

## Module 5 : S. Radhakrishnan

### Section 3 : Man

The natural sciences, physics and chemistry, anatomy and physiology, psychology and sociology treat man as an object of inquiry. They show that man is a link in the chain of living beings, one among many. These were the popular ideas of science of the 20th century. Radhakrishnan who was the product of a contemporary world epoch of freedom struggles of the third world, could not accept the ideas of science in toto, he tries to reconcile, may even to claim the superiority of experience over the fact findings of a natural science with its incompatible drive to know the truths of the objective world existence. Science may find the final truth, but it fails to note the reality aspect of a social experience which provides the subjective side of the human being. For Radhakrishnan the human being, man in his form and essence is not equal to a bundle of nerves and muscles alone. He contains in him a spirit. This spirit becomes the manifestation of a universal spirit. Man has to discover this spirit present within him. This becomes his most important idea regarding man and his future. With the recovery of spirit man tries to achieve his union with the universal spirit and achieves the bliss.

Man occupies the central position in the philosophical thinking of Radhakrishnan. Most of his ideas were developed by his extensive dependence on the philosophy of the Upanishads. The ***Prasthanas*** consists of the later three, the ***Upanishads***, the ***Gita*** and the ***Brahma Sutra*** are generally the important source on which the Indian thought, and particularly the Vedantic philosophy depends. Radhakrishnan was such a philosopher who was born in an age when the first waves of Indian revivalism are fully in their actualization. The age had much a thing to speak of the Indian scriptures and of justifications of authority. And Radhakrishnan did not fail to reflect the same. Radhakrishnan extensively refers to the Upanishads for his fundamental ideas of man and his ethical idealism. Every religion will be fully charged with the ethical foundation as its source of inspiration. The feelings of purity and the merit of his actions which may lead man to his next birth becomes the principle of human motivation. Radhakrishnan justifies most of the ethical precepts and moral principles of his idealistic philosophy. Man shall make room to the spirit within which the spirit he tries to manifest through the intuitive visions in his religious experiences. Radhakrishnan's orientation was towards the spiritual means rather than the materialistic ends. He was much pained by the world wars of the West. In his book ***Religion and Society*** he expresses his concern about the modern society's crisis. In his address at the ***Free University of Brussels*** Radhakrishnan says:

The future of mankind depends on the future of man, on his spirit, on his approach to the problems which face him. If he relies on force and adopts a military approach, the future is bleak indeed; if, on the other hand, he believes in the spirit, he will prosper<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Ed. By Virender Gover, Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi. Page 21

Radhakrishnan strongly believes in the moral victory<sup>10</sup> rather than in the physical victory by power. The spirit of Radhakrishnan is the unity of mankind and universal brotherhood. Radhakrishnan did not consider man as a simple mechanical part of a social mechanism. He likes man to be free and creative. In the same lecture he says:

Man is great when he is not a cog in the social machine, not an item in the series of objective happenings, not a unit in an anonymous crowd. He is great when he is able to think for himself, judge for himself and create for himself<sup>11</sup>.

Man is not a biological animal or an economic being. He is a spiritual person. He is not satisfied with temporal possessions<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Page 17

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Page 17

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Page 22

Radhakrishnan is not depressed by the cruel records of history. He maintains his hope despite of the fact that man can experience the worse in a particular historic context. This he can achieve through the revolution in man, the spiritual revolution in mankind. He says, "What man has done, he can undo. The future of mankind can be safe only through the efforts of individual men"<sup>13</sup>. Man is not a lonely contestant in a meaningless world<sup>14</sup>. Relativity is now generally recognized as being essential to reality. The Brahman is the sum total of change and not its total absence. Man in particular needs to understand this in order properly to evaluate his own finite existence and the reality of the particulars of his environment.

Man must do more than discover god's will for himself. He must function as a real and significant determinant of that will.

For man cannot return to Brahman- he never left it. He lives it and moves, and has his being in it and of it<sup>15</sup>.

Man is not swallowed up in the absolute or universal reality- in god or the Brahman.

Man is, to some extent, a free and creative violinist in the grand orchestra of nature and God.

Between man and society there is a deep mysterious primordial relationship<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Page 23

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., Page 30

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Page 470

<sup>16</sup> Paul Arthur Schilpp, **The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan**, Tudor Publishing Company, New York, Page 97

Radhakrishnan feels strongly the insufficiency of the capitalist system and tries to find the humanistic principles of morality. He writes:

Humanism assumes that man is by nature good and that evil rests in society, in the conditions which surround man, and if these are removed, man's goodness will emerge and progress will be achieved<sup>17</sup>.

Thus the first ideas of Humanism in Radhakrishnan will emerge. It is a feeling in which the hope for the embitterment of mankind with the presumption to maintain a better environment to bring out the best of man will exist. In the same manner Man becomes the centre of the Indian philosophy as a whole. Indian philosophy deals with the nature of man, his origin and destiny<sup>18</sup>. It is *Jnana* or realization rather than a divine providence which imposes fate on man. Radhakrishnan says:

Man need not be so presumptuous as to think that he alone is fated to go on for all time. He is but an episode in terrestrial evolution and his existence on earth will come to an end<sup>19</sup>.

Radhakrishnan accepts the very notions of the philosophical personalists. They believe that the very stuff of personality can be used to overcome the limitations it usually implies. Man is not an object to be known but a subject with a self-acquire<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> **History of Indian Philosophy**, ed. by Marietta Stepanyants, , Indian Council of Philosophical research Page 205

<sup>18</sup> Centenary Volume, **Radhakrishnan**, Ed. by G Parthasarathi, DP Chattopadhyay, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, Page 476

<sup>19</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, **Contemporary Indian Philosophy**, Page 479

<sup>20</sup> J.G.Arapura, **Radhakrishnan and Integral Experience**, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, new Delhi, Calcutta, Madras, Luck now, Bangalore, London, New York, 1966. Page 16.

He was much influenced by the German atrocities on the Christians. The then world which had seen the worst of civilizations ever experienced left on his mind the impression that secularism as the chief weakness of their age. On one side he witnessed the crimes of two world wars especially the First World War. He felt that this was due to the decreased moral order system and the increased bent of mind towards materiality. According to Radhakrishnan dominance of materialism will make men aggressive, assertive and possessive. This he attributed to be the main cause for the world war crimes. Even though he was against these atrocities his faith in humanism did not vanish. He says Man the destroyer is man the builder too<sup>21</sup>.

The end may be long in coming. It may take many years or decades or even centuries. He did not give up his faith to think of a better world that is going to come out of this turmoil. He called that, as the birth of a new world; in every crisis he had seen the infallible law of the spirit. He did never think of the breakdown of the human values. His belief always envisioned a better life with the ever hidden spirit, the knowledge of a kind of perception which always tried to protect the unity of life. He says that this belief often be weakened and the hope may be declined. Sometimes this may appear as ridiculous. Yet he says that the faith within us shall see these setbacks as temporary setbacks. He says that these will not stand against the march of the time against a permanent human hope and will. This hope he calls the evolution of moral order. This order he says will dissociate the human greed from their evil nature. And finally he hopes that it will destroy the belief that only some people are adequate enough to guard the society from the hands of anarchy and caprice. This he says that will need the sacrifice of our comforts and privileges. The end he says will be the opening of a new age but never the end of our civilization nor the end of our history. We cannot but appreciate the true cause for his obsessed faith in the recovery of religion. That religion is the spiritual religion.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> S. Radhakrishnan, **Religion and Society**, George Allen &Unwin Ltd.,London, **1948** Page 20

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., Page 20

He further says in the same book that civilization is a way of life, a movement of the human spirit.<sup>23</sup> The character of civilization he says is derived from its conception of the nature of man and his destiny<sup>24</sup>. He writes our civilization had given us the means but denied us the ends<sup>25</sup>. He sees the root cause of this burdensome epoch is due to the defeat of man by material concerns. He often quotes the lines from Bhagavad-Gita. He feels that man as a different creature is fundamentally different from other animals. He has far horizons, invincible hopes, creative energies and spiritual powers. For Radhakrishnan spirituality is the power, without this spirit man will not be the complete embodiment of satisfaction.<sup>26</sup> This satisfaction was typically absent in the modern life. He feels, that can be provided by the spirituality of our ancients only. He writes what is missing in our age is the soul; there is nothing wrong with the body. We suffer from the sickness of the spirit. We must discover our roots in the eternal the so called perennial philosophy. He sees within the Communist call for the world proletariat to unite the passion of a religion. Everything in this world of happening appears to Radhakrishnan as the call of that spirit to fight against the evils. He says that history is not actually the recapitulation of facts, but a way of looking at them<sup>27</sup>. The ideas of the moral virtues were strongly influencing throughout his thinking. He says that love and friendship, courage and adventure will be more potent than fear and hatred, struggle for power and self-interest. He says that happiness is not the end of man but the dignity<sup>28</sup>. He did not argue for a rigid and stubborn traditions and culture. He says that tradition, propaganda and ideals are among the factors that occasion changes. Even he observes these changes among the production relations of the proposed Marxian dialogue for communism as the fight against the social evil. Yet he did not accept to equate the society with the economic structure of society<sup>29</sup>.

Generally we consider man as a body and a mind which belong to him, but his self is not derived

from any of these, though it is the root of them all. All the above are his aspects of nature. He says that "Man is more than what he knows about himself"<sup>30</sup>. We can simply say that man in his limited sense of bodily individuality is not the final one. It becomes the spirit that is manifested in him will be the final one to be considered within this human being called man. It strives to know and it tries to regain its union with this universal spirit the godhead. With this kind of value man achieves a higher status than the animal, plant or mineral.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Page 21

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Page 21

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., Page 22

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Page 23

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., Page 32

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Page 34

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Page 36

<sup>30</sup> **Basic Writings of S. Radhakrishnan**, Ed. Robert a McDermott, Jaico publishing House, 125 Mahatma Gandhi Road, Bombay. Page 149

Radhakrishnan delivers his famous lecture on the ancient Asian view of man in his Columbia University Broadcasts. In his lectures he tries to redefine man's cultural destiny. He finds that both the Asian and the European views of man do not differ much. Indian culture tries to see the eternal one to be present in oneself itself. It is the reflection of the Divine in man. The man thus becomes sacred in the Indian context. He says that if we try to possess man as flesh or as mind to be moulded, we fail to recognize that he is essentially made in the image and likeness of god. We have to consider that man is not the product of natural necessity. Man is not something thrown off, as it were, in a cosmic whirl. As spiritual being, he is lifted above the level of the natural and the social world. He is essentially subject, not object<sup>31</sup>. Our knowing of the subject is somewhat different from the object. The self is deeper than the perception, thoughts, and feelings. We cannot see it or define it, for it is that which does the seeing and the defining. It is the eye which is not the object but the subject of our knowing. The *Bhagavad-Gita* speaks of the spirit of man as immortal. To know this and to break from the confines of personality into the unfathomed reaches of his true being requires disciplined effort. He says:

By penetrating through the layers of the manifest personality, the individual arrives at the unconcerned actor of life. Man is more than the sum of his appearances.

Man is somewhat different from animals and man is not an insignificant speck in a depersonalized universe<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> Occasional Speeches and Writings, Page 288

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Page 289

It is only our attachment to nature that marks the inconsistency with spiritual dignity. We need not throw off the limitations of nature. He says that our bodies are the temples of the divine. He strictly emphasizes the very presence of Divine in man. The divine is in us and the end of man consists in attaining conscious union with the divine. World becomes only man's moral choice which lives under the moral law. This becomes the scene of the life. Man's life achieves its fulfillment from the spiritual experiences. In these experiences every aspect of man's being will be raised to its highest point. These were the ideas of Radhakrishnan which were based on the ancient views of the Indians regarding man and his destiny. He says that modern civilization considers man as only a pure mechanical being, material being, a creature made up of automatic reflexes. He says that this modern civilization is blind to the higher sanctity of man. This modern civilization is having three points as its characteristics. They

are:

1. Faith in democracy
2. Unity of all life and existence
3. Insistence on the active reconciliation of different cultures and faiths<sup>33</sup>.

But these people feel loss of faith. They are spiritually displaced and they are culturally uprooted. They become tradition less. In this state of affairs Radhakrishnan sees only one hope. It is the hope for man to have a spiritual recovery. It proves that man is the unfinished animal and his goal is the Kingdom of God which is latent in him. This idea basically leads him to own his ideas of religion, society, individual and his nature and the ultimate reality.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Page 292