



Special Issue

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

This month we celebrate teacher's day on 5th September in honour of Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's birthday. Here is a special page dedicated to the pride of teaching community.

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on 5 September, 1888 in Tirutani, a well-known religious center in the Madras State. He was the second son of Veera Samayya, a tehsildar in a Zamindari hailing from a middle-class, respectable Hindu Brahmin family.

Radhakrishnan was married in 1906, at the tender age of 18 and while still a student, to Sivakamma, and spent a happy married life with her for fifty years before she died in 1956.

Bright and precocious, with a scholarly disposition and a serene demeanour, from the very beginning, Radhakrishnan spent the first eight years of his life happily and fruitfully in his home town with his parents. The tranquil and challenging atmosphere of that famous and well-loved place, as well as the benign influence of his parents who, as was common in the South, were intensely religious in the traditional sense, went far in moulding his character and sowing a lively seed of religiousness in him.

The significant fact that Radhakrishnan's parents, though orthodox, thought it fit to send their beloved son to Christian Missionary schools and colleges: Lutheran Mission School, Tirupathi (1896-1900), Vellore College, Vellore (1900-1904), Madras Christian College (1904-1908). The far-sightedness and broad-mindedness of his revered parents, which enabled them, in those days of blind prejudices and equally blind social taboos, to send their son to well-disciplined Christian educational institutions -held him in good stead throughout, making it possible for him to acquire specially Occidental vices like a sense of duty, punctuality, discipline and the like, together with specially Oriental qualities of religiosity, calmness, patience, faith in God and men.

Radhakrishnan's choice of Philosophy as his main or Honours subject in his B.A. degree course was due to a very fortunate accident. He studied Sanskrit and Hindi also and garnered a good deal of interest in the traditional languages of India. He also read the Vedas and the Upanishads with great care and reverence.

It is not always true that in this strange world of ours inner worth is accompanied by outer success. But Radhakrishnan is a glorious exception in this regard. For, all throughout his brilliant career, honour after honour was showered on him. The following are some of the main posts held by him most fittingly and efficiently: Lecturer in Philosophy, Presidency College, Madras, in the Madras Provincial Educational Service, after graduation; Assistant Professor of Philosophy in the same College for five years; Professor of Philosophy, Mysore University (1918-1921); King George V Professor of Philosophy, Calcutta University (1921-1931) and again (1937-1944); Vice-Chancellor of the Andhra University (1931); Spaulding Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics, Oxford University (1932-1953) - first Indian to be so appointed; and Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University (1942). Among the cultural posts held by him may be mentioned: Leader of the Indian Delegation to UNESCO many times (1946-1950); Chairman of the University Education Commission (1948) appointed by the Government of India; Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO (1948); President of UNESCO (1952); Delegate to the P.E.N. Congress (1959); Vice President of International P.E.N.; Honorary Fellow of the British Academy (1962); Representative of the Calcutta University at the Congress of Philosophy, Harvard University, U.S.A. (May 1962).

Among the most esteemed political posts held by him some of them are: Ambassador-Extraordinary and Minister-Plenipotentiary to the U.S.S.R. (1949-1952), First Vice-President of India (1952-1956) and Second President of India (1962-1966). He became the Vice-President for the second time from the year 1957-1962.

Among the Honorary degrees and distinctions achieved were: Knighthood (1931); Honorary D. Ph. (Teheran University, 1963); Honorary D.Litt. (Tribhuvan University, Nepal, 1963); Honorary Doctor of Law (Pennsylvania University, 1963); Honorary Ph.D. (Moscow University, 1964); Honorary Doctor of Law (National University of Ireland, 1964); over one hundred Honorary degrees including those from Oxford, Cambridge and Rome Universities; Honorary Member of the Order of Merit, Buckingham Palace (12 June, 1963).

Radhakrishnan was, and still is, one of the most celebrated writers of the present generation. His works are many and varied on philosophical, theological, ethical, educational, social and cultural subjects. He also contributed numerous articles to different well-known journals, which too, will prove to be of immense value to generations to come.

But what is most felt after reading any of his valuable works or articles is its wonderful liveliness. Truly, his articles are not merely outer expressions of his inner thoughts, but, what is more, infinitely more, emblems



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and embodiments of his very life - life that merrily dances forth in the fortuitous, zig-zag way of the world, removing all its obstacles in its own inner irresistible urge and boundless boldness. Hence, it is that his works, written in an incredibly simple, sublime, soft and serene way, are so very enchanting, enlivening, exhilarating to all. As a matter of fact, as is well known, it is very difficult to express very abstract and abstruse philosophical thoughts in easily intelligible and enchantingly sweet language. But Dr. Radhakrishnan, like the great and revered Rabindranath, is one of the few who could accomplish this apparently impossible feat. That is why his philosophical writings are not ordinary scholarly dissertations, but also melodious poetical perfections of great and permanent value.

His first book, 'The Ethics of the Vedanta and Its Material Presupposition', being his thesis for the M.A. degree examination of the Madras University, published in 1908, at the tender age of twenty only, at once established his fame as a great philosophical writer of undoubted ability. All his later works are landmarks in their respective fields, like 'The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore' (1918), 'Idealistic View of Life' (1932), 'Eastern Religions and Western Thought', 'Reign of Philosophy in Contemporary Thought', 'Kalki or The Future of Civilization', 'Indian Philosophy (2 vols.)', etc.



Dynamic in personality, quiet in demeanour, austere in habits, unostentatious in behaviour, just in decision, prompt in action, simple in his dress, sympathetic in his dealings - such is our revered Dr. Radhakrishnan. He is a living, loving symbol and lovely emblem of our age-old Indian culture and civilization. Nothing much need be said here regarding his ideas and attitude towards different issues. For, the central refrain of his Life's Music reverberates through every walk of his blessed life. That is why he is a Monist in Philosophy, believing in one Reality, viz., Spirit; a Monotheist in Religion, believing in one God; a Eudemonist or Perfectionist in Ethics, believing in inner perfection as the highest end of life; a Socialist in Politics, believing in mass or universal uplift. His whole glorious life proves anew the eternal truth of that well-known Platonic maxim, viz., "Those States only flourish where kings are philosophers, philosophers, kings" (Plato's Republic).

Radhakrishnan is considered as the greatest living philosopher of India, and one of the greatest living philosophers of the world. In 1952 the Library of Living Philosophers, an institute of world-wide repute, brought out a massive volume on 'The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, devoted wholly to a critical appreciation of his philosophical doctrines. This proves beyond doubt that he is universally considered to be one amongst the most notable of modern philosophical luminaries, like G.F. Moore, Bertrand Russell and Karl Jaspers, about whose works also the above Library published separate volumes.

"Philosophy in India is not an abstract study, remote from the life of man.... The Civilisation of India is an effort to embody philosophical wisdom in social life".

-- Dr. S.Radhakrishnan

Dr. Radhakrishnan is, indeed, a versatile genius - a great scholar, philosopher, seer, writer, orator, statesman, administrator and above all, a great man.



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