

## DR. S. RADHAKRISHNAN VIEWS ON RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY

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### **Abstract**

*Radhakrishnan the World's creation is an accident and is not necessary for God. However it is real, but not illusory. In this process we find evolution from matter to life, life to mind or consciousness, consciousness to self-consciousness and finally, it reaches the state of spiritual consciousness. "Change is the essence of existence". Evaluation of the World Radhakrishnan distinguishes different phases of the world- matter, life, mind, and self-consciousness. Matter provokes the activity of the mind and matter as we perceive it, is a human product. Life is the next stage in the process of evolution. We must recognize that life is unique kind of activity for which the formulas of matter and energy are not adequate. Similarly when mind emerges out of life, it is due to the principle of mind working with its own impulses and necessities in life. "It is a function of a later evolved and special integration of life". Matter, Life and Mind While explaining the relation between matter, life and mind continuum, Radhakrishnan observes that materiality is the first manifested form of cosmic existence. In the early stages of cosmic evolution there were no minds to perceive the physical world. "While the mind was admitted to be one of continuous movement". Matter at least was held to be immutable. However matter, life and mind which are the different levels of existence cannot be considered as inferior.*

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According to Radhakrishnan, the world is real to the extent that it is the reflection of the divine. He observes: "The world is not a mistake or an illusion to be cast aside by the soul, but a scene of spiritual evolution, by which, out of the material, the divine consciousness may be manifested". He also remarks that "the manifold universe is not an illusion; though of a lower order".

Radhakrishnan perceives four levels in the evolution of the world. They are: matter, life, mind (consciousness) and spirit (self-consciousness). He considers the level of spirit or self-consciousness as the highest stage of the evolution of the world. However he did not discard the lower levels of the world namely matter, life and mind. Radhakrishnan considers them as essential for the emergence of spirit. Thus we find in the philosophy of Radhakrishnan the holistic perspective of the world.

### **Explanation of the world: Mechanistic or Spiritualistic?**

Radhakrishnan denied the naturalistic explanation of the universe. Naturalism explains the process of the world in a mechanistic way. The world, according to it, is an automatic machine which goes on working in a blind manner. This appears to Radhakrishnan as contradicting the nature of reality itself. Therefore, he said: "The view of mechanism that the world would come into existence of its own and has come to be what it is, without any reason or purpose behind it at all, does not seem to be quite satisfactory. Even if the world is a mechanism, the questions to be answered are: what guides mechanism? Who set it up? In the process of the world, everything depends on something else. Therefore it is not self-sufficient. Each event is what it is due to its relation to other events. We seek for something that is its own explanation, but we never get it. The world is an infinite series of conditioned events. At this juncture science cannot say why it is and what it is.

Naturalistic explanation of universe is also not acceptable to Radhakrishnan because it asserts the ultimate reality of time and refuses to go beyond it. Naturalistic explanation fails to appreciate the nature of the world. Being dissatisfied with the naturalistic explanation of the universe, Radhakrishnan adopts a spiritualistic explanation of the universe.

The universe, according to Radhakrishnan, is spiritual in character. He holds: "Religious experience, by its affirmation that the basic fact in the universe is spiritual, implies that the world of sound and sense is not final. All existence finds its source and support in a supreme reality whose nature is spiritual. The visible world is the symbol of a more real world. It is the reflection of a spiritual universe which gives to it its life and significance".

Having convinced with the notion that reality is being spiritual, Radhakrishnan ultimately explains the universe on spiritual grounds. The drawback in mechanistic explanation he says, is that it is necessarily and inherently inadequate and incomplete. It seeks to explain everything in terms of its antecedents. Such an explanation can only satisfy initial curiosity. The ultimate

explanation of the universe, says Radhakrishnan, must transcend this series of antecedents and its effects, it must seek for an explanation in some order that ultimately sustains this series without being reduced to one of its kinds. Such an explanation can only be designated by a spiritualistic explanation.

Being an idealist, Radhakrishnan perceives the play of 'spirit' in the world. The world he says is not static but dynamic. It progresses from the matter to the self-conscious state, passing through the states of life, and consciousness. According to him, the world to start with, is only matter. Subsequently it progress towards life-state and then towards consciousness. Consciousness is of two varieties. It may be animal consciousness or human consciousness. The animal consciousness is of the lower state of mind. This gives rise to human consciousness, where self-consciousness is possible. The human being is not only conscious of objects, around him, but he is conscious of himself (his consciousness). This is the state of self-consciousness. Throughout the evolution of the world- from matter to self-consciousness- Radhakrishnan believes in the play of 'spirit'. It is this 'spirit' that progresses from matter to self-consciousness. In this respect, Radhakrishnan's philosophy is closer to that of Hegel. While Hegel said that 'rationality' or 'reason' is the under current of the universe, for Radhakrishnan 'spirit' is the basis of the world.

### **Nature of the World**

Radhakrishnan conceives the universe as an act of creation. According to him the entire universe holds an expression of divine plan. The world has a beginning and an end. God and world are different in the sense in which the creator and the created are distinct. The world is an actualization of one of the possibilities inherent in Absolute- God. Radhakrishnan observes: "One of the infinite possibilities is being translated into the world of space and time... the world is a definite manifestation of one specific possibility of the Absolute".

This creation, according to him, is a free act on the part of creator. It is not necessary on the part of the Absolute to express any of its possibilities. Nor is it necessary for him to have creation at all. Radhakrishnan remarks: "As to why this possibility arose and not any other, we have to answer that it is an expression of the freedom of the Absolute. It is not even necessary for the absolute". The creation of this world can only be understood as an accident of the Absolute. It is just an accident that this particular possibility has been realized. Therefore the world is an accident.

Radhakrishnan's view that the universe as an accident may remind us Sankara's conception of the world. Sankara also says that world is an accident and is not necessary for the Brahman. Thus both Sankara and Radhakrishnan viewed that the world as an accident and is not necessary for God. However there is a difference between the two. While for Sankara world is an accident and cannot be real, Radhakrishnan considers world is real, though it is an accident. A Sankarite might disapprove and says that it is not logically consistent to maintain simultaneously both the accidental character of the universe and its reality because accidentally and reality are contradictory terms. What is contradictory cannot be real.

Radhakrishnan foresees this possible objection and answers it very effectively. He says that the universe is an accident and yet real because it is the Absolute's accident. What follows from the Absolute even accidentally will be as real because what follows from Him is a necessity. Thus Radhakrishnan affirms that the universe is real, although an accident.

To put it briefly, for Radhakrishnan the World's creation is an accident and is not necessary for God. However it is real, but not illusory.

Radhakrishnan conceives the universe as a dynamic process. He calls the world a *samsara*, implying thereby that it is a perpetual procession of events. To put it in the words of Radhakrishnan: "It is interesting to know that the Indian thinkers, Hindu and Buddhist, viewed the world as a stream of happenings, a perpetual flow of events. Change is the essence of existence".

## EVALUATION OF THE WORLD

Radhakrishnan distinguishes different phases of the world- matter, life, mind, and self-consciousness. These are the different stages of evolution of the world. He did not consider the evolution of the world as mechanistic and naturalistic, but spiritualistic in nature. Spirit constitutes the essence and underlying principle of Radhakrishnan's explanation of the world.

Radhakrishnan observes that the goal of evolution is *ananda*, the spirit. However matter, life and mind which are the different levels of existence cannot be considered as inferior. The different stages are not opposed as good and evil, it is an evolution from one stage to another. Then different stages are distinguished only within a unity. Body, mind and spirit constitute the one whole man. The highest product of cosmic evolution namely spirit, is the hidden principle at

work and slowly discloses itself. When the supreme power is viewed as external creativity, the creative power is called *maya*. Creation is a mystery in the sense that it is the expression of God's freedom.

Let us now consider the different levels of the world process, as conceived by Radhakrishnan.

**(A) Matter**

This is the first stage in the evolution of the world. This is a world of physical events. They seem to exist in their own right without any relation to a perceiving mind. In the early stages of cosmic evolution there were no minds to perceive the physical world.

“While the mind was admitted to be one of continuous movement, ..... matter at least was held to be immutable. The familiar conception of matter was that of an enduring substance moving through a static space in a uniformly flowing time”.

According to the Dalton's atomic theory, matter consists of atoms or smallest particles that cannot be further divided. Material things are changed due to the varying combinations of the atoms or the indivisible particles. The changes visible in material things are traced to changes in the arrangements of the atoms, and not in their internal constitution, because the atoms were regarded as unchanging in character.

The atomic theory of Dalton was revised by J.J. Thomson. He resolved atoms into more minute corpuscles which were in turn reduced to electrical units, the mass of which was only one factor in electromagnetic momentum. Radioactivity involves the transmutation of elements, which is quite inconsistent with the immutability of atoms. Through his researches, Rutherford makes it clear by saying that the atom as a positive nucleus with negative electrons circling round it. Matter is not any more close, densely packed stuff, but is an open structure with large empty spaces and scattered electric charges. Every atom is a structure which consists of electrons and protons of varying degrees of complexity. The chemical properties of an element depend on the number of revolving electrons, and they produce the atomic number of the element. Protons and electrons themselves are sources of radiation or wave groups, a set of events which proceed outward from a centre. The electron, which is the ultimate constituent of matter, is only a hypothetical center of a group of radiations. The latter are all that we detect. In fact, as to say what exists in the centre and the nature of the medium which carries the waves. An electron is the region from which energy may radiate. For Bohr it is a little spherical particle, a disembodied

charge of electricity. Eddington called it a 'something' whose mathematical specification could be given. It works, though we do not know its reason.

According to Radhakrishnan, the conception of matter was bound up in other types of materialism with the conception of sensation. Matter was regarded as the cause as well as the object of sensation, and sensation was regarded as something passive by which the mind receives impressions from the outer world. There is no such thing as a passive reception of impressions. Matter provokes the activity of the mind and matter as we perceive it, is a human product.

### **(B) Life**

Life is the next stage in the process of evolution. It is in the context of matter that life is found fumbling for light. Biological sciences deal with the distinctive phenomena presented by living organisms from microbes to mammals and their activities. Though something life-like might be found in other parts of the universe, biologists study life in the region of the earth's surface, seas and atmosphere. Though the higher organisms exhibit the feature of consciousness, biological sciences do not concern themselves with it".

There is something unique in the behaviour of living organisms which is untraceable in the non-living. The processes of assimilation, respiration, reproduction, growth and development are different from specific structure and activities throughout all changes. The stability of form is maintained in a living organism through an inner activity, and not mere passive resistance to changes in the environment. In the activity of respiration, for example, the processes which regulate with the exact accuracy the pressure of oxygen in the blood and of carbon-dioxide in the lungs are intelligible only as a means of preserving the equilibrium of the organism as a whole. The dream of the whole, the idea of the subject is the activity influence operative in all life phenomena. Life is a dynamic equilibrium which tends to maintain itself. The parts of a living organism are less independent than those of a physical one. The removal of any part from a physical body does not involve any basic change of properties, but in living organisms the form, structure and composition are interdependent. The living organism as a whole, doing things that not atomic system could ever do. They register the results of their experience, and in a sense form habits. The changes which they present in response to outward circumstances are retained and built into the organism.

An atom can neither mend itself nor reproduce itself. On the contrary, a living organism adapts itself to its environment. It does not simply react to the changes of the environment, but

replies to them. When a living organism is injured, the healing process sets in. A plant develops a new sprout in the place of the one that is separated. The changes which occur in the process of development are of a specific kind.

**(C) Mind**

Mind is the emergence of Matter–life continuum. It is identified with consciousness. Consciousness is its property. It may be divided into two types– animal consciousness and human consciousness. It is in the human consciousness that self-consciousness is possible and this is conspicuously absent in animal consciousness.

“Mental phenomena are different from vital activities. Though the living organism maintains its activity and reproduces its structure as an organized whole, its responses manifest only the organic wholeness. Each step in its activity is an immediate response to the conditions existing at the moment. What we have is unconscious organic activity. Though the organisms seem to have a ‘mind’ of their own, it is only the seeming. The growth of an embryo realizes a plan, but its stages of development are only immediate responses to the conditions of the environment. The relation between the organism and the environment which we discovered in the physical and biological worlds becomes more intimate in the mental world through the organs of sense and of action. Through the organs of vision and hearing an animal is able to keep in touch with distant environment. Animals learn from experience. They modify behaviour in the light of previous results. So long as the end is not secured, the activity does not cease. It ceases the moment the end is achieved. The animal looks out for stimuli, and when they occur it reacts to them in a special way. The presence of consciousness makes a real distinction to the behaviour. Self-preservation becomes consciously directed through the feelings of pleasure and pain, of benefit and injury to the organism. The activities possess a unity and coordination. The animal acts as a whole and not simply in its various parts. However primitive consciousness may be, it means a sense of direction conscious behavior both adaptive and selective but is different from physical reactions or life adjustments. It is something unique, new and distinctive, unique and creative. Its appearance makes a new departure of a far–reaching character. It cannot be reduced to neurological happenings in the brain. It is a function of a later evolved and special integration of life”.

**(D) Matter, Life and Mind**

While explaining the relation between matter, life and mind continuum, Radhakrishnan observes that materiality is the first manifested form of cosmic existence. From unmanifested being we get the material manifestation. When matter grows into life, there is something in matter compelling it to grow into life. So also the emergence of life be traced to the working of the principle of matter. It is assumed that it is the work of life itself energizing in and on the conditions of matter and applying it to its own laws and principles. Life exhibits characteristics which go beyond the general laws of inorganic processes. Living organisms respond to situations in a way that they preserve and perpetuate themselves. Their nutritive, reparatory and reproductive functions are 'intelligent' though not guided by intelligence. They are full of "prospective adaptations". Their actions tend to produce results which are beneficial to the individual and the species. Such actions, on the part of human individuals, are due to foresight. We need not, postulate any mysterious vital force; but we must recognize that life is unique kind of activity for which the formulas of matter and energy are not adequate.

Similarly when mind emerges out of life, it is due to the principle of mind working with its own impulses and necessities in life. Mind is not a kind of ghost introduced into the living organisms. The principle of life and mind are not to be treated as working on independent lines in the conscious being. The unity of the living whole is preserved when the quality of mind arises.

### **(E) Self-Consciousness**

In the evolution process, Radhakrishnan observes the basic distinctions between animal and man. While animals are conscious, men are self-conscious. In this respect, men are superior to animals. However Hitler in his *Mein Kempf*, overlooked this distinctions and observed that individual is nothing, it is the group that counts. He thought that man is merely the highest of the animal. However, Radhakrishnan gives a unique position to man. He says that man is self-conscious, endowed with spirit. According to him animals are conscious; men are self-conscious and so have greater dignity than stones, or plants or animals. "History is not a branch of Biology but it is the drama of human personalities distinct from life in the animal kingdom. Social sciences which deal with the story of man in society are a separate category from natural sciences".

"In self-consciousness beings, we meet with a set of phenomena quite distinct from the physical or the vital or the merely conscious. Reflective mind is different from the

unreflective mind of the infant or the animal. When the plain man protests that men are not to be confused with apes, he declares that however primitive man may be he is still distinctly human. Man had been on earth for hundreds of thousands of years. Early specimens such as Pithecanthropus, however strange and brutish they may seem, they were distinctly men. They not only used tools which were ready to hand, but also made tools for their use. They had reason which was distinct from instinct....”

The reflective capacity of the human mind and its power of free invention are not mere complications of lower instincts. It is the essence of self-conscious intelligence to look before and after and differ action according to circumstances. Instinct does neither. When we pass from animal to man there we do not find a gradual development but a sudden break, a leap into a new form of experience. Man is able to master nature. If we say that he is the master of the world today, it is not because of his physical frame which is more powerful or his instincts sharper than that of other animals, but it is due to his intelligence which enables him to adapt himself to new and differing. Knowledge is the characteristic feature of human consciousness and it is an ultimate fact not capable of derivation from anything else.

### **(G) Spiritual Consciousness**

According to Radhakrishnan, one should surpass the level of self-consciousness and reach to the heights of spiritual consciousness. A human being is self-conscious, which is conspicuously absent in animals and lower creatures. An animal like a cow or a dog is only conscious. It is conscious of food, water around it. However it is human being that is not only conscious of his surroundings, but is also self-conscious. For instance he is not only conscious of the table before him, but he also knows that he is seeing the table. Thus he is “self-conscious”. All human beings are self-conscious in this respect. However only a few men go beyond self-consciousness and reach to the stage of “spiritual consciousness” which is the highest state of consciousness. ‘Spiritual consciousness’ is the consciousness of the ‘spirit’ which is the reality, that pervades everywhere. It is the essence of man, world and religions. Saints and philosophers like the Buddha, the Mahavira, Sankara, Ramanuja, Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi had realized the universal spirit and reached the stage of spiritual consciousness.

To conclude, according to Radhakrishnan, there is process in external world. In this process we find evolution from matter to life, life to mind or consciousness, consciousness to

self-consciousness and finally, it reaches the state of spiritual consciousness. According to him spirit is the driving force of the entire process of evolution.

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