

## THE ROLE OF SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN IN EDUCATION

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### Abstracts

*Exceedingly popular among his students right from his early days as a professor at Presidency College, Madras (since April, 1909) Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was an evocative teacher. He was offered the professorship in Calcutta University when he was less than 30 years old. He served as Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University from 1931 to 1936. In 1939, he was appointed the Vice Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University. Two years later, he took over the Sir Sayaji Rao Chair of Indian Culture and Civilisation in Banaras.*

### Introduction

#### Radhakrishnan's Contribution to Indian Education

Radhakrishnan had had the rare honour of teaching at Oxford and occupying the Splading Chair on Eastern religions and philosophy. What he achieved at that point of time, when the British rule was very intact would remain greatly in the history of India. Today after nearly a generation of changes, his philosophy's impact remains debatable. Certainly, there would not be many to take his very highly rhetorical orations. Philosophical thought itself had undergone radical change.

All this doesn't distract us from the historic role he played in raising India's image as a contributor of an ancient religion, Hinduism and certainly gave a new interpretation giving Indian thought a contemporary relevance. His was not an academic philosophy, nor was it only a religion with a theology of its own, like Christianity. One of his achievements in his time was to resist the many threats of Christianity to claim any superiority.

Now, this needn't hold us, for the world is at a different level of religious conflicts and we all, everywhere, in the West and the East are encountering multicultural societies, there is massive migration of people across nations and continents, there is in every major country the conflicts of religions, ethnic identity crises and much more issues like environment, HIV/AIDS etc.

#### New Education Content

Today we need more liberal arts courses, more mix of liberal and science and technology courses etc. Our basic education approach and attitude has to be to first make education widely accessible, create a more egalitarian approach, give students more choices, almost more like the American campus life style opportunities. In fact, as I see, events have overtaken even our present education practices. Students as pirations have radical

ly changed. Nobody wants to go to school or college to learn, to study or become better citizens! Everyone wants to study for a degree of course but it is the job one has always in mind!

So many education courses revolutions too! Skills learning is the name of the game today. So are the attitudes of institutions. There is a supply side, not a demand side to education today. Hence there is also a heavy emphasis on commercialisation. In fact, a gross commercialisation of education at all stages! At another level is the current world education perceptions. No one, an educator or educationist or even a parent wants an interference from the government! So there is the heavy rush to private schools and private schools under all sorts of streams, names have literally mushroomed! At another level, there is the great question of school or education quality. Education quality? No one seems very much worried about this in India, as far as I can see. It is only a pious talk! There is now the heavy rush and the chance to make quick big money!

#### Class Education vs Mass Education

In England there is a furious debate. The highly rated Public Schools in England, the 241 leading fee-paying schools said "highly-trained academic teachers" should be given special contracts and be allowed to focus solely on top-set groups. The chairman of these schools heads conference is none other than a very expensive, 17,500 pounds a -year St. Pauls school in London says the demand must be conceded plus the government's non-interference with the schools functioning! He wants a secondary school system run by a commission independent of politicians! Even in a highly divisive class conscious society, this demand is seen as "grossly politically incorrect"! But then, as in India, politicians can talk and do nothing!

## **Social Realities**

The social realities are always different. The education world is evolving at its own pace and at its own set perceptions. All these developments would have been unforceable in Radhakrishnan's time. Hence, it is not fair to invoke his name in our current debates. We have to find our own light. In fact, we have to more and more look to the US education because what we have now is not a class education. It is a mass education. All the way. The US has over 3,700 colleges and universities and offer a wide range of some 600 programmes at graduate, post-graduate and doctoral levels. Indian students in US universities alone make 11.5 per cent of foreign students. Even our university education is becoming more and more a quantitative expansion and a mass education. So, the standards are what they are and there is, in my view too, not a big worry. This is the time of expansion and what India needs is a competitive edge, say, with China. Specially in high Tech fields. My real worry is the large scale migration of highly talented and trained students and faculty to American shores. This had now become the dominant education syndrome. Migrating at the first opportunity is the mindset of an average student and the aspiration of every middle class family! Where this trend would lead to? What are the implications of this dominant trend for higher education? No one, not in the UGC nor in the HRD ministry or the education minister, the Prime Minister and the President of India talk on this sensitive issue!

## **UGC**

There is also the internal decay in the Indian education system. There is very much of non-functioning of the institutions, UGC is stagnant, National Accreditation and Assessment Council is simply irrelevant in the face of so much internal decay and corruption. I have no interest in corruption. I like to look at the positive side of the Indian education scene. Under Dr. M.M. Joshi, the then education minister, the very higher education in the country was irrevocably damaged. The indoctrination of higher education led to severe break with the Western education traditions. Astrology, Vedic mathematics and the revision of history and the very basic concepts of Indian history, like the coming of the Aryans, are all big scars. The new government, it looks, hasn't done much to change things, except the text books revision project. The new appointments to bodies like the Shimla based Institute of Advanced Study, another of Radhakrishnan's pet project, under Mr. Arjun Singh, had further discouraged me to have an optimistic view of things!

## **Quantity vs Quality**

So let quantity dominate, so to say, the quality for some more time!. Fortunately, we are now having an edge. This we shouldn't lose at any cost. India had emerged as a software dominant power. Let this advantage be always with us. So, I overlook, of course, sadly, the many short comings. Also the many deficiencies of education content, more and more the humanities courses are downgraded. This would damage us in the long run. We have to devise some radical concessions. We have to introduce some selective, exclusive and privileged courses in the Public Schools and also universities so that the students who go out in the world are always rich, privileged and self-employed! Anyway, let the education scenario evolve for some more time. As they say, time is the best healer!

## **Mohanty on Radhakrishnan Mohanty: a successor to Radhakrishnan**

There are some memorable pages, some deeply moving. As he was almost a successor to Dr. Radhakrishnan, I was searching for any reference to him. There is just only one sentence. It is: "Much of the work, for example, of Radhakrishnan left me cold, and I was bored to death"! Of course further reading him I have come to appreciate his arguments. Radhakrishnan was always talking in grand theories, grand constructs, much of which stood because no one at that time looked at Indian philosophy more than as an exposition of Hinduism. So, in Radhakrishnan we have got all religion and Philosophy mixed up.

## **Indian Universities don't matter**

It is another matter Indian universities multiplied and reduced our higher education as a farce. We don't rank in any international league of world Universities. After I gave a gap, I came back to Mohanty. I thought I should say some more new perspectives emerged. Here they are. While it is true Radhakrishnan's conceptualisation of philosophy, I mean academic philosophy, is not so original, it is all a handiwork of syntheses and compromises with textual doctrines, I don't agree with Mohanty that Radhakrishnan's expositions didn't have much value.

## **Individual liberty foreign to Indian thought**

Indians have no individuality, the concept of individual liberty is not an Indian conception. This concept is not rooted in Indian tradition. We are always a 'spark of the Divine', whatever this concept of our religious tradition means. Indian citizens are no individuals. They are always a mass of people. People are still more not

living like citizens. To live like citizens involves and imposes on us certain conditions. We Indians have not yet known or taught the true meaning of citizenship. To become citizens in a truly fuller and robust sense, we need to be taught our identity. The idea and ideology of citizenship, in the modern world originates from the French Revolution and the French Revolutionaries only transformed the French subjects of Louis XVI into independent citizens. Citizens live with fellow citizens and thus there is a deeper sense of belonging, to a State, to a nation and a civic society. Our civic consciousness as a subject for educational ideology in India is as good as non-existent.

The time has come for Indian educators to give a high priority for teaching citizenship in keeping with the latest developments and knowledge of the current world. We are living in a globalising world, so our national and international identity, of course after catering to the local and regional and rather the chauvinistic identities are sought to be built by the local political power centres. But any modern education has to balance these two contrasting and often conflicting identities, the more ethnic and as such narrow identities and at the same time, the globalising, international, multicultural and secular identities of modern people world citizens.

The subject is at the very heart of any modern and progressive education. An education charter as such can be constituted only on the theme of creating men and women, from the schools and the colleges and our universities by training them to become responsible citizens of their respective living spaces. Aristotle spoke of a polis, a city state. Today the scenario is that we have a six billion of common humanity, bound inextricably into a common destiny. The very economic integration, the tele-communications technological growths, Information Technology, the Internet growth is the latest technological integrating force and of course the negative forces, nuclear threat, degradation of the environment and in my own perspective, I see the rather foolhardy leaders from the development nations presiding over the destiny of mankind. Why my emphasis on developed countries? The developing countries, the Middle East, the emergent militant international terrorism, yes, is posing an altogether a new challenge. But then the response, the rational and enlightened response should be through what man had achieved. Acting responsibly through an international collective initiative. Now with George Bush, in his second term, and with the allies he has got and the Opposition to the US-UK continuing their unilateral of war in Iraq had rendered the UN and other international agencies weaker and almost helpless. The Opposition led by France and Germany seems to be the only rea-

soned stand against the drift of the world into an unfathomed abyss.

### **An Activist Education Agenda**

In such a darkened scenario, what education we can talk of? But education, as I often say, is primarily an engagement of the mind. So, as educators we can't rest helpless, we have to summon up all our inner reserves of man and forge ahead with a radical advocacy of common sense and a vigorous reasoning power. No education would be worth its name unless it has courage to stand up and speak the truth. Unless modern education reaches out to all people, gives enough courage to people to reach out to citizen groups, civic societies and interact and exchange information through all the available means, it is no education at all. What we need is not a passive concept of education. What we need for the new century is an activist education agenda.

Sir A Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar A long-serving Vice – Chancellor & a formidable educationist

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan is known for his unique distinctions. He served as Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University at Waltair for two terms and he recruited talented persons as university staff. He consulted far and wide, leading scientists in Europe when he searched for science staff.

He appointed some of the big names, Humayun Kabir, Hiren Mukerjee, V.K.R.V. Rao who all went on to create a name in national life. Also his Mysore days friend Dr. C.R. Reddy was the first vice-chancellor of Andhra university and as a Cambridge man he was more brilliant and in later years the two friends went their own ways.

Dr. Radhakrishnan was also vice-chancellor of Banaras University and whatever he did were all landmarks in Indian higher education. The legendary vice chancellor, Sir Ashutosh Mukerjee was a discoverer of talents, it was he who discovered Radhakrishnan and C.V. Raman and many others.

Soon after relinquishing his VC's post at Waltair, Radhakrishnan badly wanted to become the Director of Public Instruction in Madras! He didn't succeed because there were English men, senior to him in the Provincial Education Service. It is another matter, Dr. Radhakrishnan went on to become a professor at Oxford and later, to new heights of fame and high offices. In the South we had a formidable figure in Sir A. Lakshmanaswamy Mudaliar who served as vice-chancellor of Madras university for an unprecedented 27 years!

By all standards A.L. Mudaliar is perhaps the best known and much respected, even much feared vice-chancellor in his time. He had the distinction of becoming the VC when India was still under the British rule and after Independence there was no one to touch his sphere of activity. I know well from my close movements with the late Kamaraj and Bhakthavatsalam, that they dared not touch Mudaliar! Such was his persona, withdrawn and given to studied elegance, a pleasing rhetoric and diction, when he delivered his speeches, as he did when I was for two of his last years in the Legislative Council, the usual time limit prescribed for us was waived for him.

So he was to deliver his well constructed arguments in chaste English. At a very early age, I was one of the youngest to be elected to the Council Members of the council were Sir. A.L. Mudaliar, Dr. Raja Sir Muthiah Chettiar and others. I, fresh from Oxford and with strong convictions, I dared to challenge the formidable man with my own private member bill that sought to restrict the term of the Madras VC for three years at a time.

The fierce opposition I encountered when I rose to speak readers can't imagine! There were shouts and counter shouts and Mudaliar men in full strength and sought to block my way through my speech! However, I did succeed to make my impact on a subject that was a forbidden territory for educated Tamil society for such a long time! Thus, the term of the VC was subsequently reduced to three years and Mudaliar had to relinquish his pet office!

Sir A.L. Mudaliar survived in pre-Independence India as well as in post-Independence India, thanks to his unique survival skills! As Ashis Nandy, the sociologist, says Indians are archetypal survivors! As a nation of historic invasions, we have learnt to survive at all times. So, this survival instinct is inbuilt into our character. Unfortunately this skill survives to this day! Mudaliar was also helped by the peculiar Tamil character, the non-Brahmin movement, Justice Party all helped him to endear himself to a pro-British establishment and after Independence he survived as the spokesman for the new order in international forums.

He along with his equally illustrious brother Sir. A. Ramaswamy Mudaliar no doubt became symbols of great accomplishments. But they were no nationalists or freedom lovers. So, I had the determination from early on to do whatever in my capacity to change this obnoxious side of Tamil character.

I am glad I did accomplish this fundamental change in the Madras university history. Many were the tales told about Mudaliar's ways, his whims and fancies.

Dr. Malcolm Adishesiah and N.D. Sundaravadivelu who all followed him became my friends and we used to exchange notes! Dr. Raja Sir Muthiah Chettair was one to embrace me in the council premises soon after my speech on Madras University. However, I like to place on record Mudaliar was a phenomenon. Never after we would have such a great son of Tamil Nadu and he would remain an archetypal VC for others to be inspired and to accomplish great deeds. The best teacher is the one who suggests rather than dogmatizes, and inspires his listener with the wish to teach himself." Edward Bulwer-Lytton

### **Great Teacher, Philosopher, President, Bharat Ratna Awardee**

Exceedingly popular among his students right from his early days as a professor at Presidency College, Madras (since April, 1909) Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was an evocative teacher. He was offered the professorship in Calcutta University when he was less than 30 years old. He served as Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University from 1931 to 1936. In 1939, he was appointed the Vice Chancellor of Banaras Hindu University. Two years later, he took over the Sir Sayaji Rao Chair of Indian Culture and Civilisation in Banaras.

"If we take any philosopher as a guru, if we treat his works as gospel, if we make of his teaching a religion complete with dogma and exegesis, we may become members of his congregation of the faithful, but will not possess the openness of mind essential for a critical understanding of the master's views. The true teachers help us to think for ourselves in the new situations which arise. We would be unworthy disciples if we do not question and criticize them. They try to widen our knowledge and help us to see clearly. The true teacher is like Krishna in the Bhagwadgita, who advises Arjuna to think for himself and do as he chooses – yatha icchasi tatha kuru" – words from 'The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan' by Prof. Paul Arthur Schilpp.

Recognition of his scholarship came again in 1936, when he was invited to fill the Chair of Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford which he retained for 16 years. His mastery on his subject and his clarity of thought and expression made him a much sought after teacher. But what made him even more popular was his warm heartedness and his ability to draw out people. This aspect of his personality continued to win him countless admirers throughout his long

and illustrious public life. If in India Dr. Radhakrishnan was a highly respected figure, abroad he became one of the best-liked public figures of his time. He earned very early international recognition as a philosopher. In 1952, the Library of Living Philosophers, an institute of world-wide repute, brought out a massive volume on 'the philosophy of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan' devoted wholly to a critical appreciation of his philosophical doctrines.

When Dr. Radhakrishnan became the President of India in 1962, he was approached by some of his students and friends and requested him to allow them to celebrate 5th September, his "birthday". In reply, Dr. Radhakrishnan said, "instead of celebrating my birthday separately, it would be my proud privilege if September 5 is observed as Teachers' day". The request showed Dr. Radhakrishnan's love for the teaching profession. From then onwards, the day has been observed as Teachers' Day in India. Whatever position he held whether as President or Vice President or even as Ambassador, Dr. Radhakrishnan essentially remained a teacher all his life. The teaching profession was his

first love and those who studied under him still remember with gratitude his great qualities as a teacher.

His appointment as President was hailed by Bertrand Russel who said "It is an honour to philosophy that Dr. Radhakrishnan should be President of India and I, as a philosopher, take special pleasure in this. Plato aspired for philosophers to become kings and it is a tribute to India that she should make a philosopher her President".

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who was one of his closest friends throughout, said about Dr. Radhakrishnan: "He has served his country in many capacities. But above all, he is a great Teacher from whom all of us have learnt much and will continue to learn. It is India's peculiar privilege to have a great philosopher, a great educationist and a great humanist as her President. That in itself shows the kind of men we honour and respect."

Bharat Ratna, the highest award of the nation, was conferred on him in 1954 in recognition of his meritorious service to mankind.