi’s letter to The Hindu and his article “War against Caste”, “The Crime of Caste”, “Religion and Progress”, “A living Poet and Social Reformer” and on “Brahmanism”.

_Penñiyam [Feminism]_ of C. Seethalla (2000) deals, in a detailed way, with Feminism. Women in religion, in public and social life, and women at home and family are the areas in which the author discusses feminism with special reference to Bharathi and Bharathi’s views on women’s liberation.


_Penñiyamum Pāratiyum [Feminism and Bharathi]_ (2001) is a collection of articles edited by Vee. Arasu and published by the Department of Tamil, Madras University. This book attempts to relate the basic tenets and reactions of womanism to Bharathi’s view on women, women’s freedom and the role of women in the national struggle for freedom.

_Penñiya Nōkkil Pārati [Bharathi: A Feminist (Womanist) Perspective]_ by C. N. Kumarasamy (2001) is perhaps one among the very few full length critical studies of the works of Bharathi’s prose and poetry, from a feminist/womanist viewpoint. The author, interestingly enough, doesn’t confine himself to a definite critical credo in respect of feminism, but the book presents feminism as a larger cover-term for all issues that affect the
rise, growth and evolution of Indian women as dignified, free, domestically and socially empowered, enlightened citizens of India.

_Tamil Nāṭṭu Mātarkku Pāratiār [Bharathi - To the Women of Tamil Nadu]_ (2003) is an excellent collection of Bharathi’s various writings on women, gender issues, women’s freedom and empowerment, mostly written in prose and published in journals, dailies, and weeklies. This book, with an introduction by the compiler Nalli Kuppusamy Chettiar, focuses on women’s dignity, freedom and domestic and national responsibilities. The book also presents Bharathi’s revolutionary views, so very characteristic of him in the early stage of 20th century, when such ideals were yet to enter feminist, womanist and women studies even at the national level in India. The compilation clearly projects Bharathi as powerfully anticipating the womanist movement for gender justice and equality in India as well as across the globe.

Vijaya Bharathi (Bharathi’s matrilineal granddaughter) has, of late, brought out (2013) two collateral studies (Chellamma, _The Heroine of Bharathi’s Poetry_ Parts I and II) that mainly focus on the authenticity of Bharathi’s writings. But what is of relevance to the present study in Vijaya Bharathi’s books is her portrayal of Bharathi as a crusader of women’s causes, with internal textual evidences corroborated by external personal biographical facts.

There are also a few comparative studies of Bharathi with other Indian and Western poets, both in Tamil and English. A. Samuel Dhason’s _Pāratiyum Vaḷḷattōḻum [A Comparative Study of Bharathi and Vallathol]_
is a fine study on the views of Bharathi, the Tamil poet, and Vallathol, the Malayalam poet, on Nation, Politics and Society. Dhasan has also compared these writers on the grounds of feminism, feminist issues and the treatment of women in general and in Bharathi and Vallathol, in particular.

V. Sachithanandan’s *Whitman and Bharathi - A Comparative Study* (1978) deals with mysticism in their poetry, besides spiritual democracy and political democracy in their works and their progress from nationalism to internationalism. This in-depth study of two great champions of personal freedom and political democracy also discusses the role of women as co-builders and co-workers in establishing a world of love, peace and justice.

K. Chellappan’s *Tagore, Bharathi and T.S. Eliot: Towards Creative Unity* (1987) is a study that focuses on the similarities in the vision of these three great poets and their concept of creativity. It is a comparison of Tagore’s vision of New Women and the New India with that of Subramanya Bharathi. According to him, both saw women as an image of India and felt that there can be no regeneration for the nation unless divinity in women is recognized. This study amply presents the women image in Bharathi in a larger context of equating women’s bondage with nation’s bondage, and clearly argues that women’s emancipation, both domestically and socially, is an imperative pre-requisite for the freedom and independence of a country.

G. John Samuel in his *Studies in Comparative Literature* (1997) has extensively dealt with the cult of revolutionary womanhood in Shelley and Bharathi. Formative influences on Shelley and Bharathi, feminist’s
movements, revolutionary women characters in the works of Shelley and Bharathi, the theme of women’s liberation and the concept of love are dealt with in a detailed manner. This study documents instance after instance of Bharathi’s taking strong sides with women-folk, the oppressed and the sidelined form no fault of theirs, both from Bharathi’s prose writings and also from Bharathi’s immortal creations of inimitable as well as indomitable women characters in his poetical works and short stories.

R. Raphael’s paper “Bharathi and Tagore: A Study in Mysticism” (2003) deals with the affinities between the mystical experience and poetic inspiration of their intense yearning for liberty and their doctrine of true freedom. There are, however, deeper insights into Bharathi’s notions of women as being equal to men and that the spiritual unity demands that there ought to be material equality between the sexes.

The present thesis is different from all other critiques in the sense that it is a comparative study of woman images. It attempts a comparison of the woman images of Shelley and Bharathi with a view to bringing out the similarities and the dissimilarities between the women images on the basis of a thematological/analogical common ground that one could discern in the handling of the women images in the writings of two great fighters for women’s rights, Shelley and Bharathi.

1.7. The Image

The term image, broadly speaking, is not used in a technical sense of the term as varying manifestation as metaphors and the like in the modernist
movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Rather the term is used very loosely to mean the portrayal, the presentation, the delineation and in a way the part or the role (to be) played by women in asserting their rights to secure for themselves their freedom from bondage, emancipation from slavery, and independence from socio-domestic oppression.

The Women image does not confine itself only to the literary creation in the poetical works of both Shelley and Bharathi. It also takes into account the living personalities that these two creative artists discuss in their writing, their impacts on them, besides certain extraordinary influences of women that have left an indelible impressions on both ‘the western and the eastern poets’ with a long-lasting memory bond, and memory repertoire.

In short, the term image is used in a non-technical, very broad sense of ‘treatment’ of women in the writings of Shelley and Bharathi. But then, it is also all inclusive in the sense that it also accounts for the technical sense of the term of the metaphor and all other literary devices, traditionally termed figures of speech, that the writers bring to bear on their writing in explicating the theme of their works of art.

1.8. Aim, Scope and Methodology

The aim of the present study is to compare and contrast the women images, or rather the portrayal and treatment of women and women characters in the writings of Shelley and Bharathi. The study is also devoted to a re-reading and re-interpreting of the works of Shelley and Bharathi in the light of modern critical and theoretical stances from a comparative viewpoint and to
show how Shelley and Bharathi have been pioneers in championing the women’s cause as unmistakenly manifested in their portrayal of women characters with a yearning spirit, soaring high above in the universe, thirsting to breathe the air of freedom, love and peace.

The comparative study, in broad terms, confines itself to the poetical works of Shelley and Bharathi insofar as they relate to women and women’s concerns – discrimination and dehumanization, the twin evils that contribute to women’s oppression and marginalization. But at the same time, it also takes into account the other writings of both Shelley and Bharathi inasmuch as they also focus on, and centre around, the spiritedly cardinal theme of women’s liberation and women’s empowerment. This would naturally include the entire gamut of their prose writings as well, including short stories, novels, criticism and the like.

The methodology employed and tools of analysis made use of in the present study are basically those that are normally adopted in any comparative literary study, with of course the sole purpose of establishing the possibilities of appreciating literature beyond boundaries and across countries from a womanist viewpoint. This, undoubtedly, would effectively point to and clearly establish the oneness of human vision, the oneness of human perception and above all the oneness of human struggle for the common good of the entire race of humankind. This does not, however, preclude or exclude the potential possibilities of incremental, marginal and peripheral differences
in viewpoints and percepts coloured more by local environments, national cultures and group identities.

While applying the basic principle of comparative studies, with reference to literary production of two ethnic cultures, the varying dimensions of thematological, analogical and even impact factors are fully taken into account – the very basic pivot on which the entire study is based in re-reading and reinterpreting Shelley’s and Bharathi’s presentation of women. As to, however, the critical theories, the study maintains an eclectic approach all through its analysis of the writings of these two great warriors of women’s concerns and women’s cause.

Both Shelley and Bharathi had similar passion to reform the world. Though they lived in two different ages with entirely two separate cultural backgrounds, both thought alike especially in reforming the society. The society in which Shelley lived was an anathema to him. The French Revolution had a tremendous impact on Shelley and he was influenced by the French political thinker Rousseau. Shelley visualized society where three concepts, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity will reign supreme.

The political condition in England and India during the periods of Shelley and Bharathi were alarming. Their political democracy was evolved by the social and historical situations of the two poet’s times. Shelley and Bharathi had the social awareness that enabled them to fight against tyranny, injustice and corruption. Both were strongly individualistic. Shelley and Bharathi do not owe their existence to any political dogma. They both have
portrayed women as individuals, builders of families, political activists and womanists. Their poems reflect the burning social problems as it centres around the family and society. Both of them have presented women who stand boldly for their right in a highly male dominated society. Both have stressed the need for women’s emancipation.

This thesis entitled “Woman Images in the Poetical Works of Shelley and Bharathi: A Womanist Interpretation” is primarily a study of women and their problems from diverse perspectives as presented in the poems of Shelley and Bharathi. Womanism is an attempt at compensating the inadequacies of feminism. Womanism is more holistic, pervasive and inclusive. It vouches women’s liberty, autonomy and empowerment. It could be understood as humanism directed towards the liberation of women, who have been underestimated in the society by the patriarchal culture.

A wide range of characters are presented in the poems of Shelley and Bharathi. Bharathi’s the Human Mother, Kalaimagal, Kannamma, Maha Shakthi, Mother Goddess, Mother India, Muthumari, New Woman, Pāncāli, Parasakthi, Radhai, Lakshmi, Shiva Shakthi, Thirumagal, Umai, Wife, Women goddess like Valli, Women of the Kummi are the women characters who resist male domination and put up an unrelenting fight for their basic rights. Some of them protest against the double standards of moral virtues prevailing in the society. Shelley’s Mary Godwin, Cythna, the Lady of Atlas, Asia, Beatrice, Emila, the Intellectual Beauty are the women figures, who break tradition itself in their struggle for existence.
The Introductory chapter details the objective of the thesis which attempts to put the topic of the study in the proper perspective. This also presents the basic nuances of comparative literature as related to the present study, besides a critical review of literature on the treatment of women images in the writings of both Shelley and Bharathi.

The second chapter Womanism provides a theoretical and conceptual framework to interpret the philosophy of womanism as reflected in the writings of Shelley and Bharathi. The chapter largely focuses on the basic concepts of womanism as evolved by the famous African-American Neo-liberative womanist writers and theorists.

The third chapter, The Home-Maker, takes into account the image and role of women in the domestic scenario as the begetter, protector and promoter of children and the creator of a happy and harmonious home. It also discusses the image of women that points to the delicate, sensitive, and emotionally finer role that women play as a home-maker, in the socio-cultural as well as domestic, and the vaster universe called the family.

The fourth chapter is devoted to a study of the image of women as the beauteous and the brave. To Shelley and Bharathi, inner beauty, intellectual beauty, and inner strength are the core factors that determine the lot of a woman.

The next chapter analyses the image of women as liberators. This chapter discusses the tremendous role that women play not just as domestic liberators, but as socio-political liberators as well. It shows with copious
examples how Shelley and Bharathi assign their women with the major responsibility as liberators and as liberated women.

The sixth chapter centres around woman as goddess which focuses on the role of women being transcended from the state of mother and motherhood to divinity and spirituality. It discusses how both the poets give an elevated status to women and how women are glorified as goddesses.

The last chapter sums up the major findings of the thesis and arrives at the formulation that conceptually both Shelley and Bharathi seem to have internalized the inner dynamics of womanism in making their women aspire for greater, nobler, ideal and spiritual things of life.

For want of space and time the present study confines itself only to a few images of women. But there are many more that needs to be studied and worked out in detail from the womanist perspective. Shelley and Bharathi very much deserve a womanist-imagist study from the comparatist’s viewpoint and comparative perspective.

It is hoped that the comparative study of two legendary poets who intuitively envisioned a harmonious earthly paradise of love, equality, peace and justice for the entire humankind, through fighting boldly, very characteristically employing non-violent but creative means, for the rights of the one half of the human race, who stand deprived of their basic dignity and humanhood, would help every man and every woman to reassert, with faith and courage, the unity of humankind and the oneness of human vision. And indeed one may, then, join the rich choruses of joy, praise and eulogy of every
man and every woman, with that immortal Bard of Avon who proclaimed to
the whole world, way back in the pinnacle of the flowering of the Renaissance
in the West:

. . . O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous the mankind is! and brave new world,

That has such people in it! (The Tempest V.1:181-184)

The comparative study is fundamentally attempted in the larger
theoretical framework of the basic underlying concepts of womanism as
against the generally conceived notions of feminism. Womanism, however, is
discerned all through the present study as including and complementing
feminism, and hence the ideological stances of womanism as exemplified in
interpreting Shelley’s and Bharathi’s works are all inclusive and all
embracing; and it obviously necessitates clear elucidation in the overall
context of the comparative study. And thus, the succeeding chapter, before
taking up the thematological/analogical comparative study of Shelley and
Bharathi from a womanist perspective, is devoted to a descriptive and critical
discussion of womanism and its basic tenets.