Chapter VII

A FUNCTIONAL SPECIALIST par Excellence

In the literature on international organization and politics, Dr S. Radhakrishnan will figure clearly as an outstanding Functional Specialist, and thus what is generally described today as a "non-State Actor" in world affairs. We conclude our study with a discussion of how he qualifies to be considered so, how he enriched the theory of Functional International Cooperation, and what implications and inferences follow therefrom.

Functionalism has been a much discussed topic in recent times. Here we shall limit ourselves to the specialised meaning the term has acquired in international organization and politics. Starting in the late 19th century, a number of scholars took the proliferation of international organisations like the Universal postal Union and the International Telegraphic Union, as an indication of the growing sense of world community and as a guarantee for future international stability. Paul S. Rainch, Leonard Woolf, G D H Cole, Pitman Potter and others, all elaborated and expanded this basic idea. It was David Mitrany who best formulated the doctrine and the theory of functionalism in international organisation.

His essay *A Working Peace System* (1943) summarised the main arguments of the functionality, and drew attention to the major claim that functionalism was the road to lasting peace.

The functionalist believes that the contemporary nationalism rests on factors which cut across national lines, i.e., there is a movement away from a demand for national rights and towards a demand for services.\(^2\)

The Functional Approach maintains that social and economic maladjustments are the basic causes of war and the social and economic welfare is the precondition of peace. The real task of the common society is the conquest of poverty, ignorance and disease. It also emphasises that social interdependence is all-pervasive and all-embracing.

According to the Functional Approach, the existing state system contributes to international tensions and conflicts because it is institutionally inadequate. It cannot deal with basic global problems because it arbitrarily divides global society into national units based on territory, and not on the problem to be solved. International institutions based on functions, rather than on territory, would be appropriate for the solution of such problems. Establishing such institutions is possible because social activities can be separated into political and non-political ("technical") ones. The particular

\(^2\) Mitrany, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
activity (or function) will determine the form of agency in a given case.

Furthermore, the experience gained in one area can be transferred to other areas so that a successful institutional device can serve as a model for devices in many different settings. Successful experience will spread and accumulate forming the part of foundation for an international society. This idea is a basis for the "spill-over" concept.

The existing state system, the approach contends, promotes the subjective allegiances which send men to war. International bodies that focus attention on areas of common interest may, on the other hand, foster international loyalty among people at large and counteract harmful nationalistic attitudes. Similarly, the leaders of national states - politicians, diplomats and soldiers - are blinded by a narrow view they take of their national interests and do not have the proper perspective to encourage international cooperation. Experts working for international organisations will develop international loyalty, and will help to create a peaceful international community.

Finally, the most basic premise of the functionalists, though not explicitly stated, is that human beings are fundamentally rational, that they see that advantages of harmony and conflict in social relations and that they can control their destiny through the evolutionary steps that will lead to a peaceful world.
The functionalist plan of action thus emerges quite simply and clearly from these premises. In selected areas of life, "comprehensive and solid" authorities will be created. Some of these already exist, but many more must be added, until a "web of international activities and agencies" will "overlay political divisions".\footnote{Ibid., pp. 10-11.}

Eventually, an international government consisting of some of these agencies will be coextensive with all international activities. Coordination among these various organisations, will also emerge functionally. First there will be ties between individual bodies based on common needs and problems. When these prove inadequate, groups of agencies will start to work together. Later, general international planning agencies will emerge concerning broad ranges of activities. Finally, a general political authority will emerge out of the necessity of overall coordination.\footnote{However, this last step is left rather vague and is not considered of immediate importance.}

The functionalists do recognise that difficulties may arise in the course of implementing their programme but they claim that such difficulties are merely mechanical and can be mechanically solved as they arise.

One of the unintended consequences of the functional integrated process is the emergence of a new type of international actor—a functional specialist. He may be an international civil servant or a national

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3 Ibid., pp. 10-11.
4 However, this last step is left rather vague and is not considered of immediate importance.
specialist. But in either case preliminary studies have shown that he begins to feel a sense of community and develops a special interest in maintaining the system. His increasing decision-making power reinforces these feelings and allows him, if he is one of the more capable persons to initiate creative personal actions to further the functional integrative process.

Thus, functionalism aims at identifying the non-political aspects of human needs and desires and at "weaving an ever spreading web of international institutional relationships on the basis of such non-political needs". The functional approach implies that emotional attachment to the nation-state is a stumbling block in the attainment of peace and that this hindrance can be removed only by patient and devoted attention to the small and unspectacular steps for positive international cooperation in the technical non-political field leading gradually to an ever-increasing degree of international integration and community building. The most desirable route to international community-building, according to the functionalists, is "transnational cooperation" in the solution of common problems.

The specialised agencies set up under the UN system are said to be based on this approach of functional international cooperation. Opinion is divided on the question

5 Haas, op. cit., p. 6.
6 Sewell, op. cit., p. 3.
whether Unesco can be called a functional organisation. Some are not prepared to accept it as a functional agency at all, while others regard it as the best example of a functional specialised agency in the UN system.

Unesco is the only specialised agency whose constitution unequivocally declares that its programmes and activities would be undertaken to make an indirect contribution to peace. This, in our view, justifies the claim that Unesco is a functional organisation.

**Radhakrishnan and Functionalism**

From what has been elaborated in the pages of our study would easily show that his views would make any functionalist happy. Like functionalists, he also believed that social and economic maladjustments are the basic causes of war. He also agrees with the functionalists that human beings are basically rational, they see advantages of harmony over conflict, and they can -through their conscious efforts- control their destiny through the evolutionary steps that would lead to a state of world peace.

Radhakrishnan too laid great stress on social justice. In trying to link international cooperation with

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7 See, for example, Sathyamurthy, THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION, op. cit.

the values of justice and equality among nations he, in fact, seems to have offered a new approach to functional international cooperation.

As we have seen the essence of functional international cooperation is that we should try to develop habits of cooperation among the nations first in the non-political sphere and then transfer this experience of cooperation to political sphere. There has been some debate as to whether 'non-political' agencies of the League of Nations were in fact based on the theory of functionalism.

Radhakrishnan had pointedly mentioned (Supra, p.103) the merit of positive work of bringing nations actively together instead of keeping them negatively apart. He had also argued in favour of ending colonialism as an objective condition for the success of intellectual cooperation. His views provide the basis of the hypothesis that political equality of all the nations is as important in the functional sphere of international cooperation as it is in the political sphere. He implied that although functional activities are concerned only with the non-political field they can make a real and meaningful contribution to peace only if the conditions of political independence of all, or nearly all, peoples is fulfilled.

Radhakrishnan's interactions with the organisations both under the League of Nations and the UN are also significant for the emergence of a new type of international
actor. Without doubt, he became a functional specialist through his participation in the functional processes.

None of his contemporaries—certainly not in the earlier years—was as keen (or perhaps even competent) as Radhakrishnan was in bringing different civilisations of the world together.

Virtually total reliance of the Indian government on him for the activities concerning Unesco also is the measure of the recognition he had gained increasingly in the decision-making in at least this particular, important function of his country.

And he developed an interest in the maintenance of the system. This is evident from the manner in which he, among others, made frantic efforts to save the League of Nations, and in the initial years of Unesco cautioned about the latter's possible collapse: "we must see to it . . . that the new born baby is not strangled".  

The Man and the Organisation

It is commonplace that collectivities—not individuals—determine political actions and consequent political universe at a given time. Government bureaucracies; in recent times, the multinational corporations; and the masses are often viewed as the main forces that fashion political life and environment.

9 GC First Session, p. 27.
And yet, it is equally true that not all individuals in the collectivity are of the same calibre, importance or effectiveness. Put somewhat differently, there are some — rare, indeed — exceptional, extraordinary personalities who moot and mould the collectivities, and the lesser, ordinary beings follow or fulfill the purpose. The age of mass politics and ideological invocations that the twentieth century has turned into, hides heroes who are disguised and buried behind the bureaucracies, propaganda, and the collectivist political theories and action.

We are generally, conditioned the world over to believe that political events and organisations are inevitable in which men are mere cogs in the huge machine, or just pawns impelled into action by abstract, mysterious, dehumanised or clinically impersonal, routine or aberrant impulses; and that political reality is not controlled by anybody really, for it has a life of its own.

But individuals do matter, sometimes crucially, decisively. Personality has a place in the scheme of things. Not too infrequently, the imprint of a particular personality gives shape and substance to what seems as objective reality; or what has been structured more or less mechanically, arbitrarily, as a compromise; or to meet the need of the hour, a situation or an idea. Great world leaders prove everyday that individuals do matter in international politics. The main character of our
study most certainly belonged to this category as we have tried to show in these pages.

Then there are individuals who in their anxiety to make an impact, far beyond their immediate environment, on the world and its affairs end up as megalomaniacs who dehumanised their societies and the world with a greedy dictatorship or dominance. A Hitler or a Changez Khan would easily fall in this category.

Occasionally, an idealist believing that wars begin only in the minds of men runs the risk of blinding himself to social and historical factors that condition men into world war before they know what is happening. But then there are idealists like Dr Radhakrishnan who not only took full cognisance of the social, historical, political, cultural and economic factors operating in his times but gave a refreshingly new connotation to the 'minds of men' thesis.

The present study does not claim, nor is it based on the presumption, that individuals are the sole causes or independent variables of action in world politics or international organisations. But it certainly is suggested that individuals do not too infrequently give us a way to see the world meaningfully and hopefully, without getting thoroughly lost or alienated in a jungle of social and historical factors or theoretical abstractions. Such
personalities are rather the cutting edges of a complex, many-faceted process of social action. Indeed, they bring to life for the observer the complexities of international life and organisation through the saga of their own life.

Our study has attempted portrayal of such a sensitive, gifted and visionary of an individual who through his dedication to an international organisation made it at once the embodiment of his ideas and the instrument of their realisation. As one of the rare breed of international personalities who are known today as the functional specialists, Dr S. Radhakrishnan became virtually indistinguishable from the Unesco and its work, who in actual practice lived the ideal of a universal man. He thus became the model for all the 'Unescans'.

Individuals, evidently, are crucibles of their culture -political, and the other larger category- and milieu. Radhakrishnan was a perfect specimen of such a complete and conscientious being. By unceasingly striving to link and conciliate cultures of the world he convincingly substantiated German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche's observation: "what is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end". Our discussion in the sixth chapter above graphically illustrates this.

Actual power in world politics, we learn, is based upon the need and nature of human beings, the social facts
of political life, and the limits of nationalism and historical opportunity. Radhakrishnan, while articulating and pleading the condition and aspirations of the subject peoples, drew attention precisely to this basic aspect of power and its practice. His advocacy to exist and fashion the future of the totality of our uneven, lopsided world refused to be suffocated by the miserable, haunting present of its un- or under-developed parts.

International politics -its processes and structural components- can be defined as the attempt of certain groups of men to solve the tensions between the needs of their own people and the social realities of others and of the world. Radhakrishnan's role and contribution in this regard was sincere and steady. Till his country attained its independence he advocated and urged it wherever he got a chance to. He was too sensitive to have overlooked this overriding, overarching need of his people.

But at the same time he was not entirely impervious to some of the beneficial aspects of -the social realities- of the foreign rule, foreign rulers and the prevailing state of the world. This is particularly noticeable in his views on education, science and culture. Himself a product of the Western system of education -who remained deeply bound to the proud heritage of his faith and culture- Radhakrishnan was anything but a 'revivalist' in the realms of education, science and technology.
The framework and force of Unesco provided him with just the kind of means to promote the alchemy of a synthesis of East and West. And he made the most of it in moulding opinion and aspirations towards that happy objective as a surer guide and guarantee of universal peace.

Many of us are familiar with the idea—and probably even with the experience—that whenever an individual comes in contact with an organisation, he tends to self-actualise himself. The organisation is bound to be coloured by the subjective ideas of the individual, the more so if the individual happens to be a Titan like Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. Our essay has tried to bring out how and to what extent he succeeded in moulding the attitudes in, and of, the organisation in the matter of the urgency to attend to the needs and aspirations of the Third World. The leadership be provided the Unesco in this respect was truly statesmanlike—wise, far-seeing, far-reaching and perspicacious.

The self-actualising process is a two-way street. The mutual interaction, intermingling gradually lead to a fusion of identity and action. That such a thing happened between Dr Radhakrishnan and Unesco is fully borne out by what he made of Unesco and what Unesco made of him. The Unesco became conscious of its responsibilities
towards the Third World almost entirely because of Radhakrishnan's presence in the Organisation. And Dr Radhakrishnan in turn became a functional specialist, a universal man, the concrete manifestation of his own idea of "a man of the world". We all are the richer by it!