

“IQBAL AND RADHAKRISHNAN- A COMPARATIVE STUDY”

Nazeer Siddiqi;

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A Friendly Appreciation.

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I am grateful to the author for writing the above book. It is valuable for ignoramuses like me. I have not read the writings of Radhakrishnan. From whatever little I had read about him, I had gathered an impression that he was an exponent of his mythological religion. That impression now stands corrected. I learn from the above book that Radhakrishnan had tried to extract something like modern humanitarianism from the agglomeration of Vedic mythologies. I, however, venture to suggest that this book would become much more valuable for readers like me if, in its next edition, the author could care to deal, at some length, also with the points that I am raising in this review.

2. Extract (i): “Today, no other Indian can equal his (Radhakrishnan’s) stature in the worldwide respect he commanded for his contributions to the philosophical heritage of mankind.” (page: 35).

What precisely are Radhakrishnan’s contributions to the philosophical heritage of mankind? Instead of throwing light on this, the author has taken great pains to collect such sayings of Radhakrishnan as would appear to show that he (Radhakrishnan) was a saint rather than a philosopher!

3. Extract (ii): “I have found it extremely difficult to choose between the prose of Radhakrishnan and the poetry of Iqbal. Radhakrishnan’s sentences are as chiselled as Iqbal’s verses. In them the lucidity of thought is matched by the felicity of expression.” (Page-ix).

Here, clarity of expression seems to have been equated with beauty of expression. Clarity of expression is a praise-worthy quality of philosophical

prose, as it enables the reader to correctly grasp the writer's thoughts as well as their validities and flaws. Beauty of expression, on the other hand, is an essential quality of genuine poetry. In poetry born of passionately felt thoughts, beauty of expression enables the reader, with genuine poetic taste, to participate in the feelings of the poet, without necessarily approving or disapproving of his thoughts. Clarity of philosophical prose and poetic beauty of philosophical verses, are thus not one and the same thing. As such, there can be no question of making a comparison between the excellences of expression manifested in Iqbal's poetry and Radhakrishnan's prose. As far as I am aware, very many of the highly competent critics of Urdu and Persian poetry have regarded Iqbal as one of those top-most Urdu and Persian poets who have attained the highest degree of excellence in poetic expression. How many of the highly competent critics of-English literature, have included Radhakrishnan among those top-most writers who have attained the highest degree of excellence in expression in English prose?

4. Incidentally, as for Radhakrishnan's lucidity of thought and felicity of expression, I invite attention to the following saying of his, which has been very approvingly quoted on page 64 of the book under reference:

“Religion is participation in the mysteries of being.”

I wonder what precisely it is that this “chiselled” sentence has conveyed to Mr. Siddiqi. To a layman like me, this sentence would appear to indicate either that its writer was not quite clear in his mind as to what he wanted to say or that he did not know how to say it in order to make his idea intelligible in the modern rationalist age!

5. Extract (iii): “Man has not been able to experience the world in the form of a divine blessing as presented by many religious scriptures. Man has become bold enough to express his view or vision of the world as it comes into his experience... This is one reason why philosophies like Existentialism, which insists on the meaninglessness of life and the absurdity of the world, have begun to capture the imagination of the present age.” (page 30).

Extract (iv): “those who are above the average are plagued by some of the central problems of life. For example, the questions: Is there any ultimate

purpose in the creation of the universe? Is there any ultimate meaning to human life?”(pages 72-73).

The “bold” and “above-the-average” people referred to in the above extracts (iii) and (iv) are evidently those rational thinkers who do not believe in religious scriptures, and, for cognition of truths, rely wholly on senses-based reason of man. Now, for those who do not believe in the assertion of religious scriptures that the universe and the mankind have been intentionally created by an intelligent being, possessing freedom of will and action, is it not irrational to raise the questions as in the extract (iv) above? If universe and mankind are not creations of any intelligent being, what is the sense in worrying about the ultimate purpose of the universe and the ultimate meaning of human life?”

6. Extract (v); “Radhakrishnan maintained that life is a supreme good Personally, I have come to believe that essentially life is a supreme curse which can prove to be a good - even a supreme good - to a very small proportion of the human population of the world.” (page vii).

The author has not disclosed what he understands by the terms “supreme good” and “supreme curse”. For a reader of average intelligence, like me, these terms would mean as under:

Whatever I irresistibly desire to acquire or retain at any cost, is a “supreme good” for me:

Whatever I irresistibly desire to get rid of at any cost, is a “supreme curse” for me.

If the author would approve of these definitions, then the reader would like to know what proportion of the human population of the world irresistibly desire to get rid of their lives. If a large proportion, what is it that prevents them from fulfilling this desire?

7. Extract (vi): “Like Mallarme, he (Iqbal) knew that poetry is made out of words; it is not created out of ideas.” (page 31).

As if there can be words without conveying ideas or feelings (which are not the same things as words)¹ Suppose you do not know meanings of Chinese words, can a Chinese poem have any poetry for you?

8. Extract (vii): “Iqbal and Ghalib: A comparative view.” (Chapter 3).

For a comparison of poetic statures of poets to be meaningful for the reader, it is obviously necessary for the reader to know what, in the opinion of the writer, constitutes poetry and why, and what criterion the writer considers valid and why, for determining the degree of poetic excellence of a piece of poetry. On these points, the book under reference has observed complete silence. Hence the views expressed in its chapter - 3 lack meaningfulness for the reader.

9. Extract (viii): “The tolerance and understanding he- (Radhakrishnan) shows for humanity is simply prophetic (prophet-like²) He maintained that violence cannot be eliminated by violence, hatred cannot be conquered by hatred, and cruelty cannot be driven out by cruelty.” (pages 42-43).

It would be naive to take the above preaching at its face value, overlooking the relevant historical background and the well-known Brahmanic shrewdness (equaled or perhaps surpassed only by the shrewdness of the international Jewry). Since very very long, the high-caste Hindus have successfully kept their low-caste co-religionists deprived of the basic human rights and dignities, by inculcating in the entire Hindu society (including its lowest strata) the religious faith that the fate of the members of its low castes, being divinely ordained, is simply unalterable. To perpetuate this blind faith, the low-caste untouchables had been made to believe that for them it was sin to try to acquire education. With the advent of the British rule, these unfortunate “sub-humans” found themselves provided with opportunity to get educated. The Brahmanic far-sightedness could not fail to apprehend that this British-provided opportunity was sure to result, in course of time, in the deprived castes being aroused from their deep slumber, by some Ambedkars, to rise in violent revolt against the age-old tyranny of the privileged castes. The privileged castes were faced with the problem of how to protect their centuries-old privileges against such a violent holocaust. This historical situation needs to be kept in mind for discovering the real motives behind the patently unrealistic philosophy of non-violence so vehemently preached,

during the last about one and a half centuries, by the outstanding high caste Hindu intellectuals in our sub-continent.

10. If Radhakrishnan also was one of them, he deserves to be credited with the deep insight into human nature which enabled him to benumb the critical faculties of the “liberated” minds among the non-Hindus, by arousing, through his sermonic writings, their deep-rooted instinct of hero-worship.

11. Extract (ix): “Iqbal has laid great emphasis on the unity of humanity and the oneness of the nations of the world Radhakrishnan was no less an advocate of the unity- of humanity and intrinsic oneness of all nations.” (pages 5-6).

Extract (x): “Iqbal and Radhakrishnan believed equally in the infinite potentialities of the individual.” (page 114).

Extract (xi): “One of the several definitions of religion Radhakrishnan has put forward is that religion is an insight into reality He (Iqbal) says: Religion which is essentially a mode of actual living is the only serious way of handling reality.” (page 2).

Extract (xii): “His (Radhakrishnan’s) highest dream is that of a world community composed of all the nations of the world by surrendering national interests for the sake of international peace and harmony.” (page 116).

Extract (xiii): “Iqbal was more concerned with his own nation than the nations of the world.” (page 117).

The extract-(ix) above states categorically that Iqbal and Radhakrishnan both were equally emphatically internationalists. Equally categorical is the statement in the extract-(xiii) above that, unlike Radhakrishnan-*vide* extract-(xii) above-, Iqbal was more a nationalist than an internationalist. This discrepancy in his findings ought to have led but did not lead the author to try to find out what it was that made the internationalist Iqbal to develop partiality for a particular nation. This quest should have been facilitated by the hint contained in the extract-(xi) above that, according to Iqbal, the real function of the true religion was to enable humanity to properly tackle, reality.

12. It would appear from the book under reference that Radhakrishnan never gave serious thought to the question whether and how his dream of brotherly internationalism could be realistic in practice. The gist of whatever has been attributed to him in this regard in the book is just this: If the human race would not adopt and practice world-wide fraternity, it would be in danger of being annihilated by its latest weapons. Iqbal, on the other hand, did not stop at merely dreaming academically of world-wide human brotherhood. He was consumed by the thought of the need to discover practical ways and means of realising that dream and to imbibe in the appropriate group of people the requisite zeal to carry out that mission.

13. As a result of in-depth study of the personal, social and international aspects of human nature, Iqbal first came to this conclusion: Neither world-wide human brotherhood nor mankind's progress towards individual and collective perfection - vide the extract-(x) above - can be brought about except by adoption of such a way of life, by all the nations, as would ensure international as well as international socio-politico-economic justice.

14. And, as a result of a thorough-going study of history and the major religions, philosophies and ideologies, he made the following discovery:

It is precisely the bringing about of sociopolitico-economic revolution of the above kind which is the real mission of the Quran, and of the Quran alone. All spiritual religions require of their followers to purify their individual selves (souls) and prescribe methods for attaining this purification. It is in Islam alone that purification of individual selves is required to serve also as a preparation for carrying out the above revolutionary mission. Nor is that mission a mission for the achievement of an unrealisable ideal. The earliest decades of the history of Islam are a standing testimony to the fact that mankind is quite capable of adopting the way of life which would ensure intra-national and international socio-politico-economic justice.

The Quran does not lay down any rigid and comprehensive socio-politico-economic system. It has indicated just a few guidelines, without being based whereon no socio-politico-economic system can ever and anywhere be really just. At the same time, it has made it a religious duty of its followers to so organise their society, and to so keep up-dating its organisation, that, in the conditions obtaining at any given time and place, their society is a living and

visible embodiment of all round justice, and serves as a model for the rest of the world. The generality of mankind instinctively gravitates towards visible justice. It has been a small minority of cunning usurpers which has generally kept this basic human craving for justice suppressed, by exploiting the baser instincts of the masses, and has thus been acquiring and retaining socio-economic and race needs today is a sizeable group of people charged with missionary zeal for arousing the popular craving for all-round justice. Arousal of this basic popular craving alone can result in mankind getting rid of the all-round domination of the usurper classes. The question is which group of people is capable of being charged with this missionary zeal. The answer is; The Muslim Ummat, in which, in the earliest decades of its history, unflinching faith in the Quran had produced the said missionary zeal. This Ummat still has unflinching faith in the Quran, though, for various historical reasons, since very long it has been without that missionary zeal. Given the right type of leadership, there is no reason why that zeal cannot be revived in this Ummat through propagation of the correct interpretation of the real message of the Quran in the light of the facts and needs of the present age. There is no other human group possessing this potentiality.

15. Through his mature writings, Iqbal continuously exhorted the Muslim intelligentsia to realise their proper role in the circumstances prevailing in this age, so that, some day in the near future, this intelligentsia throws up from within itself the leadership of the requisite kind. In the light of his line of thinking, as outlined in the preceding two paras., what could be the aim of this exhortation?

Renaissance of Islam? Yes, but not for the betterment of the Muslim nation alone - Islamic renaissance, according to Iqbal, is the only practical way of ensuring enforcement of all-round justice thought out the world, which alone can bring about and sustain world-wide human brotherhood. Iqbal's immediate concern for his own nation is the result of his ultimate concern for the whole human race. This is abundantly clear from all his mature writings. Here, quotation of just one couplet of his should do:-

طهران ہو اگر عالم مشرق کا جنیوا

شاید کرۂ ارض کی تقدیر بدل جائے

This couplet, while admitting that Islamic Ummat (عالم مشرق) is Iqbal's immediate concern, proclaims unambiguously that his ultimate concern is the fate of the whole human race (کرۂ ارض کی تقدیر)

16. A critic is entitled to approve or disapprove of Iqbal's line of thinking; but, before arriving at his judgment in this regard, it is obviously necessary for him to make sure as to what really that line of thinking is. And, it should not be difficult, for anyone who would delve deep enough into Iqbal's mature writings, to discover the thought processes which have given birth to those writings. To declare that Iqbal was narrow-minded as compared to Radhakrishnan, which is what the extract (Xiii) read with the extract (xii) above does, leads one to suspect that the author of the book under reference has not taken the trouble of trying to find out the ultimate purpose for which Iqbal made it his mission to revolutionize the thinking of the Muslim intelligentsia. If the author had identified that ultimate purpose, he would have seen that:9T'bNQ actually bring into being world-wide human brotherhood and to lead mankind to the path of progress towards individual and collective perfection, was the life-mission of Iqbal, while Radhakrishnan, if it is conceded that he really desired brotherly internationalism, was an utopian dreamer, entertaining the pions hope for some such miracle to happen as would realise his dream! Mr V.P. Sing did something for the good of down trodden classes of Brahman ridden Indian Society. What did Dr Radhakrishnan do for the betterment of those hundreds of millions of unfortunate peoples as President of India and as an enlightened social worker? Did he dine with untouchable? Did he mix with those condemned by caste Hindus & their caste system?