Chapter VI

BUILDING BRIDGES OF UNDERSTANDING

In his person, Radhakrishnan combined the best of both the worlds - East and the West - spiritually, intellectually. Appreciation and admiration of one was not at the expense of depreciation or deprecation of the other. He was gifted enough to be able to find the common ground between the two. It was this common ground that as long as he lived he sincerely, systematically, ceaselessly projected as the invaluable bond that could bind the world into a peaceful, perfect place. He aimed and tirelessly endeavoured to weave world's cultural diversity into a living mosaic of understanding, cooperation and harmonious peace by shuttling from one place in the world to another, speaking, writing, exhorting - as an individual and as an articulate part of a noble organisation. Frequent were the times when the work of the person and the organization with which he associated himself became one. These pages here try to give some idea as to how an individual - the person of Radhakrishnan - stimulated and supplemented the work of the Unesco in different aspects.

International Understanding

Radhakrishnan's special contribution was in the field of creating and fostering international understanding. His approach in this regard arose from his conviction that
religion could be a means to secure this worthy and much needed end. Hence, his emphasis on the creation of common spirit and moral values; the need felt by him to create a common humanism through cultural cooperation; and his belief that humanities and philosophy would achieve these objectives.

Education could bring about peace and understanding. But, in addition to giving knowledge and skills, education should also train men and women in the art of living, in understanding human relationships, in working with fellowmen pleasantly and cooperatively. Radhakrishnan felt that there was an intimate link between education, peace and understanding. The constitution of Unesco also stressed the necessity of building up habits and attitudes of cooperation among men and nations.

The idea of creating international understanding was quite implicit in the "minds of men" thesis on which, as we have noted, Radhakrishnan held definite views. His position was that if the defences of peace are to be constructed in the minds of men, the role of international understanding has to be kept constantly in view while making every effort at achieving peace through international cooperation.¹ His introduction to R P Masani's Education for World Understanding, makes it clear that

¹ GC 1st Session, p. 27; 5th Session, p. 94; 6th Session, p. 152; 8th Session, p. 37; 10th Session, p. 40.
"to create a world community we must foster world understanding. Education for world understanding is our greatest need".  

Unesco has launched various programmes with the purpose of improving understanding among different peoples of the world. Many a time, education and culture have converged and have been amalgamated into one programme for international understanding launched by Unesco.

His was the encouragement for instituting awards for international understanding. While giving away the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding to U Thant, the UN Secretary-General, at New Delhi on 12 April 1967, he said "peace is the harmonising of men in their differences, it is giving battle to distrust and prejudice".  

"Gandhi and Social Tensions" Project

How do we eliminate, subjugate or control distrust and prejudice? Radhakrishnan advocated Gandhian techniques in this regard. These he felt must be propagated; the world must be made aware of these -their value and relevance to the times we live in.

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So, the First Conference of the Indian National Commission for Cooperation with Unesco at its first meeting in April 1949, adopted a resolution to initiate the study of the ideas and techniques aired and applied by M K Gandhi. The initiative and energy for this came from Radhakrishnan. The 1950 Unesco General Conference warmly received the resolution and the idea.

A seminar to consider the contribution of Gandhi's ideas and work to the solving of tensions within the among nations was, subsequently, held at New Delhi from 5 to 17 January 1953. Radhakrishnan was among other distinguished leaders of thought from various parts of the world at the seminar.

Commenting on the changes that the application of the Gandhian techniques would bring about in the world, Radhakrishnan maintained that the East-West conflict was largely due to a failure to recognize that the difference between the two was not the one between black and white, but between different shades of grey. Communism itself is the result of our lack of loyalty to our own religious convictions. Its militant atheism is a reply to dishonesty in religion. Gandhi examined his own conduct more carefully than the conduct of his opponent and if nations did the same, one of the major causes of conflict would disappear.

As the chief spokesman of Gandhian Philosophy, Radhakrishnan played a notable role at the seminar, which made an important contribution to the theory of education for international understanding.

Similarly, Radhakrishnan inaugurated a Symposium on Gandhian Techniques and United Nations on 4 October 1955, where again he held that Gandhi who pleaded for the adoption of non-violence in international relations was the greatest servant of the cause of man, which the world had had in recent times.6

Propagating Ideas of the Great

Radhakrishnan believed that all great men of the world have emphasised in some form or the other the desirability of international understanding and cooperation. It was, therefore, essential that the ideas of such persons should receive adequate attention of the people everywhere. Thus he participated most enthusiastically in such plans of Unesco which purported to disseminate these ideas. The most effective method adopted by Unesco in this connections has been the holding of international conferences on these persons on appropriate occasions, and publishing the works concerning their ideas and activities.

So, he contributed an article in Unesco's *Goethe: In Memorium*. At the 1950 General Conference, he chaired the public meeting at Florence which discussed the message of Confucius. Similarly, he actively participated in the *Buddha Jayanti* celebrations organised by the Unesco on the eve of 9th General Conference at New Delhi in 1956. This was the 2500th anniversary of Gautama the Buddha's *parinirvana*.

In 1961, worldwide celebrations were held to commemorate the centenary of the birth of poet Rabindranath Tagore. Unesco requested the member states and the national commissions, to organise celebrations and itself took an active part in them. The celebrations commenced by a special programme on the occasion of the 11th Session of the General Conference of Unesco in November 1960 at the Unesco House, Paris. Radhakrishnan, a long time admirer and associate of Tagore, inaugurated the function elaborating how though Indian in inspiration, Tagore's work had a universal appeal. Unesco devoted the December 1961 issue of its monthly *Courier* to the poet, while bringing out under its collection of representative work series, the French version of the poets' novel *Gora* and *A Tagore Reader* of the poet's works in English.

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7 Although the birth centenary of Tagore fell in the year 1961, Unesco celebrated it in 1960, because by the adoption of the system of biennial session in 1954, there would have been no General Conference in 1961. The next General Conference was due only in 1962.

At home, Radhakrishnan was the Vice-Chairman of the All India Tagore Centenary Committee, which organised the celebrations on a national scale and coordinated the programmes in India and abroad. In November 1961, an International Literary Seminar was organized in New Delhi. Radhakrishnan presided over the opening meeting which marked the beginning of Tagore week. Thus at several places in India and abroad Tagore's plays were staged, his paintings were exhibited and his ideas were discussed. Radhakrishnan suggested that the greatest service we can render to the memory of Tagore is to do what he would have wished us to do if he were still alive.

For the first time the Unesco honoured a statesman of one of its member states, when it decided to sponsor and support an International Round Table in New Delhi on 26 September 1966 on Jawaharlal Nehru after his death. The themes for discussion at the round table covered the following important aspects of Nehru's life, personality and achievements: (i) fight for national independence and international peace; (ii) Nehru as the man of two cultures and one world; (iii) Social justice and national development; and (iv) Nehru's ideals in relation to the activities of Unesco. Radhakrishnan, was the moving spirit behind the Round Table, of course.

The most notable contribution of the Round Table was a proposal for Unesco to launch a programme, "A design for living", which originated from Romesh Thapar, a well known Indian Journalist. The 14th General Conference of Unesco held in October-November 1966 accepted this programme. The programme aimed at proper integration of man and his environment especially in the developing societies.

A high powered Gandhi Centenary Committee was entrusted with the celebration of Gandhi centenary year in India from 2 October 1968. Opening the final meeting of the committee in New Delhi on 28 May 1965, Radhakrishnan observed that "Gandhi's philosophy, his message, is of supreme relevance to us at this present moment and what one should do is, whether it is in our own life or outside, we must work for those principles". Taking the cue, as it were, Unesco too, subsequently, invited its member states to observe 1969 as the Gandhian centenary year by arranging conferences and seminars, publishing select writings of Gandhi and by other means as they considered appropriate. An international symposium on Truth and Non-violence in Gandhi's Humanism was held at Paris.

12 President Radhakrishnan's Speeches and Writings, 2nd Series, op. cit., p. 121.
13 The records of this symposium are contained in Mahadevan, T K: (ed): TRUTH AND NON-VIOLENCE, A Unesco Symposium on Gandhi (New Delhi) 1970.
Radhakrishnan also collaborated with Unesco on its request, in its project of the publication of *All Men Are Brothers*, which described the main features of Gandhi's philosophy and his influence in furthering the friendship and understanding among peoples. He also saw to the publication of the book in some Indian languages.

**SUPPLEMENTING UNESCO'S WORK**

Radhakrishnan had been working throughout his life in line with what came to be the aims and principles of Unesco. The organisation works to facilitate communication among the different peoples of the world. It is not difficult to see as to how he sought to communicate among the different civilisations through his frequent visits to different parts of the world, attending conferences on philosophy and religion etc., and through his writings and speeches. Thus he involved himself at the practical plane in the process of bringing about peace, international understanding and cooperation. It is therefore not too much to say that Radhakrishnan embodied in his person the very aims and principles of Unesco. That is how he became a model figure at Unesco, deeply respected and often looked up to for guidance and wise counsel. Let us now see how the individual spread and supplemented the work of the organization.
Philosophy

Radhakrishnan was convinced of the merits of synthesising the essential values and virtues of each of world's great cultural traditions. To use the words of Aldous Huxley:¹⁴

"More than any man living Dr Radhakrishnan had contributed to the building of understanding which now, at long last, connects our two cultures—the Indian and the European. At a time the East was another world to some Westerners. By his profound and comprehensive knowledge of the deepest convictions and highest ideas of both East and West, by his superb literary ability and oratorial genius, and by his remarkable ability at intellectual synthesis he has made it possible for easterners and westerners alike to see the oneness of mankind".

Radhakrishnan took upon himself the task of developing a common humanism, a sort of a common denominator of philosophies of East and West. He sought to do it through his works, such as The Eastern Religions and the Western Thought, The History of Philosophy Eastern and Western, and The concept of Man. He was awarded the prestigious Goethe plaque by the Federal Republic of Germany on 24 July 1959 at Frankfurt for his contribution to philosophy.

Radhakrishnan was among those who steadily sought to falsify Kipling's rather popular couplet:

"East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet".

¹⁴ RADHAKRISHNAN NUMBER, op. cit.
His philosophical synthesis of East and West was a unique attempt to tackle in a novel and more enduring manner the political conflicts in the world in the present century. He pleaded for a global outlook and an integrated approach to these problems. He did not approve of what he called the 'either-or' approach—two sharply contrasted concepts standing against each other of which one must necessarily go under—before peace can be established in the world.

Radhakrishnan selects for constructive synthesis the idealist traditions of India and the West. He conceives of a reconciliation between the two. Although he has not overlooked other Western trends which may profitably complement and counterbalance the acosmic and absolutist tendency of idealism, nevertheless, idealism is the very essence of his basic viewpoint. His philosophy constitutes a link between East and the West. It combines the holy fervour of the East with the constructive passion of the West. In this way, he made a very substantial contribution towards the composite culture of the world. He can truly be considered as a pioneer of 'New Renaissance' in the East, and also the fore-runner of the 'Second Renaissance' in the West.

15 From the Greek α (meaning not) and κόσμος (meaning world). Shankara, the celebrated Hindu Sage, known for his Vedanta, for whom the world is the phantom of a dream and only the unmanifest Brahman is real, takes the position of Acosmic Pantheism.
The various East-West philosophers' conferences held at the University of Hawaii during the 'fifties owe a great deal to the pioneering services rendered by Radhakrishnan in bridging the gulf between the East and the West in the realm of philosophy. The prestige of this endeavour was considerably enhanced when he personally attended the third of these conferences in 1959.

He also inspired the work of the Royal Asiatic Society engaged in this type of activity, and which has contributed significantly to the work of promoting understanding between Asia and Europe.

Religion

Radhakrishnan always put a great deal of emphasis on inter-religion understanding and cooperation. He believed in what he called "the religion of spirit". He advocated the sanatana dharma, the eternal religion. According to him we can so transform the religion to which we belong so as to make it appropriate to the religion of the spirit, and every religion has possibilities and the potential of such a transformation.

The importance he attached to religious cooperation becomes evident from the fact that in the various Unesco General Conferences he went to the extent of pleading

16 Radhakrishnan, S: RECOVERY OF FAITH (London) 1956, p. 204.
17 Ibid.
for a United Religions Organization like the other international organizations. No one ever is known to have put forth such an extraordinary, bold and original suggestion.

It was the spiritual side of Radhakrishnan's personality and teaching that fascinated H N Spalding, the reputed Professor, and made him found the Spalding Chair at Oxford for Eastern Religions. Radhakrishnan was invited to be its first holder. It was again the association of Radhakrishnan that induced Professor Spalding to create a trust for the purpose of promoting the study of great religions of the world. It was mainly due to the efforts of Radhakrishnan and C E Raven, the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cambridge, that the Union for the Study of the Great Religions found its genesis. Inaugurating the Indian branch of the Union on 29 May 1955, Radhakrishnan said that religion is the binding force which will deepen the solidarity of human society. At present there are several centres of this union in different parts of the world.

Radhakrishnan was not only the greatest modern exponent of Hinduism but also a world champion of religion, in general. His faith in universal religion, the religion

18 TOWARDS A NEW WORLD ORDER, op. cit., p. 80.
19 The Times (London) 27 January 1953.
20 OCCASIONAL SPEECHES AND WRITINGS, 1st Series, op. cit., p. 236.
of humanity, impressed Harvard University tremendously when he delivered his lectures there. Subsequently, the University started its big, and now famous, Centre for the Study of World Religions. It was inaugurated by Radhakrishnan himself in 1959. The special feature of this centre is that professors and students representing different religions live a community life and have an opportunity to study how life is actually lived by people professing different faiths.

Radhakrishnan inaugurated the International Congress of World Fellowship of Faiths at Tokyo on the 3rd of October 1956. The Congress accorded appreciation of Radhakrishnan's work in promoting fellowship among the faiths of the world. The Templeton Award and the Pope's Award were conferred on Radhakrishnan for his services in the cause of religion. Perhaps no one since the appearance of Swami Vivekananda on the platform of the World Congress of Religions at Chicago in 1839 attracted as much attention in America and Europe as Radhakrishnan did.

PEN Club

In the fields of Arts and Letters Unesco decided to support the work of International PEN Club. 21

Radhakrishnan evinced keen interest in its work, and eventually became its Vice-President also. Speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the PEN Congress at Frankfurt on 22 July 1959 he pointed out that the task of PEN was to do its utmost to dispel race, class, and national hatred and to champion the ideals of one humanity living in peace in one world. In recognition of his services in this cause the West German Book Traders bestowed their coveted Peace Prize on him at Frankfurt on 22 October 1961.

An American couple, William A and Mrs. Shimer, came to India in 1954 to spread the work of what was called the World Brotherhood Organisation, afterwards called the Council of World Tensions, with Asian Headquarters at Bombay. Radhakrishnan seemed to be in sympathy with their work and the objectives of the organisation. The Shimers have acknowledged how Radhakrishnan guided and helped them and how much did they benefit from his advice in introducing the world brotherhood movement into 26 cities and communities in India.

Similarly, his sustained efforts in Unesco's campaign to educate the masses in India about the UN, its

22 OCCASIONAL SPEECHES AND WRITINGS, Third Series, p. 64.
specialized agencies and their work, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, were greatly in evidence for many years. Usually it was he who patronised the celebrations of United Nations day and Human Rights day at various places in the country.

Radhakrishnan's relentless campaign for international cooperation at whatever level possible, brought him to participate prominently in the work of voluntary organizations for intellectual cooperation like the International Students Service, and the International Youth Hostels Association. President of the Youth Hostels Association of India in 1959, he had long before welcomed the establishment of World Association of Universities, and was active in the work of the World University Service. So was his interest in the activities of Santiniketan and Visva-Bharati, the inter-cultural university set up by Rabindranath Tagore. He was one of the Pradhans, a member of the governing body, of this University.

At his personal, individual level too Radhakrishnan's contribution to supplementing the work of Unesco, and implementing its objectives and ideals, was also extraordinary. Through his prolific writings specifically

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24 GC 3rd Session, p. 58.
spreading, interpreting the life, thought and teachings of great men like Mahatma Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Buddha, Goethe, Confucius etc., he sought to serve the spirit of Unesco. His speeches on these topics were as numerous and earnest.

We see thus how Dr. Radhakrishnan, at his personal, individual, 'non-institutional' level so as to speak, promoted the spirit and strivings of Unesco as a body, while, at the same time, campaigning tirelessly as a crusader of international cooperation in the cause of peace, mutual respect and understanding. He could do this because as the foundations and moorings of his labours were a deep-rooted, passionate belief in the oneness of mankind, in the 'religion of spirit'. Whatever the differentials culture caused among peoples were viewed by him not as barriers of separativeness but bonds that could bind them in a mosaic of beauty and brotherhood born out of their great variety. East and West could -must- come together rather than stand apart in misunderstanding or antagonism. The method of bringing and weaving them together was clear to him; that of functional cooperation. Among those who thought or talked of functionalism, Radhakrishnan was perhaps the only one who actually practiced, through adoption, functionalism as an approach to understanding and policy without proclaiming so or without propounding a theory.
of it. His being a Vedantist and a 'spiritual humanist', of course helped in this, in as much as these shaped his attitudes and views.

25 Believer in Vedanta, from the Sanskrit word Veda (meaning "knowledge") and anta (meaning "end"), one of the six philosophical systems of India arising after the period of the Vedas, and in response to the heterodox systems.