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**RADHAKRISHNAN'S CAMOUFLAGED PRESENT IN
 THE POST MORTEM OF THE FUTURE**

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Abstract:

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, through perceptive analysis of the text of Kalki surveys the tenets of the present civilization. The ills of the generation so evocatively put on the scanner hundred years ago revisit the minds of the reader. The present is analysed and demasked one century ago. The ideas bear an unmistakable contemporary relevance to the twenty first century and are demonstrative of the visionary faculties of Radhakrishnan. The paper traces the nuances of the study of Radhakrishnan by interlinking the reality and relevance of contemporary times.

Key Words: *Civilization, past, present, analysis, ills of the civilization, way forward.*

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the second President of India, assumed the highest office with a spectacular heterogeneous heritage of a teacher, philosopher, thinker, scholar, orator, writer, patriot, educationist, statesman, administrator, diplomat and above all a universal human being. The impact of Radhakrishnan on the world of ideas and words has been phenomenal. His remarkable success as a philosopher lies in his deft unravelling of the obscure layers of the knowledge of philosophy, religion and spiritualism and the threading of the idea of ultimate reality with clarity; mastery of the classical texts of the Hindu and Western philosophy and his first hand exposition of the complicated thoughts. The synthesis he had initiated in the thoughts of the East and the West is a unique achievement. Bertrand Russell spoke glowingly about him: "It is an honour to Philosophy that Dr. Radhakrishnan should be President of a great country such as the Republic 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 it should make a philosopher her President." His incisive capture of the ultimate reality and faith in the abiding human values led him to write numerous books. Dr. S. Gopal comments, "A study of philosophy was to him not an exposition of past and present systems of thought or dialectical thinking about thinking but the reasoned adoption of a way of life, which included the contemplative urge to the knowledge of reality and the practical impulse to weave that knowledge into life. Philosophy assumed a living character only when there was this striving to invest life with significance: 'Every human life should become a poem.' When Plato had said that philosopher should be kings, he had had in mind not the making of laws and the solutions of political problems but the philosophic temper of mind, the exalted, calm, noble, dispassionate attitude, unmoved by motives of personal gain, ambition or power, which alone could solve such problems. Philosophy was not a speciality but an integration of specialities and the philosopher, 'travelling in truth and protected by honest thought, ever alive in mind to the ways of spirit', provided the reflection on life's problems." Thus his writings voice the concerns of the civilization, devotion to the society and political empathy.

Kalki or the Future of Civilization (1929) of Radhakrishnan was one of the books published in "Today and Tomorrow", a popular series on the themes of futurology, in which authors like Bertrand Russell, Haldane, Liddell Hart and Gerald Heard wrote books selecting symbols drawn from mythology. This text was an extended form of his lectures given at the International Congress of Philosophy in Harvard University. In Hindu mythology, *Kalki* is the name of the last avatar that is expected to descend when the

world approaches the levels of degeneration. The book is marked for its commentary on the perils of technology, its incisive discussion on the ways to tide over the crisis of the civilization, presentation of the threats, the diagnosis of the symptoms of the disease that has set into the present civilization and mandatory agenda for the reconstruction of the human society. The ideas even though enunciated in the twenties of twentieth century bear an unmistakable contemporary relevance to the twenty first century and are demonstrative of the visionary faculties of Radhakrishnan.

Radhakrishnan observes that the present civilization is at the threshold of one of its periodic crises with restlessness, uncertainty, dissatisfaction, confusion and unstable enthusiasm as its symptoms. He sees the rapid, wide ranging and lateral progress of the science as one of the main factors for the onset of crisis. He says, "If we take an animal out of its normal environment and thrust it into another, it is bound to feel restless and uneasy until it adjusts itself to the new situation. When the Bishop of Ripon suggested a scientific holiday for a short period of time, he meant to warn us that, while science is progressing pretty fast furnishing us with new inventions, man, the user of them, is not refining him at an equal rate." The outward uniformity of the world with all the signs of modernization stretching across the globe has not resulted in the inner unity, clarity, harmony and happiness. Maxim Gorky says: "Yes, we are taught to fly in the air like birds, and to swim in the water like fishes, but how to live on the earth we do not know." Today the foundations are shaking and there is an impression of dissolution in the air. Hence, future civilization has to lift itself to have a universal vision of man and human life. Radhakrishnan forecasts the victory of mechanical inventions in the future civilization and desires the preparation for spiritual unity.

Radhakrishnan was dismayed at the erosion of foundations of the religion due to onslaught of sciences like psychology, sociology, biology and anthropology. People who profess religious beliefs and principles are perceived to be inside mental hospitals. He says, "Stories of the supernatural are but fairy tales of the world's childhood. The textbooks of the past are not of much help in solving the problems of the present. Any attempt to interpret ancient scriptures to suit modern demands may show reverence for the past but not intellectual honesty." There was divided opinion about the presence and believability of god. Many people in every religion want to have the comforts of the religion without the discomfort of thinking and as a result, they are all converting themselves into blind faith. Some others, in search of spiritual freedom seek refuge in excessive individualism and some, in naturalism and some more, in scepticism and negation. Radhakrishnan rues that the confusion continues by extending the rule of disorder of belief.

Radhakrishnan attributes the lax standards of family life to disorganization brought about by the world war, late marriages because of economic conditions, and the passion for self-expression, diluted parental control, inadequate sex education, Freudian influence and the methods of birth control. He observes that the women are refusing to obey a code of conduct different from the men. He paints the reality: "The ideal of virginity which the men persuaded the women to accept has largely lost its hold. Women as much men, we are told, are wayward creatures full of roving passions who prefer romance to routine. They are insisting with great force and much success on being not our superiors or inferiors but our equals in constancy as well as in inconstancy. Sexual licence is an old habit, as old as the human race, but we justify it by giving it a new name, self-expression. Looseness is commended in good fiction and accepted in high society. The woman who 'sins' because of economic necessity is being driven out of the business by the amateur intent on indulging her cravings while preserving her conscience. Many 'sin' not so much out of passion as owing to a feeling that a married woman ought to have lovers. Sexual promiscuity is getting to be regarded in some circles as a social duty. Since social rules happen to be favourable to men and unfavourable to women, most of the latter do not want to be bound by them. Economic independence with freedom from the ties of marriage and the responsibilities of motherhood is the ambition of many a young woman of the growing 'smart set'. Divorces are increasing in numbers and children are pushed back and forth between the parents whose only communications with each other are through their solicitors." Radhakrishnan captures the divergence between ideals and practicality and says that while polygamy is

illegal and at the same time its practice is real. There is no purpose served in dwelling on the high mountains of idealism. People want to live their life completely, beautifully, adventurously and taste the cup of life before death snatches it away. For them there is no need for repression and concealment of their thoughts and desires. To them moral restraint is an old hat and piety, a blind belief. Established institutions and systems of practice are perceived to be the enemies of the present civilization which have to be brought down to unveil a new order.

Economic individualism and rapid industrialisation made the life of man easier and offered him plenty of leisure. However, Radhakrishnan opines that the monotonous mechanical processes have robbed the mystery, beauty and reverence of skill and the artisan has become a mechanic and a tool for voluminous production. Now, the workers seek their pleasure outside the work. Instead of using the leisure for higher goals, the workers drench their souls in pubs and cabarets. Through labour human beings are expected to follow fellowship and cultivate the well-being of all and in rest they are required to know their self and at worship, they are enjoined with others to become aware of the spirit and purpose of the universe. Radhakrishnan forthrightly expresses his observations and grasps the contemporary picture: "Today labour is a means of isolating man from man and deadening his social instincts; rest is used for blinding the eyes of the mind and worship, for coarsening the spiritual fibre by the acceptance of lower values. We are unable to bear loneliness. It is sheer desolation to be left alone in labour, rest or worship. We must work in factories, enjoy in crowds, go out in parties, sin in company, and worship in congregations. Quiet evenings at home, solitary walks in the country, the cultivation of spirit and meditation seem to be boring. Ours is truly a sleepless generation."

Radhakrishnan candidly says that money and wealth production is the most popular industries. One of the disastrous consequences of the industrialisation is the collapse of home and the evaporation of family ties. He castigates the present industrial environment and its catastrophic ramifications: "An industrial age believes in the creation of new wants. The consumer's appetite grows by what it feeds on. To want more, and to get more, is the way of material progress. By means of this exciting competition, we are concealing from ourselves the barrenness of life. Our machine age caters for the general needs of the public to the exclusion of the individual whims. Art goes to the wall."

Radhakrishnan sees a testing time for democracy. The working of democracy is not satisfactory and it has become mechanical and titular. The elected representatives have no conscience and conviction and they participate in unreal discussions and unnecessary debates. He analyses, "Democracy has become confused with ignorance, lack of discipline, and low tastes. Our newspapers testify to them. A democracy, which reads mainly about divorces and murders, dance halls and police courts, is cultured only in a superficial sense. Though educational facilities are within the reach of large numbers, the level of culture is not high. It has become more easy to get into college and more difficult to get educated. We are taught to read but not trained to think. Popular education, thanks also to the Press, the film, and the wireless, has succeeded in furnishing the average mind scrappily, though somewhat effectively, with ill-digested bits of Freud and Jung, Behaviourism and contraception, and various odds and ends. Those who know better are afraid to speak out but keep step with the average mind. Uncriticized mass impulses, crowd-emotions and class-resentment have taken the place of authority and tradition. As the mass is the most significant factor, its opinions prevail over those of the thinking few." Political equality is hollow when there is no economic equality. The political life is reliant on the independence of mind and the will to allow it. Unfortunately, in the present set up this seems to be an unavoidable impossibility. Radhakrishnan suggests that there should be a better method to conduct the human affairs than the lottery of the ballot box.

The international scenario is no different with nations clamouring for peace on one side and practicing war on the other. Nationalism reached a new height with the dangerous ambition to lead the humanity. It is symbolized by the waving of flags, blowing of bugles, songs of patriotism and hymns of hate. Radhakrishnan looks at the war hungry ways of the slave leaders. He comments, "Reasonable men

are turned into will-less slaves. When the trumpet of war blows, the pretences of civilization disappear and man helplessly reels back into the beast. War with its devastated fields and ruined cities, with its millions of dead and more millions of maimed and wounded, its broken-hearted and defiled women and its starved children bereft of their natural protection, its hate and atmosphere of lies and intrigue is an outrage on all that is human. So long as this devil-dance does not disgust us, we cannot pretend to be civilized. It is no good preventing cruelty to animals and building hospitals for the sick and poorhouses for the destitute so long as we are willing to mow down masses of men by machine-guns and poison non-combatants, including the aged and the infirm, women and children and all for what? For the glory of God and the honour of the nation." Radhakrishnan wants the growth of the internationalism with a soul rather than a superficial and mechanical framework with selfish nationalist working in the garb.

Radhakrishnan, after the study of the negative traits of the civilization, proceeds to present the problem in a proper perspective. He says that criticism or commendation of a civilization is solely dependent on its soul and scale of values. He draws from the Hindu and Greek thought in presenting the human body as triple mixture of body, mind and spirit. The body takes on the animalistic, the vegetable ancestry, and some mental faculties point to the relationship with the animal world whereas spiritual aspirations separate and elevate the human being to a different level. Since ages, this spiritual longing manifested itself in multitudinous forms of raw superstition and myth, polished systems of philosophical thought and ethical procedures. Radhakrishnan declares that the community, which accords greater importance to mind than body, is higher in scale and desires that the amassed knowledge should be used for the higher self than the bare physical needs. He reads the situation: "The sort of mental life which prevails is at a low level. Emotional thrills and intellectual sensations, aesthetic occupations and mental excitements attract us and not deep appreciation of great literature and noble art. Mechanical plots, detective stories, cross-word puzzles allure and amuse us." Drawing extensively on the history of the civilizations, Radhakrishnan puts forth his conception of civility in a civilization and finds fault with the varying perceptions of it. He explains the paradox without mincing the words: "Civilization seems to be as ancient as savagery. We regard the Eskimo, the Red Indian, the Basuto, and the Fiji Islander as barbarous, simply because they had not risen to our conception of civil society with its schools and hospitals, law courts and police stations, but undoubtedly, they exhibit an individuality in their modes of life, customs, and beliefs as much as the advanced Greeks and Romans or even the British and the Germans of today. We cannot call them savage or barbarian simply because their social organization was different, their knowledge of nature narrow, and their appliances crude. Even today, we tend to regard politically backward nations as semi-civilized or semi-barbarian, on the assumption that the test of civilization is political success or economic prosperity or skill in the destruction of human beings. Japan came to be regarded as highly civilized when she fought and defeated Russia, though, on this assumption, the Tartars who overthrew the Sung dynasty and the barbarians who overran the Roman empire are also to be held up as models of civilized humanity. While the crude beginnings of civilization exist even in the most primitive communities, civilized societies have surviving in them a large mass of barbarism." Radhakrishnan further elucidates the point that civilization is internal and it can be found in our moral values, religious ideas and social outlook. He makes it clear: "We cannot call ourselves civilized simply because we use the steamship, and the railway, the telephone and the typewriter. A monkey trained to ride a bicycle, drink a glass, and smoke a pipe is still a monkey. Technical efficiency has little to do with moral development." Hence he concludes that the present civilization is still in the phase of economic barbarism and is concerned with world and its power than the soul and its perfection. He laments that education has not freed the present humanity from its psychological and intellectual bondage. This has led to lack of inner unity and mental lawlessness.

Radhakrishnan cites Dr. Alexander Irvine's explanation of the history of civilizations for the last six thousand years in terms of a clock metaphor and deduces that the civilizations which consumed their

energies on politics, patriotism, and mutual extermination have destroyed themselves either from within or from without. History was full of arrivals and departures of empires one after another in quick succession. Curiously, the survival of the Asiatic civilizations demonstrates the life-sustaining nature of human and spiritual values. In spite of the presence of wars and war mongers in their civilization, their love of the higher life and ideals alone made them survive the vagaries of time. Radhakrishnan sounds a warning when he says, "Empire after empire perished as the result of its ambition to impose its dominion on the whole globe, and civilization after civilization declined on account of spiritual bankruptcy. The author of a Hindu text *Vishnu Purana* asks us to take thought and expect the advent of the next Avatar, Kalki, when society reaches a stage where property alone confers rank, wealth becomes the only source of virtue, passion the sole bond of union between husband and wife, falsehood the source of success in life, sex the only means of enjoyment, and outer trappings are confused with inner religion. If the vulgar and barbarous ideal persists too long, our life will become clogged and our civilization will perish of its own weight. The facts are clear and the laws of history are pitiless. They leave us no choice."

Yet Radhakrishnan assures that there is no need for despondency and panic. The arrival of man on this planet is recent and there is plenty of time ahead of the civilization to adjust, recover and march on. The prospect for humanity is tremendous and exciting. A straightforward analysis and an open criticism of the civilization are mandatory for the proposed reconstruction and recovery. Under the umbrella of reconstruction, Radhakrishnan re-examines the aspects of religion, family life, economics, politics and international relations and offers his explanation. He deliberates elaborately on religion and its role in human relations.

Religion

Radhakrishnan sees the inescapability of humanity from religion and its need to be in touch with the unseen reality. The only recourse is devising fresh concepts to capture the universal truths, which are in agreement with modern knowledge and criticism. It has a double task of weeding out the tyranny of the tradition on the one side and avoiding the confusion of disruptive subjectivity on the other. Radhakrishnan sees no wrong in the diversity of religions and calls for exchange of transforming ideas among the religions. He further says that in the matters of spirit, each one must follow the lead of his own conscience and one must go on a self-correction path until he or she achieves the realization of the truth. He avers, "The religion of the future must be a comprehensive one embracing within its scope all those who are religious-minded in sentiment, allowing them full liberty so far as creeds and thought-pictures are concerned. For religion is not so much a theory of the supernatural as an attitude of spirit, a temper of mind. The essence of all spirituality is the greatness of soul, which is unconquered even in overwhelming catastrophe...Religion, is not mere good form. The consolations, which are cheaply won, are not truly religious. To look upon life as an uninterrupted pursuit of enjoyment is the mark of irreligion. Suffering is not an accidental accompaniment of life, but is central to it. In pain and travail all high achievement is wrought. The end of life is not pleasure (*preyas*) but the realization of the good (*sreyas*). A life of joy and the joy of life are not the same. If suffering leads us to the fulfilment of our ideal, it is as much happiness as a life of pleasure is. The most poignant pain can be joyously accepted if it is recognized as contributory to the realization of one's ideals." Radhakrishnan lays stress on internal transformation and cultivation of moral fibres for the strengthening of the civilization. Man has to evolve from time to time at every step keeping the higher ideal in view and it would be a journey of 'acceptance and adventure'. He observes, "The modern revolt against conventional morals is a sign of the quickening of conscience. Changes in the moral codes are generally brought about by a few individuals who throw aside their prejudices and get at the reality, which is much bigger and finer than our conventions make us believe. Every moral reformer is an immoral force in the eyes of the conservative who prefer the comfortable sloth of conventional morality to the alarming activity of reflective intelligence. For morality is nothing else but the current brand of social custom, and anyone who insists on doing differently is immoral, though his immorality acquires ethical value in the next

generation and becomes part of the tradition in another. At any one period, we always have a few who are in advance of the highest self-conception of the time and some behind it, while a large number are about it. The first are the rebels, the second the criminals, and the last the normal individuals. All progress is due to the rebels.”¹⁸

Family Life

Radhakrishnan treats the physical, vital, mental, emotional, aesthetic and ethical aspects of human life as necessary and sacred. He advises that the man should not neglect the vital self of the body and starve it. He terms the sex act as sacramental for the construction of a perfect marriage and as an outward sign of an inward grace. Analysing the ideals of family life and marriage, he argues, “Marriage as a form of life means joy as much as suffering. Divorces are due to a false idea that marriage is but a state of bliss and, when anything interferes with it, it must be ended. They are not generally due to infidelity and sexual errancy of either partner but to disharmony of temper and different preferences of life.” Family life and children should be seen as gateway to a higher life. The unnatural and abnormal tendency of the recent times to neglect and ignore the love and care of the children is avoidable if they are considered as the bridges to the future generation. Radhakrishnan despises the trend of State nurseries for the care of the children.

However, Radhakrishnan, on the aspect of sexual licentiousness, adds that both rigid and loose marriage codes are irresponsible. He calls for levelling up rather than levelling down in man and woman relations and demands that men should lift themselves up to the level of women. He expresses his farsighted observations, “The new knowledge has freed women from the penalties which have been theirs throughout the ages, but this new freedom and knowledge, however dangerous, cannot wreck us so long as we face the facts with faith and courage. It is quite true that in the transition period we may have undesirable results. Modern schoolgirls are more alive to the development of the sex life than those of the previous generations are. Their professions of modernity shock the puritans. In colleges and schools where co-education prevails, there are incitements to impropriety.” He advises careful grooming of the individual before allowing him or her into the domain of freedom of marriage and sex so that self-discipline comes automatically and warns that the marriages should not be taken lightly and carelessly. He condemns the ultra-modern marriage which last only an hour as 'ludicrous'.

Economic Relations, Politics and International Relations

While discussing the economic affairs of the new machine civilization, Radhakrishnan recommends cautious and careful handling of the machines and warns against becoming slaves to them. Workers should attach a society centred attitude to their work. He says that wealth shall not be the sole object but cultivation of mind for peace and freedom shall aid the progress of the humanity. He expresses, “Science helps us to get rid of the squalor and bareness of lives and attain leisure but let us learn to use our leisure in the proper way. Right education can help us here.” Radhakrishnan looks at democracy as an ideal rather than technical procedure or practice and says that it has succeeded in many countries because it is not true democracy. By treating the inequality as a natural trait of human beings, he shreds the fallacy that democracy will erase them but affirms that equality of opportunity is a sound social ideal. He wants constant effort and education to realize the ideals of democracy.

Elaborating his stand on international relations as a part of his reconstructive effort, Radhakrishnan calls for the cultivation of universal unity and fellowship and removal of misunderstanding and pseudo-patriotism. He mentions that the world peace does not depend on signed documents and paper conventions, economic treaties and political combinations but on the confluence of conscience of minds and their exchange of culture, knowledge and ideals. He wants a shift in a nation's war psychology and demands oneness of mind. He observes, “After all, the author of the universe has not made mankind a homogeneous whole. He has made the nations of different races. But there is an easier and more reasonable way of merging national aims in a higher synthesis and international endeavour.” He moots the idea of

either world-dominion or world-commonwealth to achieve unity of the world and accepts national freedom as an indispensable prerequisite for unflinching international cooperation. Peace can reign among equal partners only.

Towering above all the thinkers of the twentieth century he succeeded in bringing the abstractions of religion and philosophy to the vistas of the common mind. He was particularly noted for harmonizing eastern and western thought, his perceptive knowledge of humanity, advocacy of universal religion and modern outlook. Radhakrishnan was a fine human being who transferred all that had been good in the past a remedies to the suffering humanity. His thoughts wrapped in simple words kindled the fire of mind and offer succour to the needy. Dr. S. Gopal rightly says, "His lifelong search for insight was a voyage of discovery of himself, a penetration of the depth of his own nature; but he had sharpened this insight from whatever outside sources available, evolved his own spirituality by applying it to everyday life, and transmitted it to those who would also apply it in their own way and learn from it."

A superb master of prose, Radhakrishnan, by his dexterous handling of English language made the English envious. It is impossible to paraphrase his ideas as he had already selected the right word to express his thoughts and no other word could so lucidly express the idea as his. In *Kalki or the Future of Civilization*, Radhakrishnan stands out as a universal visionary who has captured the pulse of the civilization and has projected the human picture in all its true colours. The organization, the analysis and the reconstruction of the book establishes Radhakrishnan as a practical philosopher. The book was marked out as a great prose work because of its use of logical perceptions of the human psyche. As the central character in his writing is humanity, his enunciation of permanently transitory ideas like religion, marriage, creative abilities, democracy, politics, war and peace, social beliefs or psychology transcend the physical boundaries of the nation. His discourse aims at making a good human being and his ideas whether they are of 1920's or 1960's act as antidotes to the widespread maladies of the civilization. Consequently his writing is not authoritative but reflects his universal outlook simultaneously mirroring the present in all hues crystallized a hundred years ago. "Readability is the unfailing characteristic of everything written or spoken by Dr. Radhakrishnan through the half-a-century and more of his working life. But he achieves this quality, not at the expense of depth of thought or accuracy of expression or the recourse to any popular devices of rhetoric, humour or oversimplification. He combined profundity of thought with lucidity of exposition and emphasis of statement with elegant expression."

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