

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN: THE NARRATIVE OF EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND NEW EDUCATION IN INDIA

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Abstract

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's (1888-1975) thoughts display a phenomenal sweep from philosophy to literature, spiritualism to politics, economics to administration, and society to culture. In the present century, divergent knowledge traditions, split into binaries of Western enlightenment aesthetics on the one hand, and emerging cultural philosophies of the Global South, on the other, invite provocative reflections on the foundations of knowledge traditions as known to us. While the traditional disciplines of literature and philosophy have significant role to play in shaping civilizational changes, it may be relevant, at this juncture, to reassess the dialogues between the two disciplines by (re)reading thinkers such as Radhakrishnan. The will to effect changes in the domain of knowledge, the will to intervene in structuring and restructuring the boundaries of education, is the remarkable characteristic of Radhakrishnan's thoughts.

The present study is based on a close reading of the reflective notes of Radhakrishnan along the broad themes of educational philosophy, proposing new educational systems for the country, and initiating reforms. His contribution to developing an ideal educational system for India remains valuable to this date. This study focuses on three texts of Radhakrishnan – “Educational Reform” (1927), “Spiritual Freedom and the New Education” (1936), and the “University Education Commission Report” (1948-1949) of 1950. Radhakrishnan's deep engagement with the synchronicity of knowledge traditions, combining both the Western as well as the Eastern intellectual territories are highlighted in his thoughts and writings. The texts also open a dialogic space helping us to situate Radhakrishnan as a reformist, whose thoughts on pedagogy and education are significant in the contemporary times. Individual

freedom, cultural responsibilities, and the openness to knowledge are the tropes in these texts.

Keywords: Radhakrishnan, inclusive notion of knowledge, educational reform, spiritual freedom and new education.

Dialogic Knowledge Systems and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan

To offset the invading course of low materialist ideals, the ideals of Indian education should be changed. The modern educated Indian is a false copy of his Western contemporary. His voice is an echo, his life a quotation, his soul a brain, and his free spirit a slave to things. (Radhakrishnan 1918: 203-204)

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan's (1888-1975) writings and his thoughts display a phenomenal sweep from philosophy to literature, spiritualism to politics, and society to culture. This paper focuses on a close reading of his select speeches and writings. The study primarily deals with his conceptualization of an ideal education for India and the world. Through a close reading of his rare texts such as "Educational Reform" (1927), "Spiritual freedom and the New Education" (1936), and with an analysis of University Education Commission report of December 1948 to August 1949 (chaired under Radhakrishnan), the attempt here is to creatively understand the language and ethos of a developing educational scenario. This paper opens with a quote from Radhakrishnan's critical study entitled *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1918), based on his assessment of Tagore's (1861-1941) literary and cultural contributions. His discussion of Tagore's keen insight into literary traditions, combined with the latter's penetrating vision of the knowledge-routes of east and west is based on this model of ideal education and human values. Radhakrishnan's writings, speeches, as well as reports may prove to be rich literary records of the country. The fast changing nature of discourses of the contemporary Global South with altering individual and cultural values, dealing with sustainability and survival issues of the existing academic systems, have ignored the contributions of thinkers and public intellectuals such as Radhakrishnan. His thoughts have an important place in the critical nexus of academic disciplines. Hirendranath Mukherjee's article following the death of Radhakrishnan in 1975, spoke of this glorious connection of philosophy to literature, and politics to pragmatic commitments:

When Oxford tried belatedly to make up for an earlier (and imperialist-motivated) indifference to Rabindranath Tagore by sending three of its

distinguished alumni to Shantiniketan with the scroll of an honorary doctorate, it was appropriate that Radhakrishnan did the honours. The very first book that Radhakrishnan had published, when barely 30, was on *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* (1918) and he had grown to be the poet's successor, so to speak, as India's first cultural ambassador to the world (Mukerjee 2007: "The Reminiscences of Radhakrishnan").

Radhakrishnan's commitment towards building an educational platform for the country and the world was based on a thought that proposed moving from a British only structure (focusing on Western knowledge traditions with an excessive emphasis on English language learning), to a dialogic model that intended to bridge Eastern and Western knowledge systems. His model of education was based on a proposal for technological advancement balanced by a creative, spiritual and philosophical approach.

The texts such as "Educational Reform" (1927), "Spiritual Freedom and the New Education" (1936) and the University Education Commission report (1950) span across three significant timelines underscoring moments of pre- and post- Independence India. The texts were delivered during important eras of world history; "Educational Reform" was delivered prior to the Economic Depression of 1929; "Spiritual Freedom and the New Education" was delivered prior to World War-II; and the University Education report was a major official text drafted after Indian independence. Radhakrishnan's ideal educational scenario is perhaps more relevant in the contemporary times as one engages in a reflective reading of his thoughts and his writings.¹

The challenges of reading philosophers like Radhakrishnan are obvious; how does one approach the thoughts without losing oneself in the halo of canonical reputation, political ramifications, and at the risk of offending an existing body of scholarship?² When Radhakrishnan became the President of India in 1962, the leading philosopher of the time Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) in his congratulatory message wrote:

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 (quoted in Murty and Vohra 1990: 154).

Russell had indicated at the promise of having a philosopher-president with a strong vision for the young new educated citizens of a country. Dhirendra Mohan Datta (1898-1974), in the Presidential lecture entitled "The Contribution of Modern Indian Philosophy to

World Philosophy” (1948) at the Philosophical Review symposium, paid a tribute to the aspect of “play” of Western and Eastern metaphysical thoughts of Radhakrishnan:

Sir S. Radhakrishnan, the most renowned philosopher of modern India, is an advocate of the idealistic view of life... Unlike most Western idealists and theologians, but like Sankara, he [Radhakrishnan] holds, however, that though the Absolute is the logical preyas of the world, creation is not necessary. “It is not necessary for the Absolute to express any of its possibilities. If this possibility is expressed, it is a free act of the Absolute.” Following Sankara’s distinction between Param Brahma and Isvara, Radhakrishnan also makes a distinction between the impersonal Absolute and the personal God, the creator of the world (Datta 1948: 557).

The spirit of tradition³ and human values combined with Western rationality and scientific enquiry marks Radhakrishnan’s style of writing and sets the tone of his works. However, most of the present-day awareness or understanding of Radhakrishnan stems from two sketchy school textbook information about him: (a) as the second President of the Republic of India (from 1961-1967); (b) that we celebrate his “birthday” as “Teacher’s Day” in the country on 5th September every year. While celebrating the birthday of Radhakrishnan, a critical assessment of the contributions of the philosopher-President is pursued in facile ways in the academic spaces. These thinkers have survived as epic-past, remembered with deep reverence but with less study. Similar to Tagore, Radhakrishnan has not escaped the fate of being trapped in the halo of his greatness. His pragmatic approach towards education, along with the idealism of his philosophical thoughts, make him a radical thinker and a passionate observer of the everydayness of life.

In the next sections of this paper, we will focus on building a critical reading of the two essays (1927 and 1936) and the report (1950) that have supported our arguments in the context of Radhakrishnan’s educational philosophy.

Knowledge, Education, and Vocation in “Educational Reform” (May, 1927)

The approach to these essays is mostly in Radhakrishnan’s own words “intuitive” in nature.⁴ These lectures, essays, reports, and notes are drafted as more than mundane policy papers, designed to handle the needs of the growing “middle class” of 1920s and 1930s in a colonial set-up. These are mediums to experience a great journey of

educational cosmopolitanism. For Radhakrishnan in *An Idealist View of Life* (2009):

...this intuitive knowledge arises from an intimate fusion of mind with reality. It is knowledge by being and not by senses or by symbols. It is awareness of the truth of things by identity. We become one with the truth, one with the object of knowledge (Radhakrishnan 2009: 137).

While the ideals set by Radhakrishnan for the larger goals of knowledge are sublime, reflecting a pursuit for an “absolute truth”, the pragmatics associated with education of the masses were still replete with challenges and difficulties. The everydayness of these realities associated with imparting education to a larger number of people must have been a problem, difficult to be resolved either by philosophical reflections or by the immediate points of action for the philosopher and the teacher.

The essay “Educational Reform” was published in the April-June 1927 series of *The Calcutta Review*. It was initially delivered as a Presidential Address at the Second Annual Conference of the All-Bengal College and University Teachers’ Association, held on 3 April 1927. The essay is divided into reflective notes arranged in the following subsections: (a) neglect of the national ideal; (b) small proportion of literacy; (c) impatience with the past; (d) cultural inefficiency; (e) indifference to science; (f) unpractical character; (g) secondary education board; (h) university reform, followed by a concluding section. The subtitles of the essay signify Radhakrishnan’s deep discomfort with the education system of the Raj and the limitations of its critical insight into the practice of education and indigenous knowledge systems of the country. Radhakrishnan’s idea of “reform” demands a critical perspective. The *Oxford English Dictionary* treats reform as a “mass noun” which means, “the removal of faults or errors, esp. of a moral, political, or social kind; amendment, change for the better; reformation of character. A particular instance of this; an improvement made or suggested; a change for the better” (2007: 2507). In the context of Radhakrishnan’s essay, reform is a mass noun for educational reforms. By “reform” he refers to educational reform at both school and university levels in India (Radhakrishnan 1927: 151-153).

The essay primarily outlines Radhakrishnan’s approach towards the “new” policies of higher education adopted by the British government, where there is a perceivable neglect of the ideals of nationhood and a deliberate undermining of India’s philosophical and cultural strength – through a constant “lesson that ‘India has

failed” (Radhakrishnan 1927: 144). The essay delineates clear foundations for education and focuses on the necessities of the new educated youth, working under the demands of the Raj. Consider the following argument and a stern criticism of the British government’s educational policy that is provided in the section entitled “Neglect of the National Ideal”:

The educational policy of the Government has been restricted in aim and scope. While it has succeeded in training men into efficient but docile tools of an external authority, it has not helped them to become self-respecting citizens of a free nation. Love of one’s native land is the basis of all progress. This principle is recognized in all countries. But in our unfortunate country it is the other way. A conquered race feels its heart sink. It loses hope, courage and confidence (Radhakrishnan 1927: 144).

In the essay Radhakrishnan has voiced differences with the British government regarding the deliberate practice of undermining the confidence of new educated Indian youth in the name of academic, racial and cultural elitism. In this context, it may be noted that these were the formative years of the division between primary and secondary school educational systems in India. Radhakrishnan mentions about the “provincial” authority of Ministers over the subject of education (Radhakrishnan 1927: 143). This idea of provincial authority implied that there was hardly any control of the “central” authorities of the Raj over the way education was imparted in schools and colleges. According to a study by C. M. Ramachandran entitled *Problems of Higher Education in India: A Case Study* (1987), the Government of India Act of 1919 divided subjects of administration into two categories; “reserved” and “transferred” subjects (Ramachandran 1987: 73). Education came as a subject under the “transferred” category, located as a part of Provincial administration of the British government.

This division between local education and national ideal is strongly critiqued by Radhakrishnan in the essay. Ramachandran recounts these early years of serious flux and new methods of dealing with the changing educational scenario of India, which had Radhakrishnan as an active agent of change. He discusses about the focus on teaching in universities instead of an emphasis on research. However, Radhakrishnan in his thoughts regarding educational philosophy for India speaks about counterbalancing research with teaching, while he was supporting the ideals of creating teaching specific and research specific institutions. Radhakrishnan elaborates

the role of the Michael Sadlar committee's (1917) recommendation to divide school examinations from the university control and set up an independent Board of Secondary Education for overseeing the secondary school examinations (Radhakrishnan 1927: 149-150). The committee suggested that teaching universities should confine themselves only to education at undergraduate and postgraduate level, while intermediate examinations should be shifted to Education Boards (Radhakrishnan 1927: 150). Ramchandran mentions about the outcome of these recommendations. They were mostly adhered by the newly established Dacca and Allahabad universities, while Panjab, Bombay, and Madras universities did not accept the recommendations. They continued with the tradition of school and higher education under one examination system conducted by the universities (Ramachandran 1987: 74).

He mentions about the challenges of executing the Secondary School Board Examination system, recommended by Sadlar Committee (149-150). Specifically, because of the challenges of a divided board examination system to be held under universities and under secondary school examination, the gap between the educated class itself is deemed to widen. The lack of uniformity due to the constant pull of controlling authorities, he names it "social glamour" about university examination, creates hindrance and destroys uniformity of examinations. Radhakrishnan's concern about school education and the necessity of governments to be perceptive about the quality of education is clearly discernible in the essay: "it is quite true that the Universities have little do with schools in other countries but we have to remember that while Universities grew out of secondary schools everywhere else, that reverse process operated in India" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 150). He is clearly in favour of demarcating university education from school education and investing authority to schools as a preparatory ground for university education. He writes about providing the Boards an "absolute autonomy" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 151).

Further in this essay, Radhakrishnan builds an argument to support an "inclusive" notion of knowledge and pedagogic thoughts. Bordering on an extreme anxiety of the necessity to propagate the ideals of "nationhood", the tone of the essay oscillates between an urgency of protecting the nationalist ideal on the one hand and weeding out the tendentious nature of "sectional" biases on the other. He concludes the section with a strong aphorism: "we cannot keep afloat or win through to port, if there be mutiny aboard or if one man's hand is turned against another's. Communal warfare is another name for national suicide" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 145).

Radhakrishnan may have been referring to the violent Calcutta communal riots of July 1926 in this essay, when he proposes that education is the only means of curbing communalism. He notes that the masses are devoid of education or its benefits and therefore resort to extreme means: "Our masses bear on their faces marks of physical and mental degradation arising from economic distress and lack of education. They have lost their grip on life and are mostly dispirited and sentimental. In their drab lives, any excitement is welcome" (Radhakrishnan 1927:145). One cannot help but note the contemporary significance of Radhakrishnan's words in the times of multiple agitations and violent uprisings. The idea of "literacy" versus the idea of "education" emerges as predominant thread in these sections of the essay. According to Radhakrishnan, while "literacy" fulfils the bare minimum requirement of making the mass read and write, education serves greater purposes of making 'thinking' and 'questioning' individuals.

A subtle sense of humour pervades Radhakrishnan's thoughts on educational reforms. For instance, "poorly paid Pandits who devote two or three hours a week to teach 'Indian thought' systems to young, impressionable minds" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 145), highlights the precariousness of education as well as brings a humour to the economic helplessness of the educational discourse. The lack of coherence in research, as well as fragmented organization of research ideas and teaching notes, remain a pervasive issue. Radhakrishnan clearly notes this incoherent organization and declining commitment towards designing high quality teaching methods:

The old and the new are jumbled together in our minds without any order or unity. We repeat ancient texts in answer to modern problems. The living faith of the dead has become the dead faith of the living (Radhakrishnan 1927: 145).

This "impatience" with the cultural and philosophical "past" of India has led to a phobic approach towards understanding of "Indian thought" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 145). Radhakrishnan can be appallingly close and animatedly "real" to the contemporary times. He exhorts us to pursue a "critical investigation" into the nature of religion that can change fanatic adherence to religious principles, into a more discerning and "discriminating insight" (Radhakrishnan 1927: 146). There are two major reforms that are being suggested by the thinker: (a) inclusion of Indian thought encompassing a reading of spiritual and religious philosophy of the subcontinent and (b) an emphasis on building a robust scientific and technological community. Radhakrishnan's thoughts indicate

the possibility of incorporating religious studies as a part of critical discourses of existing knowledge traditions. The “openness” to learn and to accept “new ideas” in lieu of “rigidity of mind” forms the core of his discussions in the essay. He proposes the need for giving up “intellectual timidity”, constrictions, and “fear in thinking” so as to open new vistas of learning, exploring new terrains of knowledge. His idealism encompasses both religious and secular knowledge traditions.

In addition to Indian thought systems, Radhakrishnan makes another significant division to understand technological studies vis-à-vis vocational education. He argues that the colleges specifically trained students in the vocation of “law” and “public service” which was the chosen profession of university students of India to enter into the government administrative machineries. He does mention with certain anguish in the tone of his speech, that Indian graduate students are relegated to Clerk position in the government of India jobs of the time (Radhakrishnan 1927: 148). He speaks of the demands of an “open market” system which needs highly trained technologists and master engineers (Radhakrishnan 1927: 148). Universities and colleges need to prepare their workshops and classrooms to provide opportunities and cater to the demands of training these technologists. The argument that is primarily made in support of increasing expenditure on education with a focus on technological studies:

...is to divert the intelligentsia from dreams of anarchism and bolshevism. A bold effort of a large scale to apply the brain-power of the country to the natural resources has to be made immediately if the increasing economic restlessness and consequent political disorder are to be averted in any appreciable degree (Radhakrishnan 1927: 149).

In the essay, Radhakrishnan seems to have already perceived an impending world economic gloom that was looming large on both the colonized as well the colonizer during that era. He does emphasize that changing the entire education machinery to cater to the demands of the new age may not solve the problems at hand. He firmly emphasizes the need to adapt, rework and rebuild upon the existing system, so that citizens are trained to achieve the aims of “self-government” as soon as possible. It is difficult not to agree with Radhakrishnan on these premises or to provide critical alternatives to his thoughts on educational philosophy. One of the first visits of Radhakrishnan as the President of India was to the convocation of the College of Engineering (renamed as Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee), and later in 1962 to the newly

set up Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (Manchanda 2008: 116). The dreams of technological university systems of high repute are realized through these philosophical lenses of Radhakrishnan in early writings as in “Educational Reform”. The idea of separation between humanities and technology perhaps must have emerged in the later times as limited and myopic perspectives towards the interconnected nature of knowledge, education, and vocation. When education is misinterpreted as just vocational training, these short-sighted vision of the university systems are “manufactured” in order to “manufacture consent”.⁵

Radhakrishnan clearly spells out the “reform” of university systems with a typology of experts who ought to be guiding the system. With a sense of finality, he ascertains: “We should endeavour in every way to free the University from Government control and interference. It does not matter whether the Government is British or Indian, bureaucratic or democratic” (Radhakrishnan 1927: 152). The essay ends with an agency and autonomy that is granted to the individual faculty member who brings his own personality, learning, education and tolerance towards oppositions as a part of his approach towards pedagogy and learning. He says that “best men of the country will have to be attracted to the profession of teaching” (Radhakrishnan 1927: 153).

The pragmatic and astute observation of an administrator comes to the fore when Radhakrishnan asserts that unless teachers are provided “with adequate salaries and reasonable security of tenure” (Radhakrishnan 1927:153) they will not be able to give their best to the university learning systems. Consequently, he proposed a raise of Rs 150 from Rs 100 as the salary of a university lecturer of 1927. This text written in 1926 is a manifestation of his work in the early years of his Professorship at the Calcutta University. The same year Radhakrishnan had represented Calcutta University in the Congress of the universities of British Empire in June 1926 and later at the International Congress of Philosophy at Harvard in September 1926.

Freedom of Spirit and Intellect in “Spiritual Freedom and the New Education” (September-October 1936)

Radhakrishnan’s “Spiritual Freedom and New Education” was published in *New Era in Home and School*, XVII, 1936. It was originally delivered as a lecture on August 3 1936 at the 7th World Conference of Education held at Cheltenham, England. This brief essay (just four pages in length) is significant because of its approach towards the grand ideals of freedom, based on cosmopolitanism of a Sophist

tradition. Radhakrishnan's cosmopolitanism provides agency to the individual, and highlights the role of an educator in bringing necessary changes in the home and the world.

In this essay of Radhakrishnan the focus is on the freedom of the spirit and the intellect. It is the *infinite* that is of greater interest to him than the finite, limited world of sensory perceptions. The philosopher, the idealist, and the educator are in a state of playful dialogue in this essay. He does focus on the freedom of "physical existence" in the essay, which is termed as a "necessity": "Freedom of the body: the right of every man to have the necessities of physical existence; these things must be granted" (Radhakrishnan 1936: 233). He goes on to say that the physical world has the space to accommodate every man and woman's material "happiness". Then, what stops people from achieving that material happiness? The answer is that there is a "lack of will" and that "greed and selfishness of the individual" are the only reasons that are "standing in the way of providing all people with the necessary conditions of physical existence" (Radhakrishnan 1936: 233).

The need for freedom is a fundamental aspect of human existence. However, he does go beyond the physical conditions of freedom of existence in its *finite* sense and looks at the unity of the individual *self* with the entire world:

So long as you confuse a human being with a physical or intellectual being, you look at the outward; you think that he is a selfish atom; you think that social obligations will have to be imposed upon him by force. You will never recognize that there is an element in human nature which makes him one with the whole world. You therefore justify dictatorships so long as you do not admit the reality of something besides the physical and the intellectual (Radhakrishnan 1936: 233-234).

It is evident that Radhakrishnan divides freedom into categories of physical, intellectual, and spiritual. It is the third category that he insists and demands for critical scrutiny. In the context of spiritual freedom as approached by Radhakrishnan, the philosopher, one cannot help but refer back to Sri Aurobindo and Tagore's ideas of "spiritual freedom" (*The Ideal of Human Unity* 1999).⁶ It is to be noted that in a highly charged political era where freedom was synonymous with an "event" or a "moment", these thinkers could dwell upon and imagine freedom as a continuous process of the body and the soul. Sri Aurobindo speaks about this spiritual freedom:

Freedom comes by a unity without limits; for that is our real being. We may gain the essence of this unity in ourselves; we may realise the play of it in oneness with all others (Aurobindo 1997: 206).

In Sri Aurobindo, the evolution is phenomenological evolution of *man* through (as J.N. Mohanty states) a series of successive “emergent have been: matter, life, animal consciousness and human self-consciousness” (Mohanty 1993:153). The final emergent stage of self-consciousness is one of the highest ideals of human unity as Sri Aurobindo reflects in the corpus of his works. In the essay “The Problem of Self” in *Sadhana*, Tagore mentions: “Our life, like a river, strikes its banks not to find itself closed in by them, but to realize anew every moment that it has its unending opening towards the sea” (Tagore, 2010-2016: *Sadhana*, Tagore Web).

The interesting aspects of Tagore’s poetic spirit, Sri Aurobindo’s phenomenological thoughts, and Radhakrishnan’s ideas of “oneness” and “unity”, is the common thread of some kind of a quest for the “ideal”, that is beyond the reach of physical or social limitations. Does this search for an “ideal” freedom of the mind and the spirit, symbolize the style of high modernist writings of the twentieth century? Or does it reflect a need to connect to the “beyond” of narrow educational constraints for these thinkers, vying to be also identified as pragmatic men of the world? The answer is difficult to find. The “invisible” deep of the self appears to be the refuge of these thinkers.

Radhakrishnan provides a strong critique of “intellectualism” in this essay. He cautions against the traps of the excesses of both high scientific positivism (that was the trademark of the century) and the rising ‘cult-ness’ that may trap the “intellectually lazy”. He particularly cites the examples of Hitler Youth Camp and the Napoleonic wars to illustrate his arguments in this context:

The other day I read in the *London Times* of a Hitler Youth Camp. Replying to the reproach that his organization was godless, one of the youths said ‘One cannot be a good German and at the same time deny God. For us the service of Germany is the service of God. If we act as true Germans, we act according to the law of God. Whoever serves Germany serves God (Radhakrishnan 1936: 234).

He says, “all those things really indicate that men’s minds are confused, aspiring, not knowing what will satisfy them. That is what the present position is” (Radhakrishnan 1936: 233). Radhakrishnan’s approach to education in this context is clearly defined by his anxiety of the influence of the “powerful” (in the context of the paper it is the Hitler Youth Camp). This influence plays an unfortunate role of propagating certain type of education by taking unsuspecting minds into control and manipulating them as a means to an end.

At this juncture, it may be relevant to understand the idea of

“new education” and the role of the “educator”. He does not clearly outline the idea of new education. Through a reading of the paper, the idea of new education seems to exist as an exploration of what is available as a dialogue between the existing cosmopolitan knowledge traditions of the east and the west. He cites the examples of Buddha and Christ, of Socratic cosmopolitanism where through individual will, they could “transcend the narrow nationalistic conceptions” and could “consider themselves as members of a Kingdom of God with no restrictions” (Radhakrishnan 1936: 235). Education in this context is defined by Radhakrishnan as “spiritual freedom”, but with a sense of responsibility and care. The mind of children is impressionable. He says:

Children have a virginal outlook, a way of craving for some kind of fellowship with brother man. What we do with them? We take hold of them and tell them that Nazi Germany or the British Empire is the greatest thing which Providence has sent, and it is their duty to have their natural craving canalized into this particular channel.... We call ourselves educators. Have we any sense of what we are doing? (Radhakrishnan 1936: 235)

The need for self-reflexive educators, their moral and ethical agency as the negotiators of knowledge between the textbooks and these young minds come to the fore in this context. The anxiety of Radhakrishnan, the policy thinker, Radhakrishnan the philosopher, and Radhakrishnan the teacher is evident in this context.

The last argument brings to the closing thought of this section, which is “socialized individualism” as a possible solution to the larger problems of nation and education. It is difficult to figure out the exact source of Radhakrishnan’s thoughts, since there is no direct reference to the term or citation in his paper. A thorough search of this phrase “socialized individualism” led to a 1933 paper by Albert G. Milbank, where he speaks about tough policy decisions, and also underlines the fact that the reforms should not be so stretched that it hampers individual lives. In precise terms, reforms should not constrain individual freedom and growth. To quote from Milbank’s paper:

It seems to me that what has really happened is that we mistook the end of an old era for the beginning of a new. Industrialism after a marvellous, and on the whole beneficent, growth of nearly one hundred years began to develop the defects of its qualities. The competitive spirit and the rewards to the individual were powerful incentives to progress. But, when industry began to forge competitive weapons more ruthless and

destructive than the instruments of war and when the rewards to the individual fostered an insatiable greed, the industrial era was threatened with destruction by the very forces that had given it life. Vanity and greed became the fruits of the Tree of Industrial Knowledge (Milbank 1933: 89).

Radhakrishnan also uses words like “greed” and “selfishness” of individuals while describing his idea of “socialized individualism” (1933). He goes on to describe the requirements of this philosophical practice as:

We want to bring about what might be called socialized individualism. We must submit the individual’s liberties to the interests of a reasonable social harmony. The liberties of classes must be curtailed; even nations will have to submit their sovereignties to international control. Unless we are able to bring about that kind of subordination of national interests to the interests of the wider humanity, we shall not have any kind of real freedom (Radhakrishnan 1936: 233).

Radhakrishnan’s writings and his thoughts are lucid and clear. They do not have the deliberate “obfuscation” of language of the thinkers of the 20th century. Yet, his thoughts are torn between the polarized opposites of individual freewill and national as well as global interests. It seems that the idealist is constantly at war with the pragmatist. The only challenge of understanding and critically reading his writings is a certain philosophical open-endedness that characterizes his works. For instance, he does not explain what “national interest” is, what is “class interest”, what could be the interest of the “wider humanity”. He leaves these terms to the imagination and interpretation of his readers and as a result falls into the traps of being ideologically appropriated by different groups and different individuals in their own ways.

Education as a Pillar of Development in the University Education Commission Report (1950)

The University Education Commission was established in 1948 post-Independence under the guidance of Radhakrishnan. His commitment to education as an essential pillar of development has been indicated in the report of the University Education Commission. The report suggested a radical transformation both at the levels of secondary schools and universities, proposed “Course of Study: Arts and Science” (102), and discussed “Professional Education” (152). This report seems to be a culmination of his early thoughts on the

education ideal narrated in the writings discussed in the sections above. It seems that the report is a pragmatic output of his early years as a teacher-philosopher.

The report was broadly divided into 18 sections, and each section dealt with an issue; issues such as “teaching staff” (58), “course of study” (102), “medium of instruction” (265), “examinations” (285), “students, their activities and welfare” (298), “women’s education” (342), and “rural universities” (480). His views on education highlight an emphasis on methodological revision. However, the difference between his speeches delivered in pre-Independence era and the post-Independence university commission report is significant. In the “educational reforms” (1927) suggestions such as “teaching staff” and “course of study” were more of philosophical musings and ideal propositions. However, the education commission report, on the other hand, witnesses a transformation of these ideals into concrete action and agenda points. Thus, the transformation from a philosopher to a pragmatic administrative thinker is interesting when these ideas are close-read at levels of language and intention.

The division of the report into sections highlight his ambition to widen the perspective of education. These divisions clearly mark the place of his thoughts in the emerging spirit and prove to be a refreshing voice of a new educational dream of post-Independence India:

While it is generally recognized that the universities should provide the best teaching over the entire field of knowledge of which its own resources may permit, that they should offer this teaching to the widest range of students irrespective of class, sex, caste or religion, that they should extend by original inquiry the frontiers of learning and, above all, would and shape students not merely by the training of the intellect but by the disciplining of the spirit, university men and women were aware of serious shortcomings in the functioning of the universities in regard to these matters (The University Education Commission Report 1950: 5-6).

Radhakrishnan also stressed on ‘professional education’ among youth across various fields such as: “agriculture”, “commerce”, “engineering and technology”, “law”, and “medicine”. The section on “professional education” began with the difference between profession and professional education. He says: “...the foundation of professional education should be not only technical skill, but also a sense of social responsibility, an appreciation of social and human values and relationships, and disciplined power to see realities

without prejudice or blind commitment” (The University Education Commission Report 1950: 153).

The report is an ambitious and systematic attempt that reflects not only his understanding of the rampant problems in the education system, but also his future vision of Indian education, especially its role in building the newly emerging nation. The report with its special devoted sections to each structural dimension of education shows his commitment to widen the scope of education across social and economic sections of the society, encompassing gender and religion. His approach to education is holistic which encourages interdisciplinary study and promotes dynamic understanding of interaction between the past and the present, between the Western and the Eastern academia.

The report also offers perspective into women’s education and its relevance to the progress of the society by highlighting three broad areas: “importance of women’s education for national life”; “special courses”; and “the future of women’s education” (The University Commission Report: 342-351). The section on “importance of women’s education for national life” was further divided into three sub-sections; “primacy of women’s education” (343); “the education of women as women” (343); and “preparation of home and family life” (344). The section “primacy of women’s education” highlights the need to create a balance between men and women by encouraging women’s education. The report encourages women to educate or learn on their own, even while performing the role of a “home-maker” (The University Commission Report: 343-349). Radhakrishnan seems to be perceptive regarding the cultural requirements of women in the post-Independence India to continue as homemakers rather than take up the role of active professionals. There is an anxiety and dilemma in the tone of the report, where both the administrator and the thinker are aware regarding the intense pressure on women in India to serve as “good homemakers”: “a democratic spirit does not necessarily follow a democratic constitutions” (350). The report captures the dichotomous existence of women as educated professional vis-à-vis the cultural baggage of managing a household. It does take into account the nurturing role of women as homemakers and as professionals. However, the report does not entail a futuristic vision for women in the later half of twentieth century and twenty-first century when the psycho-social baggage may increase.

The sub-sections; “education of women as women” (343) and “preparation of home and family life” (344) corroborate the

arguments mentioned above. The report suggests inclusion of “special courses”, divided into four parts such as: “home economics”, “nursing”, “teaching”, and “fine arts” suggesting the importance of these courses to provide a “holistic view” for the development of women (348). The final section of the future of women’s education seeks to understand the “present condition of women” (350). There is a special focus on the condition of women’s facilities in the “co-educational” schools and colleges (The University Commission Report: 350). The report provides scope for improvement in three crucial segments: (a) the need for “women in appearing for examinations” specifically for “women in seclusion”, since the maximum number of school and college dropouts are usually women (349); (b) the basic requirements of women in medical practices such as doctors and nursing staff; (c) equal pay as male colleagues and “employment of women” as staff in the government sectors (349-350).

In addition, a significant contribution of the report is regarding the emphasis on creating “rural” universities along with “urban” universities in the independent country (The University Commission Report: 480-510). The report focuses on creating rural universities by providing basic amenities to the citizens in secondary schools and higher secondary schools to address the need for equality in “people’s education”. The report stresses on equal education opportunities in rural India (481). By setting up rural universities, the nation will benefit from the educated and skilled rural youth. Moreover, higher education at the ground level would spread awareness among farmers about new techniques of farming and diversity of crop patterns (502). Educating the rural India would be crucial in removing social and economic inequalities and honing the skills of youth in the country. The study of rural university in the report is significant to understand the steps in setting up first generation educational institutions across India. In the contemporary scenario, when there is a need for educational reforms and when the country is deliberating on national educational policy documents, Radhakrishnan’s thoughts and these early years of education commission reports might be helpful if given a close read.

In the paper, entitled “Democracy, Plurality, and Indian University”, in the September-2000 issue of *Economic and Political Weekly*, Shiv Viswanathan devotes a section of his article (section IV) to the study of the Radhakrishnan report on Indian education of 1950, where he specifically mentions:

One must emphasise that Indian reports on education are never parochial

documents. They are cosmopolitan to the core both in time and space and in that sense they mimic the university as an imagination. Here Shakespeare and Cervantes, Ghalib and Kalidasa, Newton and Panini, Lenin and Manu rub shoulders in easy ambience. The Radhakrishnan Report also avoids the colonial pathos of educational sociology. It does not begin with the usual cry that university education in India was a colonial creation (Viswanathan 2000: 3601).

Viswanathan highlights the significance of understanding these scholarly thoughts enshrined in the reports as a part of the cosmopolitan nature of knowledge systems of India. Mamta Anand, in her work entitled *Radhakrishnan: His life and work* (2006), argues that “universities and Radhakrishnan, the two words had become inseparable from one another” (Anand 2006: 23). The present study underlines this necessity of bringing Radhakrishnan’s thoughts back to literary and philosophical discourses by reading him as a cosmopolitan thinker, who could strike a balance between the East and the West.

Conclusion

From its inception, this study had one core motivation and that was to creatively understand the significance of Radhakrishnan’s writings/ essays for the twenty-first century non-expert reader. This century propelled by the digital civilization, has moved beyond reading thinkers like Radhakrishnan as a part of academic curriculum. He is easily categorized and relegated to such blanket terms as a “religious scholar”, or simply branded as a political figure. The difficulty of handling these thoughts, or working with thinkers like him, is that the different ideological tags attached to their thoughts, make it a perilous task to deal with them. *The What ifs*, and *He is this kind of* rhetorical burden comes with thinkers like Radhakrishnan.

Mohanty is critical of Radhakrishnan’s idealistic worldview. He is specifically critical of Radhakrishnan’s division of Western and Eastern binaries, especially in the context of “intuition”. He finds it strange that while Radhakrishnan makes his point on intuition as an Indian concept, almost all the “list of intuitionists that he provides come from the West: Bergson, Croce, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza and Pascal” (Mohanty 1993: 322). Mohanty also argues that the distinction between Indian and Western even in Radhakrishnan’s thoughts is that of “degree” and not of watertight binaries. He is more in the line of phenomenologists such as Sri Aurobindo and Vinoba Bhave. However, even getting a faint glimpse of this rich thought-tradition of Bhave, Gandhi, Radhakrishnan is a

delight for the 21st-century reader struggling with individual, social, and political changes.

It is difficult to bring Radhakrishnan into the pedagogic space of classrooms, precisely because of the linguistic aphasia and the lack of critical vocabulary of the contemporary “educators” while dealing with his thoughts in “essence”, and not just as ideologue. Radhakrishnan’s thoughts have survived the perils of time and space, of gross simplification and over-obfuscation. Thus, “younger thinking individuals” in the quest of the philosophical and literary dialogues of India and the world might find Radhakrishnan’s thoughts on education, reform, and philosophy offering comfort in the present century.

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Notes

1. A brief part of this paper was presented at Goa University in *the International seminar on Philosophy and Literature Meeting: The West(s) and the East(s)* held on March 19 2018.
2. The existing scholarship on Radhakrishnan’s writings is rich. Refer to volume of writings compiled by Donald Mackenzie Brown in 1970, entitled *The Nationalist Movement: Indian Political Thought from Ranade to Bhave*; a lyrical biography of Radhakrishnan’s son Sarvepalli Gopal (1923-2002), titled *Radhakrishnan: a Biography* (1988) as a tribute to the thinker, and also the father; and Paul Arthur Schilpp’s *The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan* (1992) is another significant commentary on the thinker-President.
3. Refer to the idea of tradition explained in details in Mathew Arnold’s (1822-1888) momentous work *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). It is likely that

Radhakrishnan's definition of tradition had an Arnoldian touch of the ideal tradition.

4. Cf. Henri Bergson: *Matter and Memory* (1896).
5. Walter Lippmann: *Public Opinion* (1922); Herman and Chomsky: *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988).
6. Mukherjee and Rath: 'Practicing' Cosmopolitanism in Knowledge Spaces, Cityscapes, and Marketplaces (2015).

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