



***Shanti* and Second Birth: S. Radhakrishnan on Literature,  
Art and Spiritual Values**

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*Abstract*

S. Radhakrishnan, as a visionary educationist in his writings, has been a chief votary of the ideal of *Gyanam -Vigyanam sahitam*, meaning wisdom and the sciences go together. This paper investigates the thoughts of S. Radhakrishnan on how literature and art give a second birth in the spirit through wisdom. He holds that great works of literature and art give a spiritual birth regarded as a second birth in Indian culture. Once born in the vision of the spirit, *Buddhi*, that is, intelligence, works on the light of spirit, spiritual value or truth, stabilizing the mind, a zone of thoughts and feelings. A stable mind thus becomes divine by spiritual insight and vision. Literary compositions and arts born out of this state lend a person in *Shanti* tranquility, a clear and pure mind capable of spiritual vision. Thus, writers and artists create the minds of the people and the nation.

**Keywords-** Spirit, *Shanti*, Literature, Art, Intelligence, Wisdom, Science

**Introduction**

S. Radhakrishnan, through his erudite writings, has served the cause of education in India and the world. He feels there is a vital role in education played by the disciplines of literature and art. He said education was not meant only for the purse and the pocket. Money can never be the measure of the human. The truth in the person upholds life and the world. Human beings continuously suffer from an internal strife of being with the good or the evil. Education must enable people to fulfil themselves by living for the good and not the pleasant, which causes suffering. To save the human life, the spirit should be activated through education. He recommends the adoption of the ancient precept of India, *Gyanam -Vigyanam Sahitam*,



meaning wisdom and sciences must be learnt together, enabling spiritual perception to choose and love the right.

He writes that literature and art are the fields that directly deal with wisdom; hence, they must be taught on a priority basis alongside the sciences that train us in rationality. He warns us that sciences, at best, would be able to clear the slums through development and technology. But it is given to humanities, literature and art to clear the mental slums that are more dangerous. Development bringing prosperity to humanity is essential, but more important is the evolution of the human soul through disciplines that bring realization. Sciences are also a work of the human spirit but do not play a role in creating a mind with spiritual vision. The twenty-first century, a golden period for brain sciences, has discovered that the mind is an energy body regulated by vibrations of thoughts and feelings. Mind, a mental force enveloping the human being, crafts the brain (Jefferey 295). A well-arranged mind gives focus, tuning the brain to the reality of the vision it captures by firing neuronal circuits. Literature and art play a pivotal role in activating this mind, thus becoming a precursor to learning the sciences.

In his book *Search for Truth*, he says that art and literature are not merely hobbies. They play a significant role in shaping our destinies by evolving us in the spirit (155). In *Our Heritage*, he opines that thinkers, writers, and artists shape the minds and hearts of people (21), thus making them more suitable for science and technology. Dr. Susan Magsamen, in her international bestseller *Your Brain on Art* quotes the findings of the American Art Therapy Association on how art develops the brain,

Artistic expression and the creative process enhance cognitive abilities, foster greater self-awareness, and help teens regulate their emotions. The arts help them with focus, problem-solving, decision – making skills, so when presented with health choices they make better ones as their brains are dramatically changing during critical developmental periods. (109)

## **Methodology**

This study is based on the textual analysis of the primary sources, i.e., the writings and speeches of S. Radhakrishnan. Secondary sources like books, journals, and articles on S. Radhakrishnan have been consulted. Some recent research in brain sciences has been studied. This research deals with the ideas of S. Radhakrishnan on education and the vital role played by the study of literature and arts.



## Education and Second Birth

By the Indian cultural ideal of valuing education as the second birth, that is, turning the intelligence to the light of the spirit, Radhakrishnan, in his writings, clearly delineates the importance of learning literature and art. He writes in his book, *True Knowledge*,

Wisdom is more easily gained through the study of literature, philosophy, religion. They interpret the higher laws of the universe. If we do not have a general philosophy or attitude of life, our minds will be confused and we will suffer from greed, pusillanimity, anxiety and defeatism (13)

Supporting the findings of the Indian rishis that the spiritual life of a being is not activated until the being- the spirit is reached by the process of becoming. A becoming aimed at reaching the tranquil state of *Shanti*, resulting in a connection with the entire creation. Education for Radhakrishnan in the spirit of Tagore was to realize one's relation with the entire creation by raising the potential of the spirit.

This process gives birth to a writer, a poet and an artist. The writings of Radhakrishnan give us clarity on the mind, body and spirit complex. His writings can hugely benefit medical sciences, as Indian culture seeks the God in the body. They say *Deha* is *Devalaya*- the body is the abode of God (*Faith Renewed* 7). The spirit, when veiled by the *Maya* (illusory thoughts) inflicts unstable mind, resulting in inertia and ignorance. These people have uncontrolled passions, desires and fears crippling them. Such a mind has to be controlled by *buddhi*, intelligence empowered by the light of the spirit. *Buddhi* works on the spiritual values emanating from the Universal Self – the *Atman*- the spirit. In his most exalted work, *The Principal Upanishads*, he explores the importance of *buddhi* being guided by the being- the spirit. He puts it as,

If buddhi, intelligence, has its being turned towards the Universal Self it develops intuition or true knowledge, wisdom. But ordinarily, intelligence is engaged in discursive reasoning and reaches a knowledge which is at best, imperfect, through the processes of doubt, logic and skillful demonstration. It reflects on the data supplied by *manas* or the sense mind with its knowledge rooted in sensations and appetites. (*The Principal Upanishads* 95)

Thus, a mind controlled by the *buddhi* reaches the state of *Shanti*, where it serves the vision of the soul. Literature and art bring out this vision of the soul in their creation. They can also restore a person in contact with them in the state of the *Shanti*. Thus, they are the field that helps us tune into the being and also help in the process of becoming. Radhakrishnan specially appreciates the role the classics among the literary writings, he says, 'the classical spirit is a refusal to acquiesce in the immediate, a refusal to be content with the easy and the obvious. It is a determination to seek the highest even if it is difficult and remote' (*True Knowledge* 12).



Brain sciences in neuroaesthetics are continuously proving Radhakrishnan's insight to be true. Art, literary or performing, leads the spiritual development. Irish poet John O'Donohue once said, 'Art is the essence of awareness'. On the metaphysical importance of the arts in a speech at the Annamalai University in 1962, Radhakrishnan said,

Art itself is a means for the realization of the Divine. It is a means by which you can grasp the mystery of the Eternal. Art is not merely for the purpose of your entertainment or even education. It is there to produce in you a spirit of satisfaction, to make you different from what you happen to be. Art is not divorced from religion in sense of the term. (*Speeches and Writings 1962-1964* 1992, 191)

Radhakrishnan, on the necessity to read the classics, emphasizes their essential element of granting the reader *Tejas*, a Sanskrit word meaning the tip of the flame. The matter read must become a part of one's being. The flame of the classic must become our fire. It must make us different from what we are and light our potential. If this does not happen than, the education is a failure. Literacy is not education. Possessing information and knowledge can give deluded thinking if spiritual growth is neglected.

Knowledge does not transform or help us in the process of becoming. Only fields that allow us to do the soul-searching help us evolve. Sciences make us probe the truth. They help us understand the nature and its mysteries. However, if the human being has not risen above the natural self and realized the insight and vision of the spirit, even the sciences will not reveal much. He asks this question to the one who, out of pride, says, 'What do we have to do with humanities?' he answers, 'Can you understand nature and its mysteries if you are a part of nature?'

Unless one is aside from nature, unless one believes in the spiritual being capable of sitting in judgment on the investigated object, one cannot pursue truth (*True Knowledge* 18). Thus, for Radhakrishnan, arts and literary art significantly contribute to spiritual growth and are a precursor to the discipline of sciences. In his address at Kabul University in 1963, while talking about Science and Religion, he said,

Artistic creation is something where you feel an experience, and you impregnate that experience with your own personal spiritual intensity and make it come alive—that is what art means. In our country it is said, art is that which transmits to you a sense of the eternal, a sense which is beyond the merely temporal. A sense of something which is non-temporal in this world conveyed to you by the achievements of the arts. (*Speeches and Writings 1962-1964* 1992 136)

Only through spiritual activation would the human being be steadfast in wisdom. They will be enfranchised, emancipated, not depressed when faced with challenges, not elated when



faced with happiness or success, but look upon both as equal. They would then maintain a spirit of friendliness towards all. This is the actual end of education, ensuring the moral health of the individual. This saves the human being from disintegrating strife of going by the good or the evil.

Radhakrishnan reminds us that the moral health of an individual and the nation depends upon the poets and the artists. They unite the country and the world by supplying ideas and ideals realized by the vision of the soul. Knowledge does not unite, but sympathy and understanding fostered by the discipline of literature and art do bring unity by sharing and fusion of the mind.

### **Literature, Art and *Shanti***

The vision of Radhakrishnan is concurrent to the findings of brain sciences that reveal that the heart cells dance to the tune of the music. Understanding is founded on the meaning-making process induced by literature and not by logic. Literature and art enable us to appreciate the environment we are living in and how we can foster it. It saves us from perishing owing to the tough pressures of life. They give us purpose by reaching to our highest, the being, the spirit by becoming *shant*, Nick, artist and founder of *Art2Life*, observes,

Art-making is, really, about feeling more alive in your life. The creative path is unfolding process of becoming ourselves and it's a wonderful journey we get to take. (*Your Brain on Art* 185)

In building vision, Radhakrishnan praises the art of literature the most. He says all great literature is universal and unique, as all of us in our mind and heart are both universal and unique (*Living with a Purpose* 9). The more a person becomes *shant*, when the spirit, *buddhi* (intelligence), and *manas* (mind) work in harmony, they are born in compassion. Great works of literature induce refinement by developing consciousness thus bringing about *visva sreya*s, welfare of the world (*Creative Life* 14). In his speech on presenting awards at Sahitya Akademi in 1966, he stated,

Literature has so many functions to fulfil, the most important being to change the minds and hearts of people *vicara parivartana*, *hridaya parivartana*. If we want to make new beings, new human beings, we must give them right ideas and the zeal and the enthusiasm to implement those ideals. Today the whole world is suffering from spiritual disintegration. People are losing faith; they are lost and live in a world of uncertainty. They do not know what to do, what is right or wrong... (Purpose of Literature) is not merely to produce stability, but to produce a ferment, to produce a kind of confusion of mind from which they will be able to rise



to the achievement of some proper goal and purpose. All through, literature has done that work. (Speeches and Writings, Second Series, 1964-1967 204)

Literature and art are not impressionistic, he says. They are born out of travail. The inner transformation of the artist or writer where the spirit meets the ultimate and human being, God and nature become one. Great literature is born out of *Samadhi*, an intuitive experience which is not mechanical. Literature is not in repetition of old themes. It is a process which seeks answers to the ever-new experience of life. The literary work becomes a reproduction, not a blind imitation. He writes,

Technique without inspiration is barren. Intellectual powers, sense facts and imaginative fancies may result in clever verses, repetition of old themes, but they are only manufactured poetry...difference in the kind of source itself' (*Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan 91*)

At Princeton University, as given in *Your Brain on Art*, the brains of storytellers were mapped using fMRI. It was found that the listeners mirror the brain circuits that fired in the brain of the storyteller. This phenomenon is called neuronal coupling. It is the same process that gets activated in the brains of readers when they appreciate the view of the writers. This scientific fact concurs with the observation made by Radhakrishnan that writers are the parents of the race. Their literary art crafts a mind. Thus, every culture and every age must need writers and books to help people find their voice, gauge the times and develop a response by their needs. Dr. Magsamen concludes about the role of art in her book *Your Brain on Art* in these memorable lines,

The arts by their very nature, reflect and inform the time in which they are created; they take the pulse of their time, but the artists have also been essential for forecasting the future, and serving as an early – warning system for society. (230)

She further emphasizes the role of art in setting the pace to the times; in these words, 'the success of our species comes down to this: Art creates culture. Culture creates community. And community creates humanity... We created stories. We sang. We danced. We developed myths and metaphors that passed on the moral and ethical values of the group (*Your Brain on Arts* 202-203)'.

This is why the ancient seers of India said, 'the best life one can have is the life in the company of great books and great men.' Unfortunately, the modern education system is tilted much in favour of the sciences and technology, and arts, humanities and literature are neglected. This should be corrected if the race is to survive by making the right choice.



## Literature and Criticism

Radhakrishnan warns us of mimicking science in literary criticism. Reason cannot explain creativity and the power of the soul. He puts rhetorically, ‘what is modern, a scientific outlook.’ He illustrates his point on the limitations of reason by giving examples. Copernicus showed that our planet is not in the centre. Darwin showed us that we are the latest biological models. Freud shows us the unconscious. ‘An interpretation of science based on these views makes us indifferent to the creative urges in man. We try to suppress those aspects of human nature which do not fit into the moulds of scientific thought (*True Knowledge* 100).’ He quotes Lord Rutherford, a great physicist, explaining to Samuel Alexander, an eminent philosopher, about the inadequacies of the scientific reason-oriented theorizing of life, ‘when you think of all the years you have been talking about those things, Alexander, and what does it all add up to? Hot air, nothing but hot air’ (*True Knowledge* 101).

India has a tradition of appreciating books for learning by worshipping goddess Saraswati as *vina-pustak dharini*, holder of musical instrument, vina and book. Indian classics like the epics have firmly held the tradition and made them strictly of contemporary importance belonging to every generation. In his book *Living with Purpose*, he says, ‘Fuel could be different, but the fire is one. Best people from anywhere in the world find affinity with each other (113).’ It is this quality of art and literature of burning from spirit and reaching humanity thus it belongs to all ages, it simply shows that ‘artist is alone as creator’ (107). Spiritual cultivation is solitary exercise. Literature and art cannot be the result of learning, experimenting and measuring like the sciences. This is the reason why rishis of *Upanishads* issued a warning of getting indoctrinated by the pride of one’s learning, ‘Let, therefore, the *pandit* (learned) who is proud of his learning give it up and assume the outlook of a mere innocent boy! (*True Knowledge* 106) It is innocence that captures the reality without biases. Literary work and art cannot be a scientific creation of reason, though artistic genius could be a precursor to all sciences. One writes because one cannot stop the urge to write. This is the reason why reading a book is like getting new eyes. It is born out of awareness and generates awareness. Mechanical art cannot have a shelf life. It has to be a thought perfected by intuition (*Indian Philosophy, Vol I* 176). In his magnum opus, *An Idealist View of Life*, Radhakrishnan talks about the use of intuition in both the sciences and the arts and feels science is more of a branch of humanities,

Creative work is not blind imitation or mechanical repetition. It is a synthetic insight which advances by leaps. A new unknown truth, startling in its strangeness, comes



suddenly and spontaneously owing to the intense and concentrated interest in the problem. When we light upon the controlling idea, a wealth of uncoordinated detail falls into proper order and becomes a perfect whole. Genius is extreme sensibility to truth. Scientific discovery is more like artistic creation in its reaching out after new truth. (*An Idealist View of Life* 126)

## Conclusion

Radhakrishnan puts clearly that sciences evaluate but art elevates. This is the reason why science and technology must be learnt with arts, literature and humanities. ‘It (Art) does not elevate by merely touching your senses, when it instructs your mind. But when it touches your depth, when it is able to devastate your being, give you new eyes, if you are able to do that, then art elevates. It is deep calling to the deep... Art ennobles; it lifts you up, makes a different being (*True Knowledge* 140-141)

It is this deep intuitive ability of the writers and artists that creates a cultured mind that fixes itself on goals and grows in its attainment. This person could not be a pleasure seeker and be waned by desires. There is an immediate need for the intuitive writers and artists to solve social, economic, environmental and other crises of the world. The famous writer, Chinua Achebe said, ‘Art is man’s constant effort to create himself a different order of reality from that which is given to him.’ (*Story of Civilization* 7) Art and literature must fulfil human beings with vision and awareness. It should not limit itself to earning revenues and exploiting the habit-forming tendencies of human beings. It must explore. It should go on a soul expedition and eradicate spiritual poverty.

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