



## Religion and Philosophy

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

Pranab Kalita

Assistant Professor

Department Of Philosophy

Barama College, Barama

Baksa, Assam

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### ABSTRACT

A true follower of Advaita Vedanta and a teacher par excellence Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is an inspirational figure in Indian Renaissance. He deeply believed on the value of religion and its essence on human life. He believes that religion directs our social life and imparts each individual the virtues of life. His philosophy is a synthesis of Advaita Vedanta and the philosophy of Absolute Idealism. The monistic character of the Vedantic reality and the absolute idealism are combined in his philosophy. Radhakrishnan believes that the reality is one and everything is a necessary aspect of the one. He was undoubtedly one of the great personalities of modern India who has left an indelible mark in Indian Philosophy. He tried to achieve newer heights in the pursuits of knowledge. In the present paper an attempt has been made to highlight on Radhakrishnan's belief on the value of religion and his teachings of philosophy and advaita Vedanta.

**KEY WORDS:** Religion, Philosophy, Advaita Vedanta,

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### I. INTRODUCTION

“Among the philosophers of our time, no one has achieved so much in so many fields as has Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan of India ..... William James was influential in religion and John Dewey has been a force in politics. One or two American philosophers have been legislators . Jacques Maritain has been an ambassador . Radhakrishnan , in a little more than thirty years of work , has done all these things and more ... Never in the history of philosophy has there been quite such a world figure . With his unique appointment at Banaras and Oxford , like a weaver's shuttle , he has gone to and fro between the East and West , carrying a thread of understanding , weaving it into the fabric of civilization.” (George P. Conger)

A true follower of Advaita Vedanta and a teacher par excellence Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is an inspirational figure in Indian Renaissance. He gave importance on building a synthesis between East and West. His teachings are based on the needs of modern times and modern minds. He believed on the non dualism philosophy of Sankara's Advaita Vedanta. His spiritual approach and scientific attitude are highly indicative in his philosophical thoughts as well as his teachings.

Among the luminaries of modern India Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan has achieved the greatness for his teachings of philosophy and religion. He deeply believed on the value of religion and its essence on human life. Religion not only creates mutual understanding between hearts but also plays the role of discoverer to solve the obstacles of differences in this world. Religion helps each and every individual to increase the feeling of love and morality and also the power of conscience to feel and see the insight for purifying the mind and heart. However Radhakrishnan believed religion a discipline and practice which enabled man to touch the core of an individual.

## **II. RADHAKRISHNAN : AN ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE SKETCH**

Born on 5<sup>th</sup> September 1888 in the Holy town of Tiruttani in Tamilnadu , Radhakrishnan belonged to a Brahmin family . A son of a subordinate revenue official in the service of a local zamindar, Radhakrishnan spent his early life in Tiruttani. He was an intelligent boy in his academic life and awarded scholarships for his outstanding performances. In 1902 he completed his high school from Voorhees College , Vellore and graduated from Christian College , Madras in 1904. He completed his post graduation in philosophy from the same college . “The Ethics of Vedanta and its Metaphysical Presuppositions” was the title of his dissertation which he presented at the time of his post graduation in 1906. He started his teaching career from 1909 and became a lecturer of philosophy at the Madras Presidency College , Madras . To qualify himself for the permanent post of Assistant Professor he engaged himself in licentiate in Teaching training (L.T) at the Teacher’s Training College in 1910. Thereafter in 1916, he qualified himself for serving in the post of Professor in Philosophy in Govt. Arts College, Rajahmundry (A.P) In 1978 , he also served as Professor of Philosophy at Mysore University and also at Kolkata University in 1921. He got his opportunity to present his views on Contemporary Religion and Philosophy to the students of Oxford University when he took up the post of Principal in Harness Manchester College in 1929. He was honored with the title of “Earl of Willington” by the governor general due to his precious service in the field of Education. He came to be known as Sire Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan until 1947. Later he was renamed as Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. He was nominated for Nobel Prize in Literature between 1933 – 1937 for five consecutive years but he was not awarded to this coveted prize. He was appointed as Vice Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University in 1939. He represented the country at UNESCO since 1946 to 1952. He chaired the University Education Commission in 1948. He was ambassador to USSR since 1949 to 1952 . He was elected as the first Vice President of India in 1952. In 1954 he was awarded the highest civilian award of the country “Bharat Ratna” along with C. Rajagopalachari and C. V. Raman. He served as the second President of India holding the office from May 13, 1962 to May 13, 1967. Bertrand Russell once said, “It is an honour to Philosophy that Dr. Radhakrishnan should be President of India and I, as a Philosopher, take special pleasure in this. Plato aspired for philosophers to become kings and it is a tribute to India that she should make a philosopher President.” He also founded the Indian Philosophical Congress in collaboration with other eminent men of philosophy in India. During his lifetime he was the recipient of several awards. His writings were based on Indian Religion , Culture and Philosophy. Some of his major contributions are , to name a few , Essentials of Psychology (1912), The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore (1918), Indian Philosophy Vol – 1 (1923) , Indian Philosophy Vol – 2 (1927) , The Hindu View of Life (1926), An Idealist View of Life (1929), Contemporary Indian Philosophy (1936), Eastern Religion & Western Thoughts (1939). Being a true nationalist personality of Indian soil he continued his nationalist writings throughout his life. He devoted his whole life towards Hindu religion , culture & philosophy.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This paper is basically descriptive and analytical in nature. The data used in it is purely from secondary sources such as different journals, books, websites and according to the need of this study.

## **IV. OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the paper are –

- To know about the value of a religion
- To know about the depth of ideas of Radhakrishnan on Advaita Vedanta
- To know about Radhakrishnan’s approach on philosophical thoughts as well as teachings

## **V. RELIGION : A FAITH IN ABSOLUTE VALUE**

“Religion is a dynamic process, a renewed effort of the creative impulse working through exceptional individuals and seeking to uplift mankind to a new level”

The perfectness and absoluteness of one’s religion can’t be justified by any reason. Radhakrishnan puts forward his opinion in this regard : For him, religion provides everyone to build a bridge of unity and brotherhood and gives a scope of better understanding among individuals. His suggestion was based on practicing religion sincerely in our daily activities so that our desires of greed and egoism would be banished from within and create a new society of love and harmony with new spirit among all. However it is believed that true religion develops the feeling of likeness to divinity or spirituality.

Radhakrishnan believes that religion directs our social life and imparts each individual the virtues of life. This helps in all round development of the society and brings peace in the world. However it is believed that there is

no difference between any creatures of this world and each soul is filled with the same divine essence which strengthens the power of unity among us. This is the essence of reality and soul of all believes. He affirms the feeling “he that does well is of God. To do justly , to love beauty and to walk humbly with the spirit of truth is the highest religion.” He believes on religion to restore peace in the society and uses the word “Shanti” “A positive feeling of calm and confidence , joy and strength in the midst of adversity and defeat , loss and frustration.”

For Radhakrishnan , true religion is above all the expression of one truth that is ultimate reality. He admitted that religion is eternal and divine self exists within . It signifies the need to realize the supreme reality from which all manifestations originate. This is the absolute supreme reality and the supreme ideal of all religious people who realize the divine nature and the identity of self i.e. the true nature of man.

“Religion is not so much a revelation to be attained by us in faith as an effort to unveil the deepest layers of man’s piety and get into enduring contact with them.”

He established a belief on the essence of each religions. Every religion of the world has shared the same fundamental truth and the same universal reality. But the interpretation of different religions still show the unity of all beliefs to achieve the higher goal of life i.e. liberation, the absolute supreme reality which is the supreme ideal of all religious people. The diversity of world religions convey the same ideas just in different ways. He believed on the divinity and spirituality hidden within each individual human being and man’s consciousness for the spiritual truth . According to Radhakrishnan Religion is discipline which purify the mind. It exists in our own nature, helps to realize inner satisfaction and its effort to discover oneself on spirituality or spiritual experiences . In “Religion and Society” Radhakrishnan says ,

“Any serious pursuit of ideas , any search after conviction , any adventure after virtue arises from resources whose name is religion. The search of the mind for beauty, goodness and truth is the search for God. The child nursing at the breast of his mother , the illiterate savage gazing at the numberless stars , the scientist in his laboratory studying life under a microscope , the poet meditating in solitude on the beauty and pathos of the world , the ordinary man standing reverently before a starlit sky , the Himalayan heights or a quiet sea or before the highest miracle of all , a human being who is both great and good , they all possess dimly the sense of the eternal , the feeling of heaven.”

For Radhakrishnan , true religion rises within the individual. It implies a faith in the ultimacy of absolute spiritual values , the presence of Divine within himself and a way of life to realize them. This is the essence of religion and all is one and the same.

## **VI. ADVAITA VEDANTA : AN APPROACH WITH A NEW LOOK AND VISION**

All seers, whatever be their sects or religions to which they belong , ask us to rise to the conception of a God above Gods , who is beyond image and concepts , who can be experienced but not known , who is the vitality of the human spirit and the ultimacy of all that exists. This is the highest kind of religion – the practice of the presence of God.

Radhakrishnan has combined the two great traditions of both the east and the west with perfect ease. He has deep knowledge of the east and also acquainted with the wisdom of the west. This shows his efforts to evolve a philosophy of synthesis. However his fundamental convictions are deeply rooted in Indian traditions and his own philosophy are generally taken from ancient Indian philosophy particularly from the Vedantic tradition. His philosophy is a synthesis of Advaita Vedanta and the philosophy of Absolute Idealism. The monistic character of the Vedantic reality and the absolute idealism are combined in his philosophy. Radhakrishnan believes that the reality is one and everything is a necessary aspect of the one. Being an idealist he believes reality as spiritual and the entire world process is progressing . However his beliefs are grounded on ultimate reality which provides a basis for everything real. He asserts that what is required is a reawakening of the soul , it is a recovery of the spiritual faith . Radhakrishnan feels and says that ultimate reality is the Brahman – the Absolute . Like the Advaita Vedantist , he feels that ultimate can not be properly defined it must be such that it can fully account of everything – the Universe and even itself . He thinks that ultimate reality provides all questions regarding how and why of the Universe satisfactorily . The elements of the Advaita Vedanta and of the Hegelian tradition both are found in his Absolute. He believes that Absolute is essentially one in itself and is the only reality. Ultimate reality is one Brahman which remains unaffected by any manifestations. Radhakrishnan conceived his absolute as “Pure consciousness , pure freedom and infinite possibility”. He thinks that the Universe is only one possibility of the Absolute. The Absolute spirit is self grounded and transcends time in the sense that the wholly perfect is the absolute and everything else is imperfect. The nature

of the Absolute cannot be fully comprehended. Unlike Advaita Vedanta of Sankara who makes a distinction between Paramarthika Drsti and Vyavaharika Drsti Radhakrishnan conceives these two principles as one and beliefs of different ways of apprehending the same reality. In the philosophy of Radhakrishnan it is evident that he distinguishes between the Absolute and God in which God is the Absolute in action, it is God, the creator. It is believed that God is real in so far as creation is real, God is an aspect of the Absolute. He however feels that it is necessary to think of a principle to explain the order and purpose of the Universe. Radhakrishnan feels that Absolute is the object of metaphysical aspiration and God is of the religious aspiration. Absolute appears as the creator, as wisdom, love and goodness as God. So, the real is the Absolute in relation to itself and it is God in relation to the creation. According to Radhakrishnan, reality itself has to be wholly spiritual and give sustenance to all kinds of spiritual experiences. He feels that it is the possibility of intuitive experience of divine nature and God's existence ultimately rests on the deep faith of the intuitive experiences. According to Radhakrishnan,

“The one God creates as Brahma, redeems as Visnu; and judges as Siva. These represent the three stages of the plan, the process and the perfection. The source from which all things come, the springs by which they are sustained and the good into which they enter are one. God loves us, creates us and rules us. Creation, redemption and judgement are different names for the fact of God.”

Radhakrishnan is greatly influenced by Whitehead's philosophy of God and believes that one can not detach God from the world. He also thinks that universe is constantly creating to attain its goal like wise God also grows with the Universe. Universe is truly creative and thus God remains creative but not wholly identical with the universe. Hence an unrealized residuum in God makes him transcend the universe. Radhakrishnan tries to utilize the Vedantic concept of Maya and introduced the concept of God in his philosophy. Maya is all embracing power and it is described as the creative power of God. God is absolute viewed from the point of view of the world. Absolute appears as power, wisdom and love and as creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world – and to that it is known as God. According to Radhakrishnan,

“We do not have the infinite and the finite, God and the world, but only the infinite as and in the finite, God as and in the world.”

## **VII. ULTIMATE SPIRITUALITY OF THE SOUL : A FUNDAMENTAL OUTLOOK**

Being a modern thinker and an ancient Indian philosopher Radhakrishnan has a very deep realization about the real nature of man. He feels on the importance of deterministic picture of man which he considers as the essential characteristics on life's ways. He comes to think about the need of convenience and smooth life at present day situation and aware about the continuous boredom and restless life and gets tired more or less to fulfill one's own aspirations. He feels that in the midst of plenty still man is unhappy in the present day and appears to have lost the zest for life. This gives a picture of man which becomes an unnatural and unfamiliar to man himself and would lead to a dehumanization of everything.

It is believed that unlike other aspects of Nature, man has the capacity to reflect and live ahead of himself. He can aspire to heights much beyond his ordinary reach. He can plan his moves and make systematic efforts for his attainment. It is true that he is aware of the limitations of his physical nature and can realize the capacity to surpass the limitations. Radhakrishnan thinks that man has an awareness of a beyond within himself. It is an analysis of self transcendence itself which will reveal the true nature of the soul. An individual remains identical with himself and always conscious of his own self. Radhakrishnan is of the view that a self conscious person can express his individual distinct personality only through his experiences and activities collected from his own life. This capacity not only enables the man to lead a better secured life but also encourages him to develop his mind – a spiritual growth.

There is, in the self of man, at the very centre of his being, something deeper than the intellect which is akin to the supreme.

It can be said that men are constantly striving to attain greater heights in life on account of the capacity of unification to organize his moves. Radhakrishnan feels that one can feel and realize unity within. Men are not satisfied with the present status but the divine spark present within each individual provides a space for cultivating Divine excellences. Hence all spiritual activities, aesthetic or moral or religious have a kinship between man's nature and Divine nature and give a better scope to see the presence of the Divine element in man and an identity with the object of our love. Radhakrishnan thinks that salvation is the state of complete spirituality, the state of Divinity itself. Man has within himself Divine capacities and the presence of spiritual element is itself within him. With the help of examples taken from man's life it is seen that even in self consciousness the self is aware of itself which is his ultimate nature- a true nature of man.

## VIII. DOCTRINES : RADHAKRISHNAN'S BELIEFS

“The cards in the game of life are given to us , we do not select them . They are all traced to our past karma , but we can call as we please , lead what suit we will , and as we play we gain or lose – and that is freedom”

In the manner of ancient Indian Philosophy , Radhakrishnan believes in the determining factors of life through which our future is determined. He believes in the law of karma and soul's states and tendencies that are all determined. He however thinks that karmas are nothing but self determination that has a connection with the past and has its influence on the future. The soul is metaphysically free and can exercise its own control. Radhakrishnan also believes in the reality of many souls and their presence in separate centres of actions. The souls retain their own individuality in itself till the very end of the cosmic process and be viewed in a very profound manner. Karma is connected with the state of freedom and freedom consists in willful effort of the self. Although an individual is free with regard to present happenings and to select his happenings in near future. Radhakrishnan opines that karmas are karmas performed by the soul and freedom is self determination which conveys necessity to its own use. Freedom gives an individual to choose different alternatives for betterment of life. He also holds that “Karma or connection with the past is not inconsistent with creative freedom . On the other hand it is implied by it . The law that links us with the past also asserts that it can be subjugated by our free action.”

It is believed that the nature of destiny is related with future life of action. . The destiny of man lies in his ultimate salvation or Moksa. The human destiny is the realization of oneness. It is a state to realize one's true nature. Radhakrishnan says “The destiny of the human soul is to realize its oneness with the supreme.”The death of a physical life is not the end of a soul it indicates the birth of a spiritual life of soul. However it shows a course of action which provides an ample scope to achieve eternal life after several errors already committed. The belief on the reward and punishment of the soul exercised by the human souls are referred to a desire depending on the merits and faults committed by every human soul to survive. Radhakrishnan holds an optimistic view that by asserting personal effort and an active co operation of the selves every person can achieve eternal life and can ignore the contradictory ideas of eternal heaven or hell. Self realization is the fullest expression of the higher nature of the self. Radhakrishnan seems to be impressed by the ancient Indian concept of “Jivanmukta” and asserts his view that an individual is able to attain his salvation but his task is not complete and cannot attain his ultimate destiny , he has to play a part in the salvation of others. He becomes free from all the bondages of life and all his actions for others will give him a better place to think for others and becomes oneness of everything. Radhakrishnan feels that when every individual realizes divinity then the world process will reach its ultimate goal and therefore as Radhakrishnan believes the ultimate destiny is the end of time.

Radhakrishnan believes in the doctrine of rebirth and is aware that souls continue to exist even after death. The inherent nature of the self arouses the feeling of harmony , knowledge and divinity in one's life. The self continues to acquire better and still higher levels and achievement of blissful and divine qualities of soul and individuality. Goodness is an essential quality of an individual. It is an inherent potentiality of the self to make a spiritual union with the ultimate. Besides Radhakrishnan holds his view on rebirth meaning survival of souls to exist by assuming different bodies after death. He also says that lack of memory about the past happenings of one's life is not a proper ground for rejecting the belief in rebirth. As there is no evidence on the existence of rebirth and memory capacity has been ended with death , it is a general ground that few peculiarities of the individual and inborn behavior make one realized by presupposing a prior birth. It is essential to understand the nature of self and individuality.

## IX. CONCLUSION

Radhakrishnan was undoubtedly one of the great personalities of modern India who has left an indelible mark in Indian Philosophy. He tried to achieve newer heights in the pursuits of knowledge. He says that moral effort and struggles are endless and it is bound to face contradiction. As individuality is inseparably related with moral effort , a spiritualized man is attaining a new quality of human life. Radhakrishnan is convinced of the ultimacy and of the finality of the process, the supreme goal. He believes that religious way intensifies our thoughts, purifies our emotions and creates conditions for the growth of the spirit.

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