

Dr. Radhakrishnan: Life, Actions and Writings

**Md. Rajab Ali Assistant Professor Deptt. Of Philosophy Karmashree
Hiteswar Saikia College**

Abstract

One of the most influential personality of India Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born in the remotest village of Tirutani near Madras in a traditional Indian family in the year 1888. Being a student of philosophy he touched the best possible high achievable in the modern world. He was not only a great writer but also a real ambassador of Indian philosophy in the modern era. He wrote many world renowned books which count to about 150. His writings gave a new recognition to Indian thought and philosophy. He through his writings wanted to make a bridge between the East and the West. His writings are the symbols of world-unity and brotherhood. He left unique remarks as a student, teacher, vice-chancellor, politician, ambassador, president, as a kind and generous human being in India and the world. He was a great teacher of humanity. This paper is basically give importance on the life, action and writings of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

Keywords: Dr. Radhakrishnan, Life, Action, Writing.

Introduction

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the great teacher, was born in one of the remotest villages of India at Tirutani near Madras of Tamilnadu state in a traditional Indian family on 5th September, 1888, a town in Madras Presidency, British India, 64 km (40 Miles) to the northwest of Madras (Now Chennai). His father was Sarvepalli Veeraswami and mother was Sitamma. He was born in a middle class Telugu Brahmin family. His father was a subordinate revenue official in the service of a local Zamindar (landlord). He didn't want his son to learn English, instead wanted to become a priest. Radhakrishnan was married to Sivakamu, a distant cousin, in 1904 at the age of 16. As per tradition the marriage was arranged by the family. The couple had five daughters and a son, Sarvepalli Gopal. He went on to a notable career as a historian. Sivakamu died in 1956. They were married for over 51 years.

Objectives

The main objective of this research paper is to analyze the life, actions and the principle writings of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan.

Methodology

The analytical and Descriptive methods have been used to prepare this paper. Data has been collected from the Secondary sources only.

Radhakrishnan started his primary education at Primary Board High School at Tirutani. In 1896 he moved to the Hermansburg Evangelical Lutheran Mission School at Tirupati. His early life was spent in Tirutani and Tirupati. He completed his graduation and post graduation in Philosophy (1904-1908) from Madras Christian College. He studied philosophy subject at the college level as a matter of chance, because he got the text books from one of his cousins. But the later periods of his life he wrote, "if this world is living then nothing in this world is by change or by accident" (Banerjee, A.K. 1991, BHU, P.11). This reflects the thought which influenced his life.

In partial fulfilment for his M.A. Degree, Radhakrishnan wrote thesis on the ethics of Vedanta titled "The Ethics of the Vedanta and its Metaphysical Presuppositions", which was a reply to the charge that the Vedanta system had no room for ethics. Radhakrishnan says, "The principles of karma and rebirth suggest

to us that the value of the world is not in any way affected by the actuality of evil, error and ugliness. The universe is one where these elements are transmuted into their opposites through a gradual process" ("Idealistic view of life" - P. 333).

Dr. Radhakrishnan was afraid that his M.A. thesis had offended his philosophy professor Dr. A.G. Hogg. Instead, Professor Hogg commended him on doing an excellent job. Radhakrishnan's M.A. thesis was published in 1908 when he was only 20 years (Lal, B.K : Contemporary Indian Philosophy: P 257). Dr. A.

G. Hogg awarded the following testimonial for this thesis, "The thesis which he prepared in the second year of his study for this degree shows a remarkable understanding of the main aspects of the philosophical problems, a capacity for handling easily a complex argument besides more than the average mastery of good English". The thesis indicates the general trend of Radhakrishnan's thoughts. In his own words, "Religious feeling must establish itself as a rational way of living. If ever the spirit is to be at home in this world and not merely a prisoner or a fugitive spiritual foundations must be laid deep and preserved worthily. Religion must express itself in reasonable thought, fruitful action and right social institutions". During his schooling period he came to be acquainted with the main teachings of Christianity and also with the critical remarks of the Christian missionaries on the Hindu way of life. Born at Tirutani, a famous place of pilgrimage he naturally attracted towards the Hindu religion. But critical remarks of the Christian missionaries on Hinduism led him to undertake a study of Hindu scriptures. He unconsciously developed a respect for such powerful religious preachers as Swami Vivekananda. "The Indian contemporaries, Tagore and Gandhi have influenced me. Among the western thinkers the writings of Plato, Plotinus, Kant, Bradley and Borgson influenced on me a great deal. My relations with my great Indian contemporaries, Tagore and Gandhi were most friendly for nearly thirty years and I realize the tremendous significance they had for me" [Radhakrishnan's Autobiography in the philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan edited by P.A. Schilpp, p.10]. He came in the staff of Department of Philosophy in Madras Presidency College in 1909 and also completed the teacher training course in 1910 from Teachers Training College, Saidapet, Madras.

Actions

Dr. Radhakrishnan's life was a life of action. Radhakrishnan was appointed as a teacher of Philosophy in Madras Presidency College in 1909 and then his academic activities started. In 1918 he was selected as a professor of Philosophy by the University of Mysore. Then he got an opportunity of making an extensive study of western philosophy. By that time he had written many articles for journals of repute like the *Quest*, *Journal of Philosophy* and the *International Journal of Ethics*.

In 1921 Radhakrishnan was appointed as a professor in Philosophy to occupy the King George V Chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy in the University of Calcutta. He represented university of Calcutta at the Congress of the universities of the British Empire in June 1926 and the International Congress of Philosophy at the Harvard University in September 1926. At the Philosophical Congress held at Harvard University, the lack of spiritual note in modern civilization was the focus of his address to the general meeting. He says in his address at the Sixth International Congress of Philosophy in 1926, "we are not so much in need of a keen analysis of particular problems, as those of essence and existence, sense and perspectives, or a pragmatic insistence on methodology and on the futility of the metaphysics, interesting as they all are but philosophy in the larger sense of the term, a spiritual view of the universe, broad-based on the results of sciences and aspirations of humanity." (As quoted in Radhakrishnan: Comparative Studies in Philosophy presented in honour of his Sixtieth birthday, Edited by Inge and others, PP. 11-12). In 1926, Radhakrishnan was invited to Oxford University to give lecture on Hindu view of life. During this period he also founded the Indian Philosophical Congress in collaboration with other eminent men of Philosophy in India.

In 1929 Dr. Radhakrishnan was invited to take the post vacated by Principal J. Estlin Carpenter in Manchester College, Oxford. This gave him the opportunity to lecture to the students of the University of Oxford on Comparative Religion. During that visit, he also gave lecture on 'An idealist view of life' to audiences at the Universities of London and Manchester. For his services to education he was knighted by the British Government in 1931; but he never used the SR title in his personal life, preferring instead his academic title of 'Doctor'.

Radhakrishnan was the vice-chancellor of Andhra University from 1931 to 1936. From 1936-39 he was the splading professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at the Oxford University. In 1939, he was elected fellow of the British Academy. In 1939 Pt. Madan Mohan Malavya invited him as the vice-chancellor of Banarasa Hindu University. He continued as its vice-chancellor till January, 1948. He later held offices that dealt with India's national and international affairs. After independence of India he represented India at UNESCO. He was the President, General Conference of UNESCO from 1952 to 1954. He was the Ambassador of India to

U.S.S.R. during 1949-52. He was also The Chairman of University Education Commission in India. He was chancellor of Delhi University in 1953 to 62. He was the Vice-president of India from 1952 to 1962. He was made the President of India, the Head of the state for five years in 1962 to 1967. His appointment as President was hailed by Bertrand Russel who 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."

Dr. Radhakrishnan had great faith in Indian democracy. In his fare well broadcast to the Nation on May 12, 1967, he said that despite occasional forebodings to the country, the Indian Constitution had worked successfully so far. Democracy is more than a system of the government, a way of life and a regime of civilised conduct of human affairs. We should be the architects of peaceful changes and the advocates of radical reform.

Dr. Radhakrishnan when became a President of India, some of his students and friends requested him to allow them to celebrate his birthday on 5th September. He replied, instead of celebrating my birthday, it would be my proud privilege the 5th September is observed as Teachers Day". His birthday has since been celebrated as the Teachers Day in India. Dr. Radhakrishnan essentially remained a teacher all his life. The teaching profession was his first love and those who studied under him still remember with gratitude his great qualities as a teacher. His life as a philosopher, teacher, thinker, writer, orator and nice chancellor is indeed unique. He was a teacher and philosopher statesman in the honest sense. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru wrote the following about him, "It was India's pavilion privilege to have a great philosopher, a great educationist and a great humanist as the president. That in itself shows the kind of men we honour and respect".

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan the great personality passed away on April 17, 1975. He touched the highest heights in the field of philosophy, politics and humanism. The journey of his life was continuously uniform setting new examples and standards every time. Always dressed in white he looked as a true representative of India before the world community. Indian government for his great contribution to nation gave him the highest civilian award of India 'The Bharat Ratna Award' in 1954.

Writings of Radhakrishnan

Dr. Radhakrishnan wrote many world renowned books which count to be about 150. He wrote his first book on "The Ethics of the Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions" which was a thesis prepared in connection with his M.A. Examination, published in 1908. Due to the deep interest in philosophy subject he wrote many acclaimed works on philosophy, both Eastern and Western philosophy. He stated that western philosophers despite all claims to objectivity were influenced by theological influences of their own culture. He wrote books of Indian philosophy according to western academic standards and made all efforts for the west to give serious consideration to Indian philosophy. In his book "Idealist view of life" he made a powerful case for importance of intuitive thinking as opposed to purely intellectual forms of thought. He was well known for his commentaries on the "Prasthanas Trayi" namely the Bhagavadgita, the upanisads and the Brahmasutra.

Dr. Radhakrishnan was one of India's most influential scholars of comparative religion and philosophy. He earned vast knowledge of the ancient Indian Religion and Philosophy along with the extensive acquaintance with the wisdom of the west. He is considered through his efforts to have built a bridge between the East and the West by showing that the philosophical systems of each tradition are comprehensive within the terms of the other. According to him philosophy is a way of understanding life and his study of Indian philosophy served as a cultural therapy. He

wrote many books to create a bridge between the East and the West. He through his writings interpreted Indian thought in Western terms. By showing that it was imbued with reason and logic he was able to give the Indians a new sense of esteem, who were overcome by

inferiority complex by imperial forces. But he also made clear to them that their long and rich tradition had been arrested and required further evolution and he exhorted the Indians to cast off much that was corrupt and abhorrent. He says that Samanvaya or reconciliation is the need of our age. The world community which we envisage can be sustained only by a community of ideals. We have to look beyond the political and economic arrangements to ultimate spiritual issues. We have to fashion a new type of men who uses the instruments, he has devised with a renewed awareness that he is capable of greater things than mastery of nature" (Radhakrishnan: Brahmasutra; P-250).

Radhakrishnan in his writings recognises the significance of ethics only in the empirical world, the world with which common human being is concerned. He finds an intimate relation between morality and religion. He points that man requires ethics like religion as a means towards the higher destiny of his life. Morality and religion are transcended when man reaches the real goal of his life. So, it will be 'wrong to suggest that in Radhakrishnan's philosophy, taken as a whole, the worth of moral endeavour is minimized" (V.S. Naravane, Modern Indian thought; P. 255).

Radhakrishnan has aspired for the evolution of a new humanism on the basis of the unity of mankind. In each of his writings he has emphasized the evil effects of narrow nationalism, the necessity of creation of world fellowship for the humanity as a whole. He pointed out that the people of different religious faiths should understand, tolerate and respect to teach other. As he says, "My religious sense did not allow me to speak a rash or profane word of anything which the soul of man holds and has held sacred. This attitude of respect for all creed, this elementary good manners in matters of spirit, bred into narrowness of one's bones by the Hindu tradition, by its experience of centuries" (As quoted in Radhakrishnan: Comparative Studies in Philosophy. Presented in honour of his sixtieth birthday, Edited by Inge and others; PP-11-12).

Radhakrishnan's writings centred in the problems of human nature, his ultimate destiny or universal liberation or sarvamukti: He maintains that the liberated soul is not to renounce the world but to work for the perfection of the rest of humanity. He shows the importance of personal God in human society. He has tried to wipe off the gap between the empirical and the transcendental world. He has opened the way from the cosmos to the Absolute. But "he has not yet given a detailed or systematic exposition of the positive movement from the human to the Spiritual" (Radhakrishnan's Influence on Indian thought- by P.T. Raju. p.524).

The Principal Writings of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

The Ethics of Vedanta and Its Metaphysical Presuppositions (1908) Essentials of Psychology (1912)

The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore (1918)

The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy (1920) Indian Philosophy – Volume I (1923)

The Hindu View of Life (1926) Indian Philosophy – Volume II (1927) The Religion We Need (1928)

Kalki or the Future of Civilization (1929)

An Idealist View of Life (Hibbert Lectures) (1932) East and West in Religion (1933)

The Heart of Hinduism (1936) Freedom and Culture (1936)

Contemporary Indian Philosophy (1936) Religion in Transition (1937)

Gautama, the Buddha (British Academy Lectures) (1938) Eastern Religions and Western Thought (1939)

Mahatma Gandhi (Essays and Reflections on his Life and Work) (1939) India and China (1944)

Education, Politics and War (A collection of Addresses) (1944) Is this Peace? (1945)

Religion and Society (Kamala Lectures) (1947) The Bhagavadgita (1948)

Great Indians (1949)

The Dhammapada (1950)

An Anthology (of Radhakrishnan Writings) (1952)

The Religion of the Spirit and World's Need: Fragments of a Confession (1952) History of Philosophy in Eastern and Western (2 Vols.) (1952)

The Principal Upanishads (1953)

East and West: Some Reflections (First series in Bently Memorial Lectures) (1955) Recovery of Faith (1956)

Occasional Speeches and Writings – Vol I (1956), Vol II (1957) A Source Book in Indian Philosophy (1957)

The Brahma sutra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life (1960) The Concept of Man (1960)

Fellowship of Faiths (Opening address to the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard) (1961) Occasional Speeches [July 1959- May 1962] (1963)

President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings 1962-1964 (1965) On Nehru (1965)

Religion in a Changing World (1967)

President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings 1964-1967 (1969) Radhakrishnan Reader: An Anthology (1969)

The Creative Life (1975) Living with a Purpose (1977) True Knowledge (1978)

Indian Religions (1979) Towards a New World (1980)

Conclusion

Dr. Radhakrishnan is one of the greatest religious philosophers of the modern world. He does not propound any system of philosophy in the western sense of the term. He only sticks to tradition. His reinterpretation of classical Indian thought brings a new path to humanity and modern society. His comparative thought and philosophy has removed the misunderstanding from the western minds. His life, actions and writings are inspiration for new generation to make a universal brotherhood. His actions and writings will be helpful to create peaceful society. He always tried to make a bridge between the East and the West. His message of Samanvaya or reconciliation will be helpful to create unity among the world community in the present day context.

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