PREFACE

The problem of Ultimate Reality is one of the most important problems in the history of philosophy. In the enquiry into the nature of Ultimate Reality philosophers are also advocating a kind of dualism signifying two ultimate principles irreducible to each other, namely God and the Absolute. Since, the Absolute is the Ultimate Reality from the metaphysical standpoint and from the religious standpoint God is regarded as the Supreme Reality, a question generally arises whether we identify the God of religion with the Absolute of metaphysics or we maintain a distinction between them. Although various solutions have been offered by different philosophers at different times, it was mainly Radhakrishnan, who has been credited as being the great reconciler of the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute. Hence in this present work an attempt has been made to highlight the solution offered by Radhakrishnan in this connection.

Spinoza, the first great absolutist thinker of modern Europe holds that God is identical with the Absolute. Again he says that God is identical with the Infinite Substance which is the one and the only reality. Hegel identifies the Absolute of his philosophy with the God of religion. According to Hegel the only difference between the Absolute and God is that the former is the Ultimate Reality interpreted in terms of pure thought, whereas the latter is the same reality represented pictorially i.e. in terms of imagination and emotion. Bradley draws a distinction between God and the Absolute and admits that the idea of God tends to pass into that of the Absolute. For Bradley the Absolute is not God and that God has no meaning outside of the religious consciousness and is essentially practical. The Absolute for him cannot be God, because in the end the Absolute is related to nothing and there cannot be a practical relation between it and finite will. Hastings Rashdall states that the Absolute is not God alone, but God and all other spirits forming with Him a system or unity. He makes a distinction between God and the Absolute and takes God in the ordinary sense of a finite
personal being. According to Rashdall, the Absolute cannot be identified with God. The ground on the basis of which Rashdall draws a distinction between God and the Absolute is that, while God is to be regarded as a self conscious unity of selves or spirits, the Absolute is the unity of God and the selves, but that unity is not the mere unity of self conscious spirit. Besides this logical ground there is a religious demand which also compels man to make such distinction between God and the Absolute.

In the East we have the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara who draws a distinction between God and the Absolute. For Śaṅkara there is only one Supreme Reality and he termed it as Brahman. Śaṅkara claimed that God is a lower category than the Absolute. For him God is not identical with Brahman. According to Śaṅkara, Īśvara or God is the phenomenal appearance of the Absolute. Śaṅkara neither identifies God with the Absolute nor says that is different. He says that the Absolute is God, associated as it were with Māyā. So long as one is under the influence of Māyā, God appears to be real, but ultimately God disappears along with Māyā. Rāmānuja, an exponent of the theistic school of Vedānta sets forth the doctrine of determinate and qualified Brahman, where God is identified with the Supreme Brahman. In Rāmānuja’s philosophy Brahman and God are non-different. Rāmānuja’s Brahman is what Īśvara (God) in Śaṅkara’s philosophy. Rāmānuja discards the distinction that is usually drawn between the Absolute of philosophy and God of religion. Rāmānuja identifies these two terms God and Absolute and uses the words Brahman and Īśvara or God as interchangeable.

But regarding the relation between God and the Absolute, the solution offered by Radhakrishnan is more impressive than the others. Radhakrishnan was a firm believer in the Vedāntic Absolute Idealism. He is greatly indebted to the Upanisadic philosophy and also the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara for his concept of Absolute Reality. His integral idealism assimilates Śaṅkara’s Absolute and Rāmānuja’s God in the dynamic conceptual. The
dominant theme in the metaphysics of Radhakrishnan is the presence of the one universal spirit as the inner essence of all being and becoming. The three elements of metaphysics—self, God and Spirit has been variously called God and Absolute, Īśvara and Brahman. In creative universal expression it is God. God is the expression of Absolute Spirit in the world. Absolute and God, formless and formed, abstract and concrete may be only theoretically distinguished. In reality these are identical. His conception of the Absolute contains in it the elements of both the Advaita Vedānta and of Hegelian tradition.

God is not something over and above the Absolute. God is the Absolute viewed from the point of view of the world. The Absolute is impersonal while God is personal. But for this no dichotomy is to be drawn between God and the Absolute. Radhakrishnan attempted to explain this point with a curious analogy. He stated that life of a personal being is possible only in relation to an environment. God, in so far as he is a person requires an environment. In one sense the unrealised potentiality of the Absolute is the environment of the creative personality of God. Radhakrishnan stated that God is attempting to transform the non being into being, the unrealised into realised. When the unrealised potentiality of the Absolute is fully realised then the distinction between creator and created vanishes. The distinction between God and the Absolute also then vanishes. In that case, according to Radhakrishnan, God lapses into the Absolute.

Radhakrishnan’s Absolute is a pure and passionless being which transcends the restless turmoil of cosmic life. However Radhakrishnan says that from the point of view of one specific possibility of the Absolute which has become actualised, the Absolute appears as God. The Absolute as God is organically related to the world. Moreover, Radhakrishnan holds that God as the creator, maintainer and judge of the world is not completely separated to the Absolute. It seems that the formless and passionless Absolute as such has no meaning for a religious man. The Absolute acquires meaning only when it assumes the form of God.
Thus in the philosophy of Radhakrishnan Absolute and God are like two sides of the same coin. Absolute and God refer to the same truth that is the Supreme.

The Absolute, according to Radhakrishnan is the total spiritual reality, manifested and unmanifested, actual and potential realized and unrealized. It is the reality underlying the entire range of phenomenon. According to Radhakrishnan, the distinction between phenomena and noumena does not involve any dualism. He as a strict monist holds that reality is one and whatever exists, exists in that one. The world is an attempt to realize one of the infinite possibilities contained in the Absolute. Though this world is an actual manifestation of the Absolute, it is not necessary for the Absolute to have this very world. God is that aspect of the Absolute which is responsible for the phenomena of change and becoming. It an agent, for the actualization of a particular possibility out of the infinite number of possibilities in the Absolute. Hence, God is the principle of activity or change. Radhakrishnan holds that there are two sides of the supreme, the essential transcendent Being which we call Brahman, and the free activity which we call Īśvara. When we refer to the free choice of this specific possibility, we deal with the Īśvara side of the Absolute. God is, thus the Absolute considered as the ground of the world. He is the Absolute from human end. While the Absolute is the transcendent divine, God is the cosmic divine. Radhakrishnan clarifies the distinction further by saying that God is the truth of our intellect and the Absolute for our intuition and does not make God merely a principle of unreal creation as Śaṅkara does.

Though Radhakrishnan identified God with the Absolute yet there are certain qualifications in this identification. Radhakrishnan’s conception of the Absolute is ultimately based on a monistic vision. In this monistic vision the deepest subjective truth is identified with the highest cosmic truth. This is actually an insight to be found in the philosophy of the
Upanishads. The classical Upanishadic conception of the Absolute is given a modern formulation by Radhakrishnan.

A humble effort has been made in this entire work to explore Radhakrishnan’s emphasis on the problem of God and the Absolute. For this purpose the present thesis is divided into five chapters. The first chapter is “Introduction.” Here attempts have been made to introduce the philosophy of Radhakrishnan along with an overview of his emphasis on the problem of God and the Absolute.

In the second chapter, entitled “Religion and philosophy according to Radhakrishnan”, I have made an analysis of Radhakrishnan’s view regarding religion and philosophy. Here emphasis is made on Radhakrishnan’s view regarding Māyā, religious experience, Universal religion, possibility of meeting of religions etc. Radhakrishnan maintains that the conflict of different religions is only on account of the fact that emphasis is laid only on one aspect of religion in utter disregard to other aspects which are also equally important. The most important contribution which Radhakrishnan has made is that of the religion of the spirit which according to him must be the future religion of the world.

The third chapter is entitled, “Concept of God from Indian and Western Perspective.” Here in this chapter an attempt has been made to emphasise the notion of God as found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gitā, and also Advaita Vedānta, Visistadaita Vedānta, Nyāya and Yoga Systems of Indian Philosophy. Also an attempt has been made to analyse the notion of God as found in the philosophy of Spinoza, Bradley and Rashdall. In the philosophy of Spinoza, the substance is one and he named it God. For Spinoza substance is the being which is dependent on nothing and on which everything depends. Bradley conceives the God of religion as an appearance and holds that God and religion are equally lost in the Absolute. For Rashdall, belief in God is the postulate of morality. Here a special
emphasis is given to Radhakrishnan’s conception of God also. Radhakrishnan holds that the reality of God as experience by the mystic is quite compatible with scientific truth.

The fourth chapter bears the title, “Problem of God and the Absolute: Radhakrishnan.” Here in this chapter an effort has been made to analyse the conceptions of Absolute as found in the philosophies of Upanishads, Advaita Vedānta, Aurobindo, K.C. Bhattacharyya, Hegel and Bradley. In this chapter the main theme of the thesis namely the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute is discussed. Here the special emphasis is given to the solution offered by Radhakrishnan regarding the relation between God and the Absolute. For Radhakrishnan, God and the Absolute are names of the one universal spirit in different aspects. Radhakrishnan does not make distinction between God and the Absolute.

In the fifth chapter conclusion has been drawn. The concluding chapter contains a brief summary of Radhakrishnan’s reconciliation of the problem of God and the Absolute. Here some critical comments against Radhakrishnan’s solution has been analysed along with Radhakrishnan’s reply to those criticisms. Here in this chapter a special emphasis is given to striking similarities between the views of Modern Physics and Eastern mysticism in general. The Eastern mystics have a dynamic view of the universe similar to that of modern physics.

A research from this type is a result of contribution, guidance and co-operation received from a number of people both implicitly and explicitly. At the outset, I owe a great deal of gratitude to my guide Dr. Sibnath Sarma, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Gauhati University for his affectionate guidance. I consider myself to be fortunate enough to work under the guidance of such a devoted and versatile teacher. I am deeply obliged to him for his valued guidance and encouragement at practically every step of my work.

I would also like to express my heartfelt thanks to Prof. Manisha Barua, HOD, Department of Philosophy Gauhati University and all my respected teachers of Gauhati
University, philosophy Department specially Prof. Sauravpran Goswami, Prof. Girish Sarma, Prof. Begum Bilkis Banu, Dr Shakuntala Bora and Dr. Thoibisana Akoijam for guiding me in every respect for the successful completion of my research work.

My sincere thanks are due to the librarians and staffs of K.K. Handiqui Library, specially Mr. Nityananda Pathak, Asst. Librarian, Gauhati University; I.C.P.R Library Lucknow; I.C.H.R. North East Regional Centre, Guwahati; OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati; Cotton College, Guwahati; and Centre for Women’s Studies, Gauhati University. In particular, I thank Ms. Preeti Chandra, I.C.P.R. Library, Lucknow, for providing me with research materials, specially the rare references available.

My deep sense of gratefulness goes to my family members for they have been solidly behind me in the entire endeavour. I owe it infinitely to my parents Joy Chandra Sarma and Sita Devi and my in-laws Dr. C.K. Barua and Prof. Manisha Barua for their inspiration and encouragement at every step during the course of my thesis work. I am also grateful to my husband Saugat Barua, for showing immense patience and understanding and kept me going throughout. Last but not the least, I express my gratefulness to my brothers, brother in law and sister in law. And I am also remembering the valuable inspirations of all my well wishers whose name could not be included here.

Date: (Nabanita Barua)