

DR. MOUSUMI DAS

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

M.A Fourth Semester

Core Course

C.C.4.1

**MODERN INDIAN THOUGHT**

## **MAN AND RELIGION**

### **Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's views**

Radhakrishnan and Rabindranath Tagore both possessed an idea of religion which is different from the general practice of the term religion. In this section we shall mainly discuss about what is the general concept of religion, how religion is different from scientific method and what should be the true nature of religion. In this section we will mainly discuss about Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's views regarding religion. For that purpose we will mainly follow two important writings of Radhakrishnan. They are '*An Idealist View of Life*' and '*Religion and Culture*'.

### **The Scientific Method**

Radhakrishnan viewed that among the new forces that have made our world so different from what it was the most important is natural science, which has imposed its methods and conclusions on us and altered the very atmosphere in which we live, move and think. The strict method of science requires us to believe a proposition only when we are in a position to prove it. Whenever statements are made, it is our duty to find out whether they are capable of verification by those who will take the trouble to investigate them. Whereas, Religion, on the other hand, consists, according to Freud, "of certain dogmas, assertions about facts and

conditions of external (or internal) reality which tell us something that one has not oneself discovered and which claim that one should give them credence.” Moreover, if it is asked that on what ground the claim of religion is to be believed three answers are generally put forward. First, the religious claims are deserved to be believed because our primal ancestors believed them; secondly, because we possess proofs which have been handed down from this period of antiquity; and thirdly, because it is forbidden to raise the question of their authenticity at all.

Radhakrishnan views that in former days any act against the dictates of religion met severest penalties and even to-day society is unwilling to see anyone renew it. The scientific theories which supersede earlier ones are only links in the long chain of progressive advances likely in time to be themselves transcended. The only justification of the scientific theories is that they provide adequate relevant facts. They are temporary resting places in the search for truth and there is nothing absolute in them. Religion on the other hand claims to be absolutistic. The truths of religion are said to be unalterable and our duty is to defend them. Moreover, Science demands induction from facts and not deduction from dogmas. We must face the facts and derive our conclusions from them and not start with the conclusions and then play with the facts. While, reasoning in religion is only rearrangement of our prejudices. Religion assumes that God is the author of the universe and the benevolent father of all. Science insists on the reign of law. If law works everywhere and through all time, there is nothing mysterious or miraculous about the world. Only the uneducated believe that

Demons cause diseases and priests cure them. The world is a cosmos, an ordered whole. Besides, the need for religious mystery diminishes as the scope of scientific explanation extends. Moreover, Radhakrishnan views that we generally indent on the hypothesis of God when knowledge reaches its limits.

Furthermore, popular use of expressions like "it is an act of God," "God only knows," shows how ignorance is the source of the knowledge of God. God is the

name we tremblingly give to the unseen and the inexplicable. Religious ideas are consoling devices produced by the mechanisms of projection and regression and do not refer to any objective reality. God is but a function of the unconscious.

### **The defectivity of the proofs of Theism**

Radhakrishnan views that the so-called proofs for the existence of God are all defective, the ontological argument starts from the idea of God as an absolutely perfect being. Such an absolutely perfect being must exist, for non-existence would be an imperfection and a more perfect being which exists could be imagined. But such a proposition is opposed to the first principle with which the argument started. Therefore God exists. Kant points out that existence is not an attribute like goodness or wisdom and cannot be involved in the conception of any idea in our minds. There are many things which exist only in our imagination. We have an idea of a perfect circle, but that does not mean that a perfect circle exists. The idea of God is no exception and God's existence cannot be deduced from the conception of God. The causal argument is not more satisfactory. It proceeds on a series of untenable assumptions: that the causal concept is valid, that it applies not merely to parts of the world but to the world as a whole, that we can have a first cause, which somehow is an exception to the law of succession and that the first cause is God. An infinite series of causes and effects is not impossible to conceive. If causality is interpreted as meaning that the contingent implies the necessary, it begs the whole question. We take the world as created and then argue that it must have had a creator. If God is conceived as infinite, eternal and necessary, it is possible to look upon the world itself as infinite, eternal and necessary. Again, causality relates happenings in nature and we cannot by means of it go outside of nature and reach the creative

source of things. The given world is a contingent fact. It is conceivable that there may be no world at all or only an irrational and fortuitous one. It is therefore conceivable that there may be no God. At best, for causality, God is only a contingent being. The argument from design is profoundly affected by the development of the theory of biological evolution. The question of the purpose of human life is irrelevant. Why should human life alone have a purpose and not animal life? The universe does not seem to have any definite purpose which it is attempting to realise. To be born, to live, to die and to begin all over again, until all things have disappeared as though nothing had ever been accomplished, such is the process of the universe, such its destiny. Even if the world lends itself to the realisation of purposes, we cannot infer the reality of a purposing mind. We are thrown back on a naturalistic view with its insistence on mechanical determination, the insignificance of man, the irrelevance of personal immortality, the repudiation of personal freedom and the cosmic sanctions for moral standards and indifference to a responsive spirit.

### **Religion as seen in Today's World**

Religion as seen in the context of present world is also faulty. The view that God has entrusted his exclusive revelation to any one prophet, Buddha, Christ, or Mohammad, expecting all others to borrow from him or else to suffer spiritual destitution, is by no means old-fashioned. Nothing is as hostile to religion as other religions. We have developed a kind of patriotism about religion, with a code and a flag, and a hostile attitude towards other men's codes and creeds. We have the courage to repudiate the doctrine of chosen races and special prophets and plead for a free exercise of thought about God is treated as outcasts. No wonder that even the sober are sometimes tempted to think that the only way to get rid of religious fear, conceit and hatred is to do away with all religion. The world would be a much more religious place if all the religions were removed from it. Religion to-day is a branch of statecraft. Sometimes the modern challenge

to religion is met by a somewhat pragmatist view. Pragmatism rejects absolute truth as a myth, and holds that all truths are human and relative. A truth is tested by the value of its consequences. In science, e.g., we adopt and act on suitable hypotheses. In Authoritarianism implies a sort of scepticism. In affirming that religion should be defended from human reason, that its God should be approached with eyes coloured by faith, that its systems should not be regarded too closely, authoritarianism seems to harbour a secret scepticism. It can have little appeal in an age remarkable for its criticism of creeds of all shades. Only those who have never known the meaning of doubt can accept authority. The many thinking men, who are still hoping to discover a warrant for their faith which traditional dogmas cannot give, even when they undergo the violent distortion of allegory and exegesis, can only be restive under an authority that is merely external. The authoritarians show a somewhat imperfect acquaintance with reality. The philosophical fashions of naturalism, atheism, agnosticism, scepticism, humanism, and authoritarianism are obvious and easy, but they do not show an adequate appreciation of the natural profundity of the human soul. In the Eastern religions, the energy of the depth of the soul is something before which external existence pales into insignificance. While the tendency to emphasise the inward spirit as all that counts and treat life itself as an indifferent illusion is one-sided, to ignore spiritual life and confuse it with the physical or the vital is equally one-sided. If, in spite of our ethical culture and rationalistic criticism, we feel that our lives have lost the sense of direction, it is because we have secularised ourselves. Human nature is measured in terms of intellection. We have not found our true selves, and we know that we have not.

### **The True Religion of Man**

Religion has been identified with feeling, emotion and sentiment, instinct, cult and ritual, perception, belief and faith, and these views are right in what they affirm, though wrong in what they deny. Schleiermacher is not wrong in saying that there is a predominant feeling element in the religious consciousness.

If we assimilate religious experience to the moral consciousness, as Kant is inclined to do, we overlook the distinctive characters of the two activities. Religion is not mere consciousness of value. There is in it a mystical element, an apprehension of the real and an enjoyment of it for its own sake which is absent in the moral consciousness. Religion is not a form of knowledge as Hegel sometimes urged. While religion implies a metaphysical view of the universe, it is not to be confused with philosophy. When Professor Whitehead defines religion as "what the individual does with his own solitariness," he is urging that it is not a mere social phenomenon. It is not an apologetic for the existing social order; nor is it a mere instrument for social salvation. It is an attempt to discover the ideal possibilities of human life, a quest for emancipation from the immediate compulsions of vain and petty moods. It is not true religion unless it ceases to be a traditional view and becomes personal experience. It is an independent functioning of the human mind, something unique, possessing an autonomous character. It is something inward and personal which unifies all values and organises all experiences. It is the reaction of the whole man to the whole reality. We seek the religious object by the totality of our faculties and energies. Such functioning of the whole man may be called spiritual life, as distinct from a merely intellectual or moral or aesthetic activity or a combination of them. The spiritual sense, the instinct for the real, is not satisfied with anything less than the absolute and the eternal. It shows an incurable dissatisfaction with the finiteness of the finite, the transiency of the transient. Such integral intuitions are our authority for religion. They reveal a Being who makes him known to us through them and produces revolt and discontent with anything short of the eternal. Personal experience generally

identifies ourselves with our narrow limited selves and refers to spiritual experience as something given or revealed to us, as though it did not belong to us. We separate the power of spiritual apprehension from the rest of our nature and refer to it as something divine. Such a separation is unfair to humanity. The insight of the best moments reveals the deepest in us. It is wrong to regard human nature as it's very self when it is least inspired and not its true self when it is most. If our self finds in these moments of vision its supreme satisfaction, and is intensely alive while they last, then that self is our true self. We cannot limit our being to the physical or the vital, the customary or the conventional. The divine in us is the source and perfection of our nature. The Divine is both in us and out of us. God is –neither completely transcendent nor completely immanent. To bring about this double aspect, contradictory accounts are given.

. The endeavour of religion is to get rid of the gulf between man and God and restore the lost sense of unity. It is a progressive attempt at self-realisation, the lifting of the empirical ego into the transcendental plane, mind in its immediacy into mind in its ideal perfection. A strict ethical discipline is insisted on. The apprehension of spiritual truth depends on the quality of the soul of him who sees, and this quality can be raised only by the cultivation of the intellect, the emotions and the will through prayer and contemplation. No one can know the truth without being the truth. An absolute inward purity demanding self-mastery and self-renunciation is demanded. Salvation is attained not so much by placating God as by transforming our being, by achieving a certain quality and harmony of the passions through severe self-discipline. The effort is costly. No tricks of absolution or payment by proxy, no greased paths of smooth organs and stained-glass windows can help us much. The spirit has to be stripped bare if it is to attain its goal. Meditation is the way to self-discovery. By it we turn our mind homeward and establish contact with the creative centre. To know the truth we have to deepen ourselves and not merely widen the surface. Silence and quiet are necessary for the profound alteration of our being and they are not

easy in our age. Discipline and restraint will help us to put our consciousness into relation with the Supreme. What is called tapas is a persistent endeavour to dwell in the divine and develop a transfigured life. It is the gathering up of all dispersed energies, the intellectual powers, the heart's emotions, the vital desires, nay the very physical being itself, and concentrating them all on the supreme goal. Religion is not science nor is church an academy. It is the perception of the eternal in the finite. Human progress lies in an increasing awareness of the universal working in man. Through the exploring of nature, the striving after wisdom and the seeking of God, the individual struggles to achieve a harmony between himself and his environment. He finds his goodness in what is more than himself. He realises that his fragmentariness will be cured only if he is devoted to the whole. Fullness of life means service to the whole. So he strives after values, frames ideals and struggles to build up a world of unity and harmony. Knowledge, art, morality and religion are the devices employed by man to realise his destiny as a member of a spiritual fellowship, a Kingdom in which each is in the whole and the whole is in some measure in each.