

Dr. Radhakrishnan On The Dhammapada

¹Dr R. Subramony

Synopsis:

In Gautama the Buddha we have a master mind from the East, second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other. Radhakrishnan further states that the Buddha belongs to the history of the world's thought. He is part of the general inheritance of all cultivated men. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in history.

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Introduction

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan delivered a Master Mind Lecture at the British Academy on 28 June 1938. The *Dhammapada*, a part of *Khuddaka Nikaya* of the *Sutta Pitaka* has in the Pali version 423 verses divided into 26 chapters. Radhakrishnan states that it is an anthology of Buddhist devotion and practice. (1) Dhammapada is the foundation of religion. It is attributed to Buddhaghosa, a learned Brahmin, who was converted to Buddhism and lived around A.D. 400. He wrote commentaries on each of the four great collections or Nikayas. His greatest work is the *Visuddhimarga*. He is a legend in Pali Buddhist scholarship.

Radhakrishnan states, "In Gautama the Buddha we have a master mind from the East, second to none so far as the influence on the thought and life of the human race is concerned, and sacred to all as the founder of religious tradition whose hold is hardly less wide and deep than any other." (3). Radhakrishnan further states that the Buddha belongs to the history of the world's thought. He is part of the general inheritance of all cultivated men. "He is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in history." (3)

At the age of twenty-nine, Prince Siddharta left his home, put on the ascetic's garb and became a seeker of truth. Radhakrishnan states, "Just as fire cannot be produced by friction from damp wood, but only from dry wood, seekers whose passions are not calmed, he thought, cannot attain enlightenment. He accordingly started a series of severe fasts, practiced exercises of meditation, and inflicted on himself terrible aesthetics. Weakness of body brought on lassitude of spirit ... He therefore decided that asceticism was not the way to enlightenment ... (7). With tremendous mental struggle, he broke away from the old beliefs and tried new methods. Through meditation, he passed through four stages of contemplation. He acquired equanimity. Radhakrishnan states that, "He saw the whole universe as a system of law, composed of striving creatures happy or unhappy, noble or mean, continually passing away from one form of existence and taking shape in another. In the last watch of the night "ignorance was destroyed, knowledge had arisen... as I sat there, earnest strenuous, resolute' Gautama had attained bodhi or illumination and became the Buddha, the enlightened one. (8).

The Buddha not merely preached, but lived his preaching. He converted the first five disciples who were with him in the dear part in modern Sarnath. Disciples flocked to him. This included Ananda, the companion of all his wonderings. The Buddha travelled for forty-five years and gathered many followers. Radhakrishnan states, "Brahmins and monks, hermits and outcasts, noble ladies, and repeat out sinners joined the community ... In our times he would be taken for an intellectual. When we read his discovers we are impressed by his spirit of reason. His ethical path has for its first step right views, a rational outwork". (9)

The Buddha advised his disciples to test the logic everything. He asked them not to accept anything out of regard for their authors. He said, "Do not accept a statement on the ground that it is found in our books, nor on the supposition that "this is acceptable" nor because it is the saying of your teacher". (Mahatanhasankhaye Sutta). His teachings were not esoteric. Radhakrishnan states that, "The highest seat of authority is the voice in the spirit in us. There is little of what we call dogma in the Buddha's teaching. With a breadth of views rare in that age and not common in ours he refuses to stifle

¹ Associate Professor & Head, Department of English, Madura College, Madurai, Tamilnadu.

criticism, intolerance seemed to him the greatest enemy of religion” (12). He wanted reason to be the foundation of his arguments. He criticized denunciation of other creeds.

The Buddha never got angry. He was known for his tolerance. For the world was ignorant and not wicked. He met opposition with equanimity. He was the model of courtesy. He did not believe in forcible conversion. Radhakrishnan states, “We are unhappy because of our foolish desires. To make ourselves happy all that is necessary is to make ourselves a new heart and see with new eyes. If we suppress evil thoughts and cultivate good ones, a bad unhappy mind can be made into a good happy one. The Buddha is not concerned with changes of creed. He sits by the sacred fire of a Brahmin and gives a discourse on his views without discouraging his worship.” (3). Radhakrishnan, throughout his intellectual career, has always emphasized on the tolerant traditions of India. He states: “The quiet end of the Buddha contrasts vividly with the Martyr’s deaths of Socrates and Jesus. All the three undermined, in different degrees the orthodoxies of their time. As a matter of fact, the Buddha was more definitely opposed to Vedic orthodoxy and ceremonialism than was Socrates to the state religion of Athens, or Jesus to Judaism, and yet he lived till eighty, gathered a large number of disciples, and founded a religious order in his own lifetime. Perhaps the Indian temper of religion is responsible for the difference in the treatment of unorthodoxies.” (15).

The Buddha stood for truth and rationality. He requires to possess courage to go beyond theory totality. Each individual should realize the truth by personal effort and realization. Ethical striving is of paramount importance. Meditation is different from prayer. Meditation leads to self-change. It is the reconditioning of the soul. It is the mutilation of the animal nature. The absolute reality is beyond logic. Radhakrishnan is also quick to point out the inadequacies in the thought of Buddha. 1) The Buddha’s conception of dharma as the absolute reality was not sufficiently concrete for practical purpose. The Buddha became deified. 2) The Buddha taught that student and married life were not essential and one could take up Sanyasa at any stage. (56).

Conclusion

Radhakrishnan concludes, “We find in Gautama the Buddha, in powerful combination, spiritual profundity, moral strength of the highest order and a discreet intellectual reserve. While his great intellect and wisdom gave him comprehension of the highest truth, his warm heart led him to devote his life to save from sorrow suffering humanity, thus confirming the great mystic tradition that true immortals occupy themselves with human affairs, even though they possess divine souls. The greatness of his personality, his prophetic zeal and burning love for suffering humanity, made a deep impression on those with whom he lived ... He is one of these few heroes of humanity who have made epochs in the history of our race, with a message for other times as well as their own. (57).

Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan remains one of the foremost intellectuals of our times who commented extensively on the Shastras. R. R. Srinivasa Iyengar work, “... the spirit that moved and sustained our ancient Indian Rishis and Acharyas is not foreign to Professor Radhakrishnan, and it is this alone that can explain the splendor of his ministry over a period of half a century.” (59).

References:

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