

Spiritualistic Humanism of Dr S. Radhakrishnan

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Abstract

Humanism is a philosophical theory which recognises man as the highest being on earth. In Indian philosophy, humanistic thoughts have been developed through various stages. From ancient to modern, in almost all the philosophical traditions, humanistic thoughts can be found. Among those the philosophers of contemporary India have most prominently expressed their humanistic thoughts. Their humanistic thoughts are mainly concerned with the nature and destiny of man, freedom of will, relation of man to man, relation of man to the world, relation of man with the God and status of man in the world. Among the contemporary Indian thinkers, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is regarded as a great humanist. Every standpoint of Radhakrishnan whether it be culture, literature, philosophy, education, science and religion is discussed from humanistic perspective. The chief element of his humanistic philosophy is spirituality. For this reason, his humanism is called spiritualistic humanism which is somewhat different from the existentialistic humanism of Jean Paul Sartre or the dialectic materialism of Karl Marx.

In this brief paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the humanistic thoughts of Radhakrishnan. An attempt has been also made to highlight how far his humanistic thoughts are needful in the present day society.

Key words-Humanism, Spirituality, Radhakrishnan. Existentialism, dialectic materialism

Humanism is a dynamic philosophy. The central theme of this philosophical thought is the dignity and freedom of man. Humanism recognizes man as the expression of this great nature

and accepts unnatural events as imaginary concept. In the ancient thought, humanism refers only to human being. But in modern thought humanism also includes the human problems and human nature. This philosophical thought believes that man has the potentialities to solve his problems. Man is the maker of his own destiny. Man finds highest good by serving man.

August Comte, the French philosopher of the nineteenth century, is the first systematic humanist, who insists on worship of man instead of worshipping God. The term 'humanism' is frequently used in the time of European Renaissance and it is the first protest against the unearthliness of Medieval Christianity. According to the thinkers of this period, universal man is the ideal man. After that we can mention the humanistic thinking such as Literary Humanism, F.C.S. Schiller's Pragmatic Humanism, Naturalistic Humanism, Marx's Socialistic Humanism, Jean Paul Satre's Existential Humanism, Positivistic humanism of Positivists. In this way the term humanism represents the various thoughts related to the relations of man and social environment.

In Indian philosophy, humanistic thoughts have been found since the time of the Vedas. 'Atmanam Viddhi' represents humanistic tendency of the Vedas. Because, this expression reflects the mysterious existence of human being. Gautam Buddha establishes a humanism in the form of morality. The status of man at the present time is very much different from the ancient time. The Indian philosophers of the nineteenth century realize the need of review human problems from a new standpoint. This leads to the beginning of spiritualistic humanism.

Spiritualism recognizes human mind as the highest reality. Traditionally, spirituality referred to a religious process of re-formation which aims to recover the original shape of man, oriented at the image of God exemplified by various religions. In modern times the emphasis is on subjective experience of a sacred dimension and the deepest values and meanings by which people live, usually in a context separate from organized religious institutions. Modern spirituality may include a belief in a supernatural realm, personal growth, a quest for an ultimate/sacred meaning, religious experience, or an encounter with one's own inner dimension.

Radhakrishnan attempts at reinterpreting advaita Vedanta philosophy from a scientific standpoint. Radhakrishnan does not propound any system of philosophy. He is bound to tradition like his contemporaries. But his philosophy is distinct from other philosophies of his time. Radhakrishnan's philosophy is based on his own experiences and reflection.

In Indian philosophy, study of self takes most prominent place. Radhakrisnan also maintains that, “In India, ‘Atmanam Viddhi’,(know thyself), sums up the law and the prophets.”¹ Here, Radhakrisnan’s existentialistic thinking reflects. Radhakrisnan is one of the spiritualistic philosophers who gives more importance in man. He analyses human problems from spiritualistic standpoint. Radhakrisnan believes that we can understand man only from the spiritual standpoint. Radhakrisnan gives prime importance to man and human values. In this brief paper, an attempt has been made to discuss the humanistic thoughts of Dr. Radhakrishnan. An attempt has been also made to highlight how far his humanistic thoughts are needful in the present day society.

Radhakrisnan gives to man a special dignity and uniqueness. Radhakrishnan enquires into the nature, origin and destiny of man. For him, Indian philosophy has been understood as an enquiry into the nature of man, his origin and destiny. Radhakrishnan seeks to assess every thing in relation to man’s concern. Radhakrisnan defines man as a complex, multi-dimensional being including within him different elements of matter, life, consciousness, intelligence and the divine spark. Radhakrisnan believes that each individual is unique and universal.

Radhakrisnan asserts the great Upanisadic thought ‘Tat-tvam-asi’ and says that man is essentially subject, not an object. Man is one with Brahman. Man is more than matter, life or mind or all these taken together. Radhakrisnan says, “Man is always more than he is able to comprehend of himself.”² Radhakrisnan, like the existentialist thinkers emphasizes that man has immense potentialities. Radhakrisnan maintains that man must be transformed and transmuted to a higher level of existence in course of evolution. Man’s greatness is not in what he is, but in what can be.

The picture of man that emerges in the philosophy of Radhakrishnan is an organised unity of the physical and spiritual. Radhakrishnan clearly reveals two essential aspects of man - one is finite and the other is infinite. Man combines in himself the physical nature with the spiritual nature. The finite aspect of man is described by Radhakrishnan as the empirical man, the physical man, the natural man, the bodily individual etc. The finite aspect of man can be known in scientific terms. It is determinable in terms of biological, physiological and psychological facts. This aspect, according to Radhakrisnan, represents the real aspect of man. Physical aspect constitutes an aspect of the soul. He says, “The realm of spirit is not cut off from the realm of life. To divide man into outer desire and inner quality is to violate the integrity of human life...the two orders of reality- the transcendent and the empirical are closely related.”³

Infinite aspect of man consists in his spirituality. Here spiritual stands for something higher than the empirical. In the empirical realm distinction between the subject and the object is there. According to Radhakrisnan, man as a spiritual being is self-conscious person who is able to unite all his experiences and activities in his self. It is on account of the capacity of unification that he can foresee his future and make plans for it. This capacity enables him to organize his moves and to bring about a spiritual growth. This is the true nature of man, according to Radhakrisnan.

Radhakrisnan describes this as an aspect of the divine. We are not satisfied with our present status and we are constantly striving to attain greater heights shows that we bear the Divine spark within ourselves. He says, “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.”⁴ Man can exercise free choice and can act in freedom. He can rise to great spiritual heights and can have spiritual experiences. For him, “The destiny of the human soul is to realize its oneness with the Supreme.”⁵

Spirit in man is the central reality, the basis of his physical existence, biological growth, mental development and intellectual evolution. Radhakrishnan’s notion of spirit appeals to the modern mind because it does not contradict science and is logically consistent and intelligible. Defining spirit in man he says, “It is not the physical body or the vital organism, the mind or the will, but something which underlies them all and sustains them. It is the basis and background of our being, the universality that cannot be reduced to this or to that formula.”⁶

Spiritual life is the highest life, and realization of the self is the supreme end of life. Since morality is just one manifestation of spiritual activity, the life of spirit is the basis as well as the goal of ethics. The life of spirit is the truest and the most desirable life. It leads to the attainment of a state of perfection or self-realisation, the highest state that can ever be arrived at by man. In his words: “Spiritual geniuses possess the highest that man can possess, constant contact with the creative principle of which life is the manifestation, coincidence with the divine will, serene calm, inward peace, which no passion can disturb, no persecution can dismay”.⁷

Radhakrisnan wants to establish humanism as a substitute of religion. For him, “Humanism is a protest against naturalism on the one side and religion on the other. The soul of man is not a thing of nature; not is it a child of God. Humanism contends that this world is our chief interest and perfection of humanity our one ideal.”⁸ For him, “Humanism seems to be religion secularized.”⁹ Radhakrisnan, believes that there is no conflict between religion and humanism. For him, the service of man arises from the internal relation between

man and God. Radhakrisnan criticises August Comte's view of worshiping man instead of worshiping God and says that those religion whose central theme is man, not God will never be a strong religion. The essence of religion is not social reform, but spiritual salvation. Radhakrisnan has a firm belief in spiritual power of man. We can realize ourselves only with the help of intuition. Only self-realization can give us the real picture of the world. Self-realization can make us happy. The self-realization leads to universal love and brotherhood. Every man after attaining liberation can help others in attaining liberation.

For Radhakrisnan, humanism deprived of values would not be humanism at all. Pragmatic, socialistic and communistic humanism cannot explain values satisfactorily since both regard biological man as 'the measure of all things'. They neglect the spiritual and the central aspect of human nature without the knowledge of which integrated development is not possible either for man or for society as a whole. Thus, the spiritual element of man is the universal element and it is intuitive spirituality which alone can inculcate universal love and brotherhood in each and every human individual.

The spiritual humanism of Radhakrishnan, which aims to blending the oriental and the occidental cultures, thereby paving the way for a universal human culture. This humanism accommodates science as well as religion, reason as well as faith, individual freedom as well as social well-being, discipline as well as desire, and self-sacrifice as well as self-realisation. It promotes a life which can bring about health, happiness, holiness and harmony to both individual and social life.¹⁰

Radhakrisnan sums up the plight of modern society in the following lines: 'We have a world of rationalist prophets, of selfish individualists, of a monstrous economic system compounded out of industrialism and capitalism, of vast technical achievements and external conquests, of continual craving for creative comforts and love of luxury, of unbridled and endless covetousness in public life, of dictatorship of blood and brutality, anxious to make the world a shambles dripping with human blood, of atheism and disdain for the soul, a world in which nothing is certain and men have lost assurance'.¹¹

Radhakrisnan realises the present condition of man. Today, is the age of science and technology. And at this period, man suffers from uncertainty and unhappiness. Radhakrisnan says "we live in a period of agonizing strain, of grave anxiety, of manifold disillusionment. The world is in a condition of trance."¹²Radhakrisnan, in spite of the crisis of present time maintains an optimistic attitude towards life. According to him, man's unrest is not a mere negative force. He is not only oppressed by new doubts but is inspired by new horizons, new perspective and a thirst for new relations with fellowmen. We are in the beginning of a new age. Suffering and miseries are an aspect of the process of spiritual

growth. Liberation, for Radhakrisnan, is a state of freedom. It means the realisation of self in its pure nature. For him, moksha, nirvana, eternal life are not an escape from life, but the realization of life's fullest possibilities. The perfection of personality.¹² Spiritual realisation, which is the state of existence in which the individual can rise above the contradictions of life, is attained through morality, and the intuitive knowledge of the reality is reached through intellect. The empirical world with all its pleasures of sense is not to be discarded but transcended, and liberation (*Moksha*) is not the isolated existence of the soul, but a displacement of a false outlook by a true one (*Avidya* by *Vidya*). This outlook does not make the individual selfish, but inspires him to be altruistic. Radhakrishnan once again brings to light the humanistic aspects of Indian philosophy and points out that the ideal of Moksha, far from being antagonistic to social well-being, is not only conducive to it but is the very basis of it.

The humanism of Dr. Radhakrisnan meets the spiritual demands of the time, yet it satisfies the scientific approach of life. The crisis of value at present situation is a global phenomenon. Man seems to be mechanical day by day. The values of humanity, sympathy, love, co-operation, brotherhood etc. have lost their identity in modern society. The globalized economy brings competitiveness among people and the miraculous scientific achievements make man very mechanical which help in losing spirituality among man. In this alarming situation, we feel an ardent need of such philosophy which can rise our values and make us human than a biological man. It can be hoped that Radhakrisnan's spiritual humanism can play a vital role in eradicating the present value crisis of human society.

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