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Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's Religious Philosophy and Humanism

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Abstract:

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's basic philosophical position is a kind of synthesis of advaita vedanta and the philosophy of absolute idealism. He takes up the monistic character of the vedantic reality and combines it with some of the important aspects of absolute idealism. Like a vedantin he believes that the reality is one, like an absolute idealist he shows that everything is a necessary aspect of one. He is not only idealist. He was an great Humanist and Universalist. His Philosophy describes spiritualistic Humanism. This article is argument of Radhakrishnan on the relation between humanism and religion. 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. As against religion, humanism argues that this world is our chief interest and perfection of humanity is our ideal. The ultimate harmonious interrelation of all individuals with one another is the aim of humanism. Humanism admits these ultimate values and in this respect it implicitly accepts the spiritual view of the world, advocated by religion. Radhakrishnan opines that humanism overlooks the immortal longings, the intimations of sanctity, the hunger and thirst for holiness, the readiness to suffer persecution and martyrdom. Without the postulation of such a spiritual centre, which will help us to co-ordinate the variety of unlike elements of which human nature consists, our life will have no integrity. Radhakrishnan analyzed the concept of humanism with his philosophical insights. Radhakrishnan argues that there is no conflict between religion and humanism because the inner feeling of the relation between God and man is bound to issue in the service of humanity.

Keywords: Advaita, humanity, religion, philosophical

1. Introduction

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on September 5th, 1888, at a small place, Tiruttani, forty miles to the north-west of Madras. Veeraswami and Seethamma were his parents. His early life was spent in Tirupati and Tiruttani, both famous as places of pilgrimage. Perhaps on account of that early influence, he was naturally attracted towards religion. His basic philosophical position is a kind of synthesis of advaita vedanta and the philosophy of absolute idealism. He takes up the monistic character of the vedantic reality and combines it with some of the important aspects of absolute idealism. Like a vedantin he believes that the reality is one, like an absolute idealist he shows that everything is a necessary aspect of one. He is not only idealist. He was a great Humanist and Universalist. His Philosophy describes spiritualistic Humanism

Radhakrishnan argues that humanism and religion are not opposed. They supplement each other. While humanism praises man as mind, and explains morality on the basis of reason, religion goes deeper and inquires into the spiritual foundations of reason. In fact, spirit is necessary for the supporters of humanism because holistic explanation is possible through spirit only. In nutshell, this is the argument of Radhakrishnan on the relation between humanism and religion. Let us study in detail.

2. Origin and Development of Humanism

In Oxford dictionary, humanism is defined as 'any system of thought or action which is concerned with merely human interests (as distinguished from divine) or with those of the human race in general.' "For humanism man is the highest type of individual in existence and the service of man is the highest religion. It believes good life, in moderation, harmony, balance, while religion insists on another standard. 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. Religion, on the other hand, believes in the radical insufficiency of human nature. The religious individual is tormented by the grim of the sin and the dire necessity to escape from it."

Humanist revivals occur when religions disintegrate and fail to attract people's attention. It took place in ancient Greece. In his work *Truth*, Protagorus remarked: "Concerning the gods, I have not been able to ascertain whether they exist or not; the obscurity of the subject and the brevity of human life have hindered me from finding out." Similarly, in the East Confucius held that the highest form of good was the proper maintenance of a well-balanced systems of human relationship. When questioned about death and the proper duties to the gods, he said that 'one cannot know what death is, unless one can know what life is; one cannot serve gods, unless he

learns how to serve humanity'. When the Brahminical faith was undermined by its own ascetic excesses, Buddha insisted on the majesty of moral law and mercy to all creation. Morality for him is a categorical imperative, a command about which there is nothing contingent or conditional.

In Europe, the religious state of mind dominated from the third century A.D. to the fifteenth. Humanists rejected this domination by religious superstition and dismissed the view of life as a vale of tears and since then humanist philosophy has increased its influence. The leaders of the eighteenth century kindled an optimistic attitude to life with an active ethics of enthusiastic devotion to human welfare. Humanism becomes the secular religion and its practical results were seen in the declaration of Human Rights and the French Revolution. Many intellectuals of our generation adopted humanism as a reasonable attitude. The positivists identify religion with the service of humanity. Many of the skeptical thinkers today adopt humanism as the creed of commonsense. American humanism draws upon the Greek, the Buddhist and the Confucian trends.

As against religion, humanism argues that this world is our chief interest and perfection of humanity is our ideal. The ultimate harmonious interrelation of all individuals with one another is the aim of humanism. It is supposed that while excessive atheism is encouraged by religion, humanism believes in balance and proportion. It is based on the Greek doctrine of harmony and the Roman sense of decorum.

3. Radhakrishnan's Conception of Humanism

Humanism is thus a trend that developed as a reaction against religion, and when it fails to attract man's attention. Repudiating this misconception, Radhakrishnan argues that religion and humanism are not opposed. They supplement each other. Religion and art are the compression of the human spirit. Humanism admits these ultimate values and in this respect it implicitly accepts the spiritual view of the world, advocated by religion. It should be noted that when Radhakrishnan refers to religion, he means by it not organized religion or religion of the authority, but the religion of the spirit which gives freedom to man.

Radhakrishnan observes that in defining the nature of man, humanism cannot exclude a reference to the spirit in him. Aristotle describes the source of reason is better than reason. Radhakrishnan opines that humanism overlooks the immortal longings, the intimations of sanctity, the hunger and thirst for holiness, the readiness to suffer persecution and martyrdom. As the Indian visitor is reported to have said to Socrates, if we do not know about God we cannot know about man. "Religion is the perfection of the truly human. Humanism today is in search of a soul."

Religion and humanism, says Radhakrishnan, need to supplement each other. This recognition prepares the way for the belief in the perfection of man. He observes that when religion succeeds in making us spiritual, our conflicts are resolved. We are no more members of this or that particular group, but belong to humanity as a whole to have the primary patriotism which is the love of humanity.

Humanism, opines Radhakrishnan, is a protest against naturalism on the one side and religion on the other. The soul of man is neither a thing of nature nor it is a child of God. Devotion to values would not be explicable, if men were entirely products of nature.

In Radhakrishnan's observation, humanism seems to be religiously secularized. The self-sufficiency of the natural man and the belief that the only values that matter, are human values is the central faith of the humanists. Plato and Aristotle, from whom this faith derives its inspiration, are clearly aware that the deeper needs of the soul requirements should be satisfied. It was not really human but it feels that it is related to something that transcends the finite and the conceivable. It was not a mere improvement of the world, but an ideal transfiguration of it.

Humanism demands a disciplined life and insists on wholeness and harmony. That is possible, says Radhakrishnan, with the identification of Spirit in man. Without the postulation of such a spiritual centre, which will help us to co-ordinate the variety of unlike elements of which human nature consists, our life will have no integrity.

Radhakrishnan says that Kant's attitude to moral law is deeply religious. His chief argument for theism is that since the good man is often defeated on earth, it requires a super-human power to adjust virtue and happiness. When the foundations of life are shaken, when the ultimate issues demand an answer, humanism is not sufficient. Life is a great gift and it has to bring to it a great mood. Humanism cannot induce it. Hence it is inadequate.

Radhakrishnan analyzed the concept of humanism with his philosophical insights. When the humanist admits the ultimate of the values, it is implicitly accepting the spiritual view of the universe. Humanism is thus rooted in a reality deeper and more comprehensive, in which it finds its completion.

While comparing naturalism, humanism and spiritualism, Radhakrishnan writes: Naturalism is right in its insistence on man as body; humanism is right when it exalts man as mind; but man is not merely body or mind, but it is spirit as well. While naturalism identifies man with body, humanism identifies man with mind. But man is neither mere body or mind, but spirit as well. Spirit is the reality of man. So humanism cannot do duty for an adoring life which is identified with the mind of God, and manifests itself in service and self-loss'.

Radhakrishnan argues that there is no conflict between religion and humanism because the inner feeling of the relation between God and man is bound to issue in the service of humanity. While what matters is works of religious life, its social productivity, the most efficient servants of society are those who cultivate the interior life.

4. Conclusion

Radhakrishnan's interest in man leads him to develop a kind of social philosophy of his own. Its chief characteristics are spiritualism, universalism and humanism. It is basically spiritual, in as much as Radhakrishnan holds that the whole universe in all its

complications is permeated by one supreme spiritual consciousness. His humanism is a kind of metaphysical humanism. It is to be demarcated from that of the humanism of Comte and others.

It is essential, says Radhakrishnan, to regard the human individual not as a mere animated instrument, but as someone who is a co-creator with the divine, who is assisting the purpose of the universe, trying to lead it from one stage to another. Man is not fulfilled until it is not complete; he has not reached what he has to reach, unless he is able to develop the *spirit*. The world is thus in need of spiritual orientation.

5. References

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