

Saju Chackalackal

Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore

A SYNTHESIS OF TRADITION AND MODERNITY

Man has the noble faculty of memory to remember his past and to make use of it in the present with necessary changes "in the light of the signs of the times." The aim of the present study is to explore and unveil the attempts made by S. Radhakrishnan towards a reconciliation or a creative synthesis of tradition and modernity, which is a perennial problem ever since the dawn of human civilization. It was his belief that "nothing is good simply because it is ancient, and no composition is faulty merely because it is anew."¹

1. Tradition in the Traditional Sense

i) Meaning of Tradition

Though the literal meaning of the Latin noun tradition is 'handing over, through the usage it has come to mean, 'teaching' or 'instruction.' Referring to the dynamic aspect of its content, it is also defined as the deposit of the totality of cultural and moral values. There are two different types of traditions, namely, verbal and non-verbal. The latter cannot exist in isolation from the former; but the latter is needed to interpret the former. Non-verbal traditions include traditional artifacts (eg., icons, monuments etc.), sites, designs, customs etc. and the verbal traditions may be either oral or written.

Tradition is said to be that aspect of the cultural, religious and social life of our ancestors which had the power to transcend the fluctuations and changes that took place in the history. It is the lived experience of our elders which can guide us towards enlightenment and success. Radhakrishnan has clearly brought out the great value of tradition and the need for loyalty to it in his *An Idealist View of Life*:

1. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956), p. 117. (Hereinafter referred to as *Religion and Society*).

If we are not to lapse into individualistic rationalism and ultimate negation, if we are not to be led astray by our wandering whims, if our personal institutions are to be guided by the accumulated wisdom of the race, only tradition can help us. It takes centuries of life to make a little history, and it takes centuries of history to produce a little tradition, and we cannot lightly set it aside. Mankind does not begin completely afresh with each individual . . . The past helps us to reach more elevated heights from which, as the ages move, we may gain a clearer vision of the relations of God and man.²

This passage brings out clearly the necessity of tradition in the moulding of our personal and societal life, for a sense of tradition, allowing the old to be appreciated as ever new and the new to be received as clarifying or fulfilling the old, provides guidance for individuals and groups. All of us should benefit from the store of traditional wisdom, and it would be a great loss if we fail to learn from the past. For, otherwise we may have to live it over again which may not at all be possible in this short span of our human existence.³

ii) *Necessity of Tradition*

For a vast majority there is "a certain degree of inevitability"⁴ with regard to tradition and its continuity in their every day life. It is true that we always long for certain change or novelty; but at the same time we could observe among ourselves a thirst for eternal truths embodied in some fixed formulas which we need not discuss, modify or correct. While speaking about the Hindu tradition Radhakrishnan brings out the possible reasons behind such a longing of the human heart. He writes:

-
2. S. Radhakrishnan, *An Idealist View of Life*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951). pp. 78, 79. (Hereinafter as *Idealist View*). In this connection we may cite another relevant passage from his "Fragments of a Confession": "Human minds do not throw up sudden stray thoughts without precedents or ancestors. History is continuity and advance. Philosophic experiments of the past have entered into the living minds of the present. Tradition links generations one with another and all progress is animated by ideas which it seems to supersede." S. Radhakrishnan, "Fragments of a confession," in *The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan* (ed. Paul A. Schilpp, (New York: Tudor Publishing House, 1952). p. 10. (Hereinafter referred to as *Fragments*).
 3. Cfr. S. Radhakrishnan, *President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings* (Delhi: Publications Division, The Govt. of India, 1965), p. 33.
 4. *Fragments*, p. 8.

Men, in the rough and tumble of life with their problems and perplexities, sins and sorrows, have no patience for balanced arguments or sustained meditation, but they want some formulas or rules of life which they can accept as valid. Through it, they are induced to a new way of life . . . Even those who wish to discern the truth for themselves require a guide in the early stages.⁵

There are also some other factors which motivate us to accept certain traditional patterns of life. In fact we do not choose certain things in our life, for example, our sex, our parents, our country, our mother-tongue and also the cognitive milieu. These factors are sure to condition what we are, to a certain extent, and thus to share the tradition of a particular country or culture. Drawing our attention to these factors Radhakrishnan says that, "we are as little free in choosing our cultural ancestors as we are in choosing our physical ancestors."⁶ On another occasion he wrote about the effect of such an inheritance in our lives:

Something is directly experienced, but it is unconsciously interpreted in the terms of the tradition in which the individual is trained. The frame of reference which each individual adopts is determined by heredity and culture.⁷

Such a frame of reference or traditional inheritance has a primary function to provide directions in times of change or crisis in the lives of the individuals and groups. But one should remember that "no custom could be useful to all people at all times."⁸ For,

if we are wedded over much to the rules of the past, if the living faith of the dead becomes the dead faith of the living, the civilization will die If an organism loses the strength to excrete its own waste, it perishes . . . If old practices are taken as final, they become fetters to the living spirit . . . if we rest content with what our fathers have done, decay will set in.⁹

5. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Hindu View of Life* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1957) p. 18. (Hereinafter referred to as *The Hindu View*).

6. *Fragments*, p. 8.

7. *Idealist View*, p. 99.

8. *Mahabharata, Santiparva*, 259, 17.

9. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion and Society* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956), p. 117. "If a new and a better order is to arise, the old order must be broken up. For genuine growth, life and space are necessary, and what is congesting the ground

It is a task of all of us to discern "what is dead and what is living in each tradition" in order to save ourselves and our friends from "the folly and stupidity of our elders."¹⁰ According to Radhakrishnan, "it will not be wise to look upon our ancestral wisdom as infallible." It may be liable to err even as contemporary fashions are.¹¹ Only a living tradition can influence our inner faculties, humanize our nature and lift us to a higher level of human existence.¹²

iii) Tradition and Religion

Living traditions are the vehicles for spiritual ideas. Today we make use of them, and accord them great value "because of the spiritual significance which they convey."¹³ According to Radhakrishnan,

We must respect all spiritual traditions. Whichever tradition enables us to go higher, to raise ourselves to the level of spirit that must be accorded due reverence.¹⁴ Every tradition which helps man to lift his soul to God is held up as worthy of adherence.¹⁵

An analysis of the history of different generations will reveal that they have formulated their experience of the ultimate truth of life in terms those were meaningful to the individuals of those generations, terms corresponding to the "numinous experience" they personally had. But often the succeeding generations inexorably cling to the old symbols and terms which were adopted as mere guidelines in the beginning. This fact could be explained in terms of a political leader who assumes power. When a hero succeeds in his fight against the established powers, he becomes the king in his turn. As a king he must now build and organize

must be destroyed. We are surrounded by traditions that once were living but are now dead, not only in the spiritual world but in the political, social and industrial . . ." S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967), pp. 104-105. (Hereinafter referred to as *East and West in Religion*).

10. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion in Changing World*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1967), p. 152. (Hereinafter referred to as *Changing World*).
11. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Brahma Sutra* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), p. 10 (Hereinafter referred to as *The Brahma Sutra*).
12. Cf. *The Hindu View*., p. 18.
13. *East and West in Religion*., p. 74.
14. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Spirit of Religion*, (Delhi: Hindu Pocket Books, 1978), p. 52. (Hereinafter referred as *The Spirit of Religion*).
15. *The Hindu View of Life*, p. 20.

and institute reforms, and as he grows older, revolutionary and dynamic drives give way to conservative habits and values. He naturally turns to protect what he had created and gradually he becomes a symbol of the established power. Here again, a new generation will come up, and battle with the ruler and thus will free the members of his generation from the oppression that prevents the members from creating anything of their own.

In religion different traditions are the recorded experiences of our devout ancestors who had a real thirst and consequently a vision of the supreme through their own personal efforts. What a religious tradition aims at is not rather to create truth, but "to clothe it in language and symbols for the help of those who do not see it themselves."¹⁶ Therefore one should not mistake the symbolic character of tradition for reality. The responsibility of every religious follower is to try on his own to achieve a "direct experience." According to Radhakrishnan religion is not true unless it ceases to be a traditional view and becomes a personal experience."¹⁷ For him the essential aspect or the unchanging substance of religion "is the evolution of man's Consciousness."¹⁸ Yet he recognises that religion "is dependent on the past tradition and grows out of it."¹⁹ Our dependence, however, on it should not be a blind conformity. He says:

... loyalty to tradition is one thing, and bondage to it quite another. Complete conformity is contrary to life. Only the dead are completely conforming. . . . No tradition is final and absolute.²⁰

iv) *Tradition: Different Perspectives*

The content of any tradition can be approached from different angles according to the perspective one adopts towards it. Some people who follow literally what is handed down to us would be mostly conservatives. They resist all kinds of changes because for them truth is never affected by time and so it is immutable. Radhakrishnan calls our attention to the fact that the traditionally accepted beliefs also

16. *Fragments*, p. 77.

17. *Idealist View.*, p. 88.

18. *Fragments*, p. 77.

19. *Idealist View.*, p. 78. "The tree of civilization has its roots in spiritual values which most of us do not recognize. Without these roots the leaves would have fallen and left the tree a lifeless stump." (*Dhammapada*, p. v.)

20. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

may become inadequate or even false on account of changed times.²¹ He criticized his fellow religionists for their conservative outlook :

Those who are untouched by the Western influence are for a large part intellectual and moral aristocrates, who are indifferent to political issues, and adopt a gospel not of confident hope but of resignation and detachment. They think that they do their duty with their gaze fixed on the eternal *dharma* of the past.²²

There are also, on the contrary, quite a good number of people who reject everything of the past and believe in the self-sufficiency of the things of their age. They are the people, according to Radhakrishnan, who had been "educated in the Western way of thinking, who adopt a despairing philosophy of naturalistic rationalism and ask us to get rid of the dead weight of the past. These are intolerent of tradition and suspicious of the alleged wisdom of the age."²³

He advocated loyalty to the past and an openness to changes, for tradition is not a finished product. Those who inherit it should have the courage to make radical changes without disturbing its fundamentals.²⁴ Every generation is infected with a spirit of conservatism and it would be prepared only to make insignificant changes rather than any radical change called for by the changing times. What is required is that :

The radicals and the conservatives, who stand for the new hope and the old learning, must come closer and understand each other. We cannot live by ourselves in a world where aircraft and steamship, railways and telegraphs, are linking all men together into a living whole. Our system of thought must act and react on the world progress.²⁵

21. *Indian Philosophy* : General Characteristics, "Basic Writings, of S. Radhakrishnan, Robert A. McDermott (ed.), Delhi : (Jaico Pub. 1972), p. 70. (Hereinafter referred to as *Basic writings*).

22. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

24. Cfr. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Spirit of Religion* (Delhi : Hindi Pocket Books Pvt., 1978), p. 23, (Hereinafter referred to as *The Spirit of Religion*).

25. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

We may now take up the discussion on modernity to see how far tradition and modernity can be reconciled and reintegrated in our life with a genuine spirit of synthesis.

3. Modernity

i) *The Evolving New Order*

A rapid change is being experienced in all areas of life and thought due to the fast progress in science and technology. These have, no doubt, their impact on religion and society.²⁶ For Radhakrishnan the present age is revolutionary as far as the modality of change is concerned. He writes:

Any urgent desire for intense and drastic change of the foundations of civilized life is a revolutionary desire... What makes a period revolutionary is not the fact of change, which is always present in history, but the pace of change. The present age is revolutionary because the rate of change is very rapid. Everywhere round about us we hear the sound of things, of changes in the social, in the political and economic institutions, in the dominant beliefs and ideas, in the fundamental categories of human mind.²⁷

He was convinced that "man is essentially a remaker," and that "he is not content with the patterns of the past,"²⁸ which are liable to change and improvement. An enlightened person will certainly try to avoid the unnecessary confusion that is bound to arise in the process of transition from an old order which is dying out, to a new one that is struggling to be born. Change is the very principle of life. There is ample possibility for freedom, since everything is dependent on the decision of the individual. He says, "the future is open and the shape of things to come will depend on the choice which we will make."²⁹

26. "Unlike religion and custom, which are local in character, science recognizes no political or social boundaries, speaks language which is understood by all... The industrial revolution has affected economic relations so completely that we have become a world society with a world economy which calls for a world order." *Religion and Society*, p. 13.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

28. S. Radhakrishnan, *Religion in a Changing World* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1967) p. 16.

29. *The Spirit of Religion*, p. 138.

ii) *Science and Humanity*

Scientific and technological progress has its own negative aspects also. The man made machines have destroyed the creativity and originality of man, resulting in the loss of subjectivity.³⁰ Radhakrishnan says: "the modern mechanistic societies lack the vision of self in man. They recognize only an external mechanistic universe reflected in the machines that man has devised. This is how disintegration becomes the key image of the modern world."³¹ Again, he recalls the changes that were taking place in psychology where man was simply reduced to a mechanical and material being:

Unfortunately some of the leaders of our age who are fascinated by the triumphs of science and technology speak of man as a purely mechanical material being, a creature made up of reflexes. They emphasize the more earthly propensities of human beings and seem to be unaware of the higher sanctity that lives in them.³²

Again, as a result of the intensified "enslavement to the economic machine . . . human values are declining,"³³ both in spirit and in practice.³⁴ It is true that "we do not belong entirely to the world of objects to which modern scientific techniques are seeking to assimilate us."³⁵ One is called to free oneself from the debilitating effects and nervous strain of modern life. We may be able to achieve this, if, and only if, we become aware of our cultural identity and nobility, which will in turn help us to adopt and adapt various elements (both sacred and profane) from other systems and civilizations to complement our own. As a concrete step towards the realization of this goal Radhakrishnan suggests:

30. Cf. "In our modern life we all wear the same kind of clothes, cut according to regulations; we obey the same social laws and our thoughts are moulded by the same traditions. We read the same papers, attend the same pictures and play the same games. . . We have become the worshippers of the god of decency." *East and West in Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 113.

31. *Religion in a Changing World*, p. 145.

32. S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West - Some Reflections* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955), p. 119. (Hereinafter cited as *East and West*).

33. *Fragments*, p. 15.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

35. S. Radhakrishnan, *Recovery of Faith* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1956) p. 18. (Hereinafter referred to as *Recovery of Faith*).

... if we are to be saved from the assault which beat so insistently on us from the screen and the radio, from the 'yellow' progress and demagogy, if defences against them are to be built in the minds of men, if enduring interests of humanity are to be implanted in us, we must make it a point to have short time in our daily life for the quiet reading and reflection.³⁶

This task is very much to be assisted and accelerated by religion – i.e. "the concern of inner life."³⁷ But today even the religions seem to be very much influenced by the scientific innovations of the 20th century. It is enobling to notice that religions purifies itself from the dead faith of the past and adjusts itself according to the new findings.³⁸ But the impact of science and technology has created a rather materialistic outlook among many religious believers. Radhakrishnan writes:

The demands of our civilization direct the attention of its workers so energetically and exclusively to that which is nearest at hand, to the investigation and practical application of our material resources. ... But even those who adopt the methods and conceptions of exact and descriptive sciences are obliged to raise the further question of the limitations and value of scientific knowledge itself. ... Electrons and protons do not clear up the mystery of reality. Besides, God and soul cannot be treated as mathematical equations.³⁹

Radhakrishnan was not aiming at mere scientific progress alone, rather on the development of a "scientific frame of mind," or in other words a "scientific habit of thinking." According to him many of the so-called scientists are scientists only in the class rooms. When they get back to their own homes they happen to burn their homage in the fire of superstition which may, perhaps, lead them to fear, morbidity and mental destoration.⁴⁰

36. *The Spirit of Religion*, p. 28.

37. "My Search for Truth," *Basic Writings*, p. 41.

38. "All the religions of mankind under the stress of modern thought are moving forward to a realization of the spirit of religion, a reaching forth to the fundamental and lasting varieties of truth and love." *The Spirit of Religion* (p. 16).

39. "My Search for Truth," *Basic Writings*, p. 51.

40. Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *On Nehru* (Delhi: Publications Division, The Govt. of India., 1966), p. 25.

iii) *Modernization and Religious Spirit*

The domination of science in the life of modern man caused a suppression of the spirit and as a result of which even today "man feels that he is rootless because he is unaware of his real being."⁴¹

Radhakrishnan writes :

We cannot base the new civilization on science and technology alone. They do not furnish a reliable foundation. We must learn to live from a new basis, if we wish to avoid the catastrophe that threatens us. We must discover the reserves of spirituality, respect for human personalities, the sense of sacred found in all religious traditions and use them to fashion a new type of man who uses the instruments he has invented with a renewed awareness that he is capable of greater things than mastery of nature.⁴²

A hostile attitude to conveniences science and technology bring to life can never be justified.

When anaesthetics were used to relieve women of pain in childbirth, it was argued that God had intented women to suffer; otherwise he would not have made childbirth painful. To mitigate women's labour pains is to thwart God's intentions and is therefore impious.⁴³

For him it is wrong to imagine that science and technology are indifferent to religious values or values of the spirit. Genuine science has a capacity to enlarge our concept of God and other aspects of religion; religion could save science from going astray; religion should not end up in wars and inquisitions nor science in Hiroshimas and Nagasakis.⁴⁴ The great advances of science reveal, not the omnipotence of matter, rather the superiority of the human mind over the world of matter. The science reveals to us the mystery at the heart of the universe, and as a result they disclose to us the riches of the spiritual life.

41. *Religion in a Changing World.*, p. 64.

42. *East and West in Religion*, p. 119.

43. *Recovery of Faith*, p. 23.

44. S. Radhakrishnan, "Science and Religion," *Facets of Radhakrishnan*, ed. B.K. Ahluwalia, (New Delhi : Newman Group of Publishers, 1978) p. 144.

4. Creative Synthesis

i) *Modernized Tradition*

The synthesis of tradition and modernity appears to be a noble task but a difficult one in practice. Tradition reveres continuity in all respects; and modernization demands new beginnings. Tradition that is living and dynamic by the law of life itself must undergo change. Modernization that is vital should recognize the value of continuity preserved by tradition.

In *Recovery of Faith* we read:

History is continuity and advance. Traditional continuity is not mere mechanical reproduction; it is a creative transformation. We must preserve the precious substance of religious reality by translating it out of the modes and thoughts of other times into terms and needs of our own day and generation.⁴⁵

In his preface to the translation of *Brahma Sutra* he comments on the purpose of translation; it is not the re-transmission that is required; rather we need a renewal in every generation. Tradition is to be used as a principle of growth and regeneration by a "free use of reason and experience."⁴⁶ Thus each generation would reinterpret the past afresh and "stamp it with something of its own problems and preoccupations."⁴⁷ This was the main objective he had, while engaged in translating and interpreting the Indian classics. He says:

... while taking note of the traditional interpretations, I have also in mind the problems of our age. It is my endeavour to present a

45. *Recovery of Faith*, p. 8. "The traditions help us to take us to the truth above all traditions and of which the traditions are imperfect, halting expressions... If we open ourselves up unreservedly to the inspirations of our age, we will get to the experience of the Spirit which takes us beyond the historical formulations." (*Fragments*, p. 77).

46. *The Brahma Sutra*, p. 8. "The thinkers of India are the inheritors of the great tradition of faith in reason. The ancient seers desired not to copy but to create. They were even anxious to win fresh fields for truth and answer the riddles of experience, which is ever changing and therefore new. The richness of the inheritance never served to enslave their minds. We cannot simply copy the solutions of the past, for history never repeats itself. What they did in their generation need not be done over again. We have to keep our eyes open, find out our problems, and seek the inspiration of the past in solving them..." "Indian Philosophy; Past and Present," *Basic Writings*, p. 104.

47. *The Brahma Sutra*, p. 8.

reasoned faith which deals justly with the old Indian tradition and the demands of the modern thought. A commentator has ample scope to explain the *Brahma Sutra* in relation to the religious milieu he represents.⁴⁸

Again in his introduction to the *Bhagavadgita* he writes:

History pauses our problems, and if we restate old principles in new ways, it is not because we will to do so, but because we must. Such a restatement of the truths of eternity in the accents of our time is the only way in which the great scripture can be of living value to mankind.⁴⁹

Such a restatement of the ancestral wisdom, according to the needs of the time, requires "the assistance of creative minds."⁵⁰ In order to bring an enduring result, to inaugurate a new living tradition we need the emergence of at least two or three great personalities with creative power.⁵¹ They would be able to push away "the blind adherence to the outworn forms and obsolete habits," and thus to accept "progress and change as the life-blood of its activity."⁵²

Tradition is meaningful only if it is worked out anew and recreated by the free activity of its followers. We can observe a continuous recreation of the Hindu tradition throughout the ages. The encounter of the vedic Aryans and the native tribe,⁵³ the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism, interaction with the Dravidians, the contemporary renewal movements led by Ramananda, Caitanya, Kabir, and Nanak, and the inauguration of Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, all draw our attention to the revival and recreation of the Hindu religion.⁵⁴ According to him the commentators

48. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

49. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Bhagavadgita*, (London : George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1948) p. 6.

50. *Idealist View.*, p. 51.

51. Cf. *Religion and Society*, p. 118.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

53. Radhakrishnan himself says in his exposition of the history of Indian Philosophy that during this encounter the Aryans tried to allogorize the myth and symbol, the fable and legend, through which the new tribes were delighted. They imparted, as much as possible of the new into the old. Aryans, thus, accepted the worship of the tribal gods, and made an attempt to reconcile them all with vedic culture. Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy*, vol. I, 2nd ed., (London : Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 46; 476. (Hereinafter cited as *Indian Philosophy I*).

54. Cf. *The Hindu View.*, pp. 21-22.

on Hindu *Dharmasatras* have continually incorporated a number of changes in the past years. "Social flexibility has been the chief character of Hindu *Dharma*. To uphold the *Sanatana Dharma* is not to stand still. It is to seize the vital principles and use them in modern life."⁵⁵

He admits however, in Hinduism that "there is much wood that is dead and diseased," which "has to be cleared away"⁵⁶ in order to reach a better state. That does not mean that the whole of the past has to be given up. It would not be possible for a progressive people with a rich tradition to break away completely from the past even if it contains some unedifying elements.⁵⁷ It is the duty of an enlightened man to protect the enduring substance of religion from the forms and institutions which suffer from the weakness of man and the corruptions of time.⁵⁸ It would be "better to build on foundations already laid than by attempting to substitute a completely new structure."⁵⁹

ii) *Religion and Science*

Today religions also are responding positively to the challenges of the modern sciences:

Traditional bonds of religious opinion are loosened as hardly ever before, and men claim absolute freedom to think as they like and mould their theories of life anew under the impulses of the hour... The present unsettlement is a challenge to the ancient creeds to revindicate their validity and usefulness. The spiritual leaders of all progressive religions are now busy, rethinking their traditional views as to rescue them from the assaults of advancing knowledge and experience.⁶⁰

Moreover today, religions are emphasizing only the essential principles and ideals rather than the dogmatic schemes, due to their variance with the new findings:

55. *Religion and Society*, p. 113.

56. *The Hindu View of life*, p. 130. "True progress is an organic thing like the growth of a tree. We must cut out the dead wood and cast away the withered past. We have changed so often in the past, a more change does not disturb the spirit of religion." *Religion and Society*, p. 118.

57. Cf. *Basic Writings*, pp. 96-97.

58. *Recovery of Faith*, p. 8.

59. *Basic Writings*, p. 107.

60. S. Radhakrishnan, *The Heart of Hinduism*, (Madras: G. A. Natash and Co., 1936) p. 65.

Every religion is attempting to reformulate its faith in accordance with modern thought and criticism. Stagnant and stereotyped religions are at variance with the psychology of modern life. If, in the name of religion, we insist on teaching much that modern knowledge has proved to be untrue, large numbers would refuse to accept devitalized doctrines.⁶¹

In fact, many of the things stated in the scriptures of various religions have proved to be untrue when they are taken in their literal sense (for instance, the chronology of Genesis given in the Bible). Therefore "the literal infallibility is not now insisted on except by a few fundamentalists Their utterances cannot be regarded as infallible."⁶² The genuine findings of both human and social sciences should be assimilated into the religious dogmas and practices, for "religion is a rational synthesis which gathers into itself new conceptions as philosophy progresses."⁶³

In a technological civilization where the role of religion is not properly recognized the individual will be a depersonalized unit.

Those who are immersed in the facilities which technical progress has put at our disposal find it difficult to make the efforts for self-mastery. The more we depend on the gadgets which enable us to lead a life of comfort at the material level, the more estranged do we become from ourselves.⁶⁴

Hence religion has to stay as a redeeming force in our modern living.

iii) A Wider Synthesis

Besides the synthesis of the scientific and religious truths, an overall synthesis of the whole thought-process of an individual is necessary. This broader synthesis is evidently found in the writings of Radhakrishnan, who draws inspiration from the western Hegelian idealism and the then existing religious trends.⁶⁵ He writes:

61. *Fragments*, pp. 74-75.

62. *Recovery*, p. 16.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

64. *Indian Philosophy, I*, p. 25.

65. Hegel: The cleavage between the real interiority and official authority; authority repeats what was in the past, and connotes a passive reception and a mechanical execution.

Whitehead: Religion is what the individual does with his or her own solitariness.

W. R. Inge: The essence of religion resides in the immediate intuition of God.

Although I admire the great masters of thought, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, I cannot say that I am a follower of any, accepting his teachings in entirety. I do not suggest that I refused to learn from others or that I was influenced by them. While I was greatly stimulated by the minds of all those whom I have studied, my thought does not comply with any fixed traditional pattern. For my thinking had another source and proceeded from my own experience, which is not quite the same as what is acquired by mere study and reading. It is born of spiritual experience rather than deduced from logically ascertained premises.⁶⁶

iv) *Personal Contributions*

On the basis of his optimistic vision of the future he was confident enough to prophesy the emergence of a world religion⁶⁷ through a healthy synthesis of traditional values of religions and achievements of the modern sciences. It does not mean the merger of different faiths into a vague synthetic creed, but a better understanding of one's own faith. In his lectures on the *East and the West*. We read:

Progressive thinkers of different faiths are getting together in a common endeavour to realize the good life through truth and love. The world is groping not for the narrow, stunted religion of the dogmatic schools, not one of fanaticism that is afraid of the light but for a creative spiritual religion. It should not be inconsistent with the spirit of science. It should foster humanist ideals and make for the world unity.⁶⁸

One should be open to the voices of different religions⁶⁹ and all these sources should be taken into account in shaping the eternal world religion. It is not to be identified with any particular religion, for it is the religion which transcends race and creed and yet informs all races and creeds.⁷⁰

66. *Fragments*, p. 10.

67. Cf. *Religion in a Changing World*, p. 18.

68. *East and West*, p. 121.

69. Cf. S. Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 20.

70. *Recovery of Faith*, p. 204.

With a view to bring in this new vision of the universal religion within the framework of Hinduism, Radhakrishnan reinterpreted the *advaitic* theory of *maya* in such a way as to give some reality to the phenomenal world.

The world has empirical being (*vyavaharika satta*) which is quite different from illusory existence (*pratibhasika satta*). Human experience is neither ultimately real (*paramartika satta*) nor completely illusory. The world is not a phantom, though it is not ultimately real.⁷¹

The theory of *karma* which was said to be in the way of human progress and freedom also was reinterpreted. According to him the law of *karma* has two sides: one stresses the deterministic aspect, and the other emphasises the free-will aspect.

Karma or connection with the past is not inconsistent with creative freedom. . . . The law that links us with the past also asserts that it can be subjugated by our own free action. Though the past may present obstacles, they must all yield to the creative power in man in proportion to its sincerity and insistence. The law of *karma* says that each individual will get the return according to the energy he puts forth.⁷²

He worked for the early dawn of new society in which men and women enjoyed equal status, without any discrimination on the basis of caste or creed. Though he was born a Brahmin, he argued that the important sacrament of *upanayana* should be permitted to all Hindus, men and women, because he found that all are capable of the highest goal of spiritual insight.⁷³ After thoroughly examining the value of caste system he concluded its practice has to be rectified in many ways and that the places of worship, public wells and public amenities such as bathing ghats, hotels educational institutions and cremation grounds should be open to all.⁷⁴

71. *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, p. 86.

72. *All Idealist View.*, p. 276.

73. *Religion and Society*, p. 136.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

In his "Reply to Critics" he strongly advocated a radical change in the caste system. He said: "I should like to make it clear that any scheme based on heredity is not only undemocratic but unspiritual." "Reply to Critics" in *The Philosophy of Radhakrishnan*, ed. Paul A. Schilpp, (New York: Tudor Publishing House, 1952) p. 840.

5. Conclusion

The creative synthesis of tradition and modernity we find in Radhakrishnan may be of some help to our age in its struggle to create a better society and a genuine religious spirit and to accommodate the past traditions with the findings of the modern science and technology. This much needed reconciliation of the past with the present is the only hope for a bright future for mankind.