

## THE VALUE OF LIFE IN RADHAKRISHNAN'S PHILOSOPHY

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One of the main questions in philosophy is that where does man find his real goal of life or 'good'? The world's complexity is enough to divert man to achieve his real goal of life. The world is the scene of misery so we can not get the true good by analyzing the worldly events. It is not gained in the arena of worldly scene. No real achievement is possible in the outer world. According to *Buddha* the life of man is full of sorrows and sufferings. So, where the man will get any meaning or add any value to his earthly life? Therefore, Indian Philosophers consider the value of life is to attain freedom from the bonds of empirical life which is automatically refers to the negation of experience of life.

Many western thinkers like John Mackenzie and Schweitzer<sup>1</sup> characterized Indian Philosophy in the same tone cited above. They find no value of life in Indian Thought. Indian Philosophers talk about not the present life but after this life. There is no significance in the present life. But this is not the real case in Indian thought. All these objections are raised by some western thinkers due to their improper understanding of the special characters of Indian Thought. Indian Philosophers have conceived the goal of life is the achievement of *mokṣa* (redemption) i.e., the release from nature's toil.

Radhakrishnan tries to refute the above charges against Indian Thought. He introduces his discussion in his book *The Hindu View of Life* with the remarks that the most important objection raised against Hindu Ethical theory that it prescribes us life negating-world views. He says, "Doctrine of *māyā* is supposed to repudiate the reality of the world and thus make all ethical relation meaningless. The world of nature is said to be unreal and human history illusory. There is no meaning in time and no significance in life"<sup>2</sup>

The Western thinkers particularly the students of ethics have distorted the basic principles of Indian Philosophy. The other critic John McKenzie<sup>3</sup> also remarks that Indian Philosophy leaves no room for ethics because it identifies *dharma* with morality. *Dharma* is intellectually rootless. He also says "the duties of social life can not be deduced from ultimate goal of attainment as the orthodox understand it, nor can they be shown to stand in any vital relation to it. *Dharma* is imposed by authority, and that is the end of it."<sup>4</sup> But when Sidgwick says in his book 'The Method of Ethics' "Ethics is

<sup>1</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and its Development*, Mrs. Charles E.B. Russell, trans. London, Adam and Charles Black, 1951.

<sup>2</sup> Radhakrishnan, *the Hindu View of Life*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1948, P-61.

<sup>3</sup> John McKenzie, *Hindu Ethics*, Oxford Univ. Press 1922, pp-206-207.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp-209-210.

sometimes considered as an investigation of the true moral laws or rational precepts of conduct; sometimes as an enquiry into the nature of the Ultimate End of reasonable human action—the Good or ‘True Good’ of man – and the method of attaining it”<sup>5</sup> According to Sidgwick “If a man accepts any end as ultimate and paramount, he accepts implicitly as his ‘method of ethics’ whatever process of reasoning enables him to determine the actions most conducive to this end” and “it can hardly be denied that the recognition of an end as ultimately reasonable involves the recognition of an obligation to do such acts as most conduce to the end”.<sup>6</sup> The acceptance of ultimate end which is teleological in purport includes the method of ethics. It regulates the life of man which is most conducive to that end.

Now considering the framework of Sidgwick’s approach to ethics we can reformulate the objections to Indian moral philosophy. It offers a theory of “Ultimate Good” which excludes all natural things and experiences from the *Summum Bonum*. It postulates an experience which is characterized as alone of intrinsic worth i.e, as ‘ultimately good’ yet which in its nature stands in no comprehensible relation to the moral teaching advocated as alone conducive to its realization.

Radhakrishnan says that the value of life has extrinsic value or we can say the instrumental value as it supports or help the way of realizing the life of sorrowlessness. The value of life means to achieve the goal of life i.e. to overcome the sorrows and sufferings of life. So we can not fully satisfy with the help of finite objects in this world. Radhakrishnan remarks that “finite objects can not give us satisfaction for which our soul hungers. As in the field of intellect we miss the ultimate reality in the objects of the empirical world, even so the absolute good we seek for in morality is not to be found in finite satisfaction”<sup>7</sup> The spirit in us seeks the true satisfaction and nothing less than the infinite can give us that. Therefore, we can say that there is no permanent satisfaction in nature. Our soul always hunger for infinite, search for eternal reality. The perfect ideal of our life is found only in the eternal reality.

The value of life or the ideal of life is derived from the metaphysical standpoint of Radhakrishnan’s philosophy. His philosophy can be described as monistic idealism. It is monistic because the reality is one and it is called idealism for more than one reason. One is idea-ism and the other is ideal-ism.<sup>8</sup> The former indicates the reality as a nature of an idea that means mental or spiritual. The later one insisted on the ultimacy and value of some ideal. He prefers this sense and believes that there is a spiritual ideal towards which the whole world-process is progressing to achieve some goal. According to Radhakrishnan the real meaning of the word idea is that what is the principle involved in it when we ask with reference to any thing or action? It indicates the meaning or purpose of its being or the aim or value of that action. It shows that when we say about the nature of an idea we try to determine what that thing is driving at? Thus if we assert that the universe is driving at something—that it has a meaning and a value, that it is not a blind force striving or an irrational movements onwards but it is a constant progression towards some higher end, and then we are an idealist. In this sense, an idealist is a teleologist who

<sup>5</sup> Henry Sidgwick, *the Methods of Ethics* (7<sup>th</sup>ed.) London: Macmillan & Co.1913, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Santayana, *the Life of Reason*, Vol-V, pp-240-241.

<sup>7</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I, pp.212-213.

<sup>8</sup> B. K. Lal, *Contemporary Indian Philosophy*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 2005, p.259.

believes in the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe. So a man who is earnestly searching for the value of his life “can find no rest until he gains a view or a vision of the world of things and process which will enable him to interpret the manifold experiences as expressive, in some sort of a purpose”<sup>9</sup>

The nature of man has two aspects. One is the finite aspect and the other is the infinite or the divine aspect. According to Radhakrishnan the finite aspects of man are those aspects that are determined by the empirical or environmental conditions. This aspect of man is not final. He has another aspect of divine or infinite aspect. That is why every action of man is goal oriented. The end of every action is to achieve some goal. Here the goal of man is to achieve the Supreme. “There is in the self of man, at the very centre of this being, something deeper than the intellect, which is akin to the supreme”.<sup>10</sup> So a man always searches for the goal of his action. In moral life the goal is perfection. One can not attain the goal so long as he remains merely moral. Radhakrishnan says “the love of the finite has only instrumental value while the love of the eternal has intrinsic worth”.<sup>11</sup>

The finite aspect of man is the creative activity of man which has an instrumental value. It relates to the empirical events. The supreme value or the intrinsic value is identified with the unchanging, the perfect for Radhakrishnan’s point of view. As he remarks “The end we seek is becoming *Brahman* or touching the eternal. This is the only absolute value”<sup>12</sup>

Radhakrishnan conceived value in such a manner that nothing natural can be of intrinsic worth. The only satisfaction ultimately worthwhile is that which is by nature immutable, *moksā*, release from nature’s toil is the final goal of life. If sorrowlessness to be the only intrinsic good, all life, both individual and social becomes a cosmic pilgrimage which will not come to an end until nature is obliterated, or transmuted or come to be totally disregarded. Radhakrishnan tells us “All ethical goods bound up as they are with the world of distinctions are valuable as means to the end. While self realization is the absolute good, ethical goods are only relatively so. The ethically ‘good’ is what helps the realization of the infinite and the ethically ‘bad’ is its opposite”.<sup>13</sup>

Indians have considered spiritual values are the ultimate end from ancient times. The four human ends i.e., wealth, pleasure, righteousness and *moksā* (spiritual freedom) of which the first two have no intrinsic value, the third one has instrumental value to achieve the *moksā*, the supreme value of human life. It is considered as escape from the cycle of rebirth. According to Radhakrishnan the world is the training ground for uplifting another higher stage of the world and “the meaning of man’s life is to be found not in this world but in more than historical reality. His highest aim is to release from the historical succession denoted by birth and death”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Radhakrishnan, *an Idealist View of Life*, p-10

<sup>10</sup> Radhakrishnan, *an Idealist View of Life*, p-103

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* p.214.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*-p-553.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, Vol-II, P-614.

<sup>14</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1939 pp-75, 83.

In Indian sense the value of life has never been separated from the metaphysical insight. The moral discipline and the metaphysical insight go together. The four stages of life is directly oriented towards liberation. It is a journey to the eternal life through different stages is as follows:

- *Brahmacharya* or the period of training.
- *Gārhasthya* or the period of work for the world as a house holder.
- *Vānaprastha* or the period of retreat for the loosening of the social bonds.
- *Sanyāsa* or the period of renunciation.

The four stages of life what Vyasa says in the *Mahābhārata* a ladder or flight of four steps. By ascending that flight one reaches the region of *Brahman*.<sup>15</sup> According to *Hindu Dharmasāstra*, each individual should pass through these four stages of life, one after another and live in them in accordance with the *Śāstras* if he desires to obtain salvation or moksa. But according to Radhakrishnan these four stages are “helpful but not indispensable”<sup>16</sup> because duties of life mentioned in these four stages are not externally imposed upon our life. It is a natural growth of our life.

The different stages of life are not divided by the limitation of ages. There is no particular age; one is expected to enter into each of the four stages. It is depended upon individual ability and also depends upon social condition. Now-a-days the young ones or brahmacharin does not enter into the next stage (*Gārhasthya*) due to their economic insecurity. The four stages of life in the modern period are strongly affected by socio-economic conditions of the society. As the social order change day to day so the individual also change their attitudes. It is relevant in the present context of society what Vatsayana says about the four stages of life. Due to uncertainty of life one should follow *Vidyā, Kāma, Dharma* and *Mokṣa* as they came to him at any period of life.<sup>17</sup> It means whenever a man gets opportunities to practice any one of these, he should properly avail himself of the same, in whatever stage he may be.

The first stage in life is the period of training and education. The very word Brahmacharin indicates that it is oriented towards the knowledge of the *Brahman*. The discipline of body and mind is the aim of this stage. Both boys and girls went through this stage. “The students are subject to the direction of *guru* who diligently guides them and supervises their education. They learn the sacred without overlooking the secular.”<sup>18</sup>

The second stage is that of the householder or the *Gārhastha*. All other stages are sustained by this one. Hence, a high place of honour is given to it. This stage alone can three *puruṣārthas* be practiced together and the three rinas (*Devarṇa, Pitrṛṇa* and *Rṇsirṇa*) could all be discharged satisfactorily. The life of householder which is working for the others overcomes his narrowness and selfishness. Being in the world means that men are pledged to one another, the individuals for the family, the family for the community, the community for the nation, and the nation for the world. The householder establishes himself in the supreme reality after the fulfillment of his duties. He then dedicates all his actions in his married and social life to God.

<sup>15</sup> *Mahabharata, Shantiparva, 242, 15.*

<sup>16</sup> *Kamasutra of Vatsayanamuni* Ed. Goswami D.S., (Aksi Sanskrit series) Banares-1919, I, II, 1-6.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Radhakrishnan, *the Heart of Hindusthan*, p-39

The third and the fourth stage i.e., *Vānaprastha* and *Sanyāsa* where *Dharma* and *Mokṣa* are the main concern of life. Here *Dharma* becomes identified with *Mokṣa*. The later one occupies the supreme position in the stages of life. To achieve *Mokṣa* is to make the life meaningful on earth. It is the stage of the meditation where there is no force applied to control the passions but an easy spontaneous self-control. Radhakrishnan describes the fourth or the final stage of life as “a freedom and fearlessness of spirit, an immensity of courage, which no defeat of obstacle can touch, a faith in the power that works in the universe, a love that lavishes itself without demand of return and makes life a free servitude to the universal spirit are the signs of the perfected man.”<sup>19</sup> Radhakrishnan reminds us by saying that this perfected men or the meditants are never other-worldly, rather they are concerned about the world and works for all men. He gave the example of *Buddha* and *Mahadeva* as embodying the great ideal of the meditant. *Buddha* was always engaged to remove the suffering from human life after his enlightenment. *Mahadeva* in mythology is said to have drunk poison in order to save the world from death.

So, we have seen that the realization can occur only after a lifetime of training, go through the four meaningful and valuable stages of life in which the individual is drawn away from the world, comes to know the true worth of the nature and finally attached with the ultimate metaphysical intuition. So the value of life on earth is never denied by the Indian Philosophers.

The moral categories are relative to the phenomenal space-time order. But our action is like saints action where “the conventional standards, the external duties and the ethical rules become meaningless to us.”<sup>20</sup> The question of value does not arise here because “sin and stain there can not be; for we have overcome that creation full of desire and its work and reactions which belongs to the ignorance, and living in the supreme and Divine nature there is no longer fault or defect on our works; for these are created by in equalities of the ignorance. The equal *Brahman* is faultless, beyond the confusion of good and evil, and living in the *Brahman* we too raise beyond good and evil; we act in that purity, stably, with an equal and single purpose of fulfilling the welfare of all existences.”<sup>21</sup> When we rise beyond the level of distinctions then we felt us totally different from others. The value of our life is our constant cravings to achieve the highest goal of life. As Radhakrishnan says, “an ideal which requires us to integrate ourselves, to maintain a constant fight with the passions which impede the growth of the soul, to wage war on lust, anger and worry, can not but be deeply ethical.”<sup>22</sup>

The man who attains the state of liberation does not require ethical principles because at that time morality has become his second nature. The liberated soul acts in such a way that natural order has not so relevant for him any longer. But Radhakrishnan says that it does not mean that he has lost any meaning of his life. “For the liberated *Yogi* there is no other law, rule, *dharma* than simply this, to live in the Divine and love the Divine and be one with all beings; his freedom is ...not dependent any longer on any rule of conduct, law of life or limitation of any kind.”<sup>23</sup> The man who has achieved liberation

<sup>19</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, pp – 380-381

<sup>20</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, Vol. I p. 229.

<sup>21</sup> Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religion and Western Thought*, p-298

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*-p-53

<sup>23</sup> Radhakrishnan, *the Bhagavatgita*, pp-71-72.

*dharma* is no longer binding upon him. He works for the welfare of his less enlightened fellows in the sense of helping them to come to a realization of their true nature, or of what they are potentially; he values them for what they would be if liberated, or as some would contend, for what they are without knowing it. The liberated soul works for the welfare of the world.

Radhakrishnan says that one must begin with a faith in reality. The lack of this faith makes man frustrated and isolated animal in the world. He says it is the faith in religious experience. According to Radhakrishnan, "Religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into reality"<sup>24</sup>. This insight will reveal that man is always confronted with something greater and higher than him, which makes his life meaningful and valuable. The main task of religion is to make a bridge between the finite and infinite insight. Therefore he says that Religion is that way of life which helps men to "make a change in his own nature to let the Divine in him manifest himself."<sup>25</sup> Religion implies a faith in the supremacy of absolute spiritual values and a way of life to realize them.

The eternal or the Absolute Reality which is present in the soul of man as its secret ground provides a driving force to that man to harness his life in this world. This purposive act of man makes human life valuable and worthy to live in this world. We find a vivid illustration of this kind when Radhakrishnan says "Any serious pursuit of ideas, any search after conviction, and any adventure after virtue arises from resources whose name is religion. The search of the mind for beauty, goodness and truth is the search for God. The child nursing at the breast of his mother, the illiterate savage gazing at the numberless stars, the scientists in his laboratories studying life under a microscope, the poet meditating in solitudes on the beauty and pathos of the world, the ordinary men standing reverently before a starlit sky, the Himalayan heights or a quiet sea or before the highest miracle of all, a human being who is both great and good, they all possess dimly the sense of the eternal, the feeling of heaven".<sup>26</sup>

We are organically related to the universe or parts of it, so our life has a value. According to Radhakrishnan the universe is driving at something - that it has a meaning and a value. We are the moral agents who take part in the world process of progressing. The value of life is to realize the divinity. Radhakrishnan says that in the ever growing flow of nature there is neither repose nor halt. Nature is never satisfied with the level it has reached. So our destination of life is to find out a meaningful way to overcome the present situation of life. In search of certainty and supreme reality our life has meaningful and valuable on this earth.

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<sup>24</sup> Radhakrishnan, *My Search for Truth*, p.27

<sup>25</sup> Schilpp Ed. *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan*, p.59.

<sup>26</sup> . Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1947 p.47