Dr. Sarbapalli Radhakrishnan occupied a unique position of distinction in the national life of India. He was a brilliant writer, spell-binding orator. He was the greatest bridge-builder of the century, which has led to an abiding philosophical synthesis of the best in the East and the West, of ancient wisdom and modern science. Our former President, R. Venkatraman while analyzing the contributions of this great Indian Philosopher described Dr. Radhakrishnan as "a statesman among philosophers and a philosopher among statesmen". R.D. Sinha Dinkar stated "Morden India is known to the outside world through Vivekananda, Gandhi, Jawaharlal and Tagore. But the intellectuals of the world know us chiefly through the writings and speeches of Radhakrishnan, the ablestman that India has produced to interpret herself". Similarly, D.S. Sharma wrote "alongwith Gandhi and Tagore, he has raised the prestige of our nation among the nations of the world".

Radhakrishnan had a religious approach to the problems of life. He would press for the application of religious spirit of tolerance, love and genuine charity in all walks of life. Social philosophy of this great son of India was based upon spiritualism, universalism and humanism. His humanistic philosophy was directed towards the welfare of mankind. According to him, we live in a world where there is a crisis of faith. The people are lost in the euphoria of affluence. They are far from cherishing the ideals of love, tolerance and sacrifice. They suffer from a sense of alienation. To Radhakrishnan, suffering for others and enduring pain and loneliness are the hallmarks of a true human society. He believed that when our hearts are starved and brains hollow, wealth and money can not help. Love and friendship alone can give us hope and solace. They are the greatest of the forces on earth. Wealth and fame pale into insignificance before them. Love and friendship owe their worth not to power of riches, but to a glittering smile and a noble word.

Apart from being a great philosopher, Radhakrishnan was also a very successful
diplomat. In 1949, when Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit, our first ambassador to the USSR relinquished her appointment in Moscow in order to go to Washington. The question arose as to who should be chosen to succeed her. Many names came under consideration. Pandit Nehru had great love and admiration for Radhakrishnan and finally he selected him for this coveted post. While accepting this offer, Radhakrishnan made it a condition to retain the post of Professorship of Comparative Religion at Oxford. The Soviet Government showed its approval of his appointment by the promptitude with which it arranged for the presentation of his credentials. While Mr. Lamping, then ambassador of the Netherlands in Moscow had to wait for six months before he could present his credentials, Radhakrishnan was received by Kalnin, the head of the Soviet State within a few days of his arrival. The Soviet people respected Radhakrishnan very much. Unlike Khrushchev, who was ready to meet every Tom, Dick and Harry, Stalin met a few diplomats. Stalin earlier declined to meet Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit but he met the new Ambassador soon after his arrival. In the first meeting itself, that lasted for half an hour, in the presence of Vycinsky, the Foreign Minister of Russia and Pavalov the interpreter of Russian language into English. Radhakrishnan won over the heart of the iron man of Russia. Despite illness, Stalin received Radhakrishnan again on April 5, 1952 on the eve of the later's departure from Moscow as Vice-President designate of India. Radhakrishnan warmly patted on his cheek with love and respect and eagerly greeted him saying "Hallow, how are you ?" Stalin was deeply moved by this warm touch and said, "You are the first person to treat me as a human being and not as a monster. You are leaving us and I am sad. I want you live long. I have not long to live". Prophetically, six months later Stalin passed away.

Pavalov, the interpreter who met Radhakrishnan some time after, reported him that his boss liked Radhakrishnan's simplicity and frankness. He further reported on what Stalin told about Radhakrishnan. "This man speaks from a bleeding heart, not like an ordinary ambassador". Radhakrishnan's brief tenure as Ambassador was remarkable both for India and Russia. By his gracious personality he paved the way for the development of Indo-Soviet relationship on a most impressive scale.

On his arrival in April 1952 Radhakrishnan was elected to the post of Vice-President of the Indian Republic. He was unanimously elected again for the second term in 1957. He conducted the office of the Vice-President with rare dignity and decorum. Pandit Nehru once remarked that as Chairman Radhakrishnan has turned the Upper House into an ideal home. Veteran Congress leader Govinda Ballav Pant remarked that in the hands of Radhakrishnan Rajya Sabha was simply a toy. Similarly, K. Rama Rao another senior member remarked that Radhakrishnan as Chairman was the very soul of Rajya Sabha.

After Dr. Rajendra Prasad, in the Presidential election of May 1962, Radhakrishnan captured 98.3 percent of vote while his rival C.H. Ram got only 1.1 percent of vote. It was a record which was unprecedented in the history of Presidential election anywhere in the world. His election to the highest post of President of India was hailed by Bertrand Russel as "it is an honour to philosophy that Radhakrishnan should be the President of India and I as a Philosopher take special pleasure in this. Plato aspired philosophers to be kings and it is a tribute to India that she could make a philosopher her President". Radhakrishnan held his office with rare dignity and reputation. He accepted a meager sum of 2000 rupees from the
country's ex-chequer though a huge amount of Rs.10,000/- was his legitimate due. In 1962 when Indian defences had crumbled against the Chinese invasion, it was President Radhakrishnan who publicly castigated the Government for having brought the country to such a sorry pass. He forced Nehru to oust V.K. Krishnan Menon, the then Defence Minister from the Union cabinet. The Prime Minister who was a blind supporter of the Defence Minister acted accordingly. On the eve of 17th Republic Day speech he warned his countrymen by saying "charges of corruption are frequently made against people at all levels of Government, Central and States, Immediate disposal of this charges is essential".

In 1967, though he retired from public life, there was infact no retirement for Dr. Radhakrishnan from intellectual activity. He was a prolific writer, a voracious reader endowed with rare poetic insight. He wrote as many as forty books. His major works include, 'Indian Philosophy', 'An Idealist View of life', 'Future of Civilisation', 'East and West', 'Freedom and Culture', 'The Dhammapada', 'Gautam, the Buddha', 'The Recovery of India' and 'Great Indians'. His translation of 'Bhagabat Gita', the 'Upanishadas and Brahmansutra' is unique in the whole history of Indian literature.

Radhakrishnan was a member of our Constituent Assembly. He was the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University from 1931 to 1936 and Banaras Hindu University from 1939 to 1948. He was the first from the whole of Asia who was appointed as a Professor of Oxford University. Radhakrishnan was endowed with the most prestigious award, the 'Order of Merit' by the British Government. He was the third non-British recipient of this very rare award, the other two being Albert Schweitzer and Dwight L' Eisenhower.

Through his life, Radhakrishnan was a fearless crusader of peace and liberty who raised his voice against cruelty and injustice. It was Gandhi, who aroused national unity among his countrymen. It was R.N. Tagore who enlivened Indian cultures. At the same time, it was Radhakrishnan, who successfully propagated Indian philosophy abroad.

Radhakrishnan was one of the greatest Indians of our time. He was, in deed, a Yuga Purusha, Amrutasya Putra - a child of immortality.

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