CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan is one of India’s best and most influential twentieth century scholars of comparative religion and philosophy. He is an eminent expositor and interpreter of Indian traditional philosophy, which carries with it the actual reflection of Indian culture. He is a philosopher, statesman, and a diplomat consistently at the same time. His basic philosophical position is an outcome of synthesis between the East and West traditions. Naturally he combined the two traditions with perfect ease and is able to evolve a philosophy of synthesis. Radhakrishnan was born in an orthodox Brahmin family at Tirutani, a small town near Madras (Chennai) on 5th September, 1888. He was the second son of his Orthodox Hindu parents Sarvepalli Veeraswami and Sitamma, who were conventional in their outlook. His early life was spent in Tirutani and Tirupati, both famous as places of pilgrimage. Perhaps on account of that early influence Radhakrishnan was naturally attracted towards religion. He himself admits that since then he developed a firm faith in the reality of the unseen world, a firm faith which was never forsaken. He had his early education in the Lutheran Mission High School at Tirupati, and in Voorhees College, Vellore. He studied in the Madras Christian College and in 1909 he took his M.A degree in Philosophy. His first book *Ethics of the Vedanta*, a thesis prepared in connection with his M.A Examination was published in 1908 when he was only twenty, which earned high fame to his credit.

His vocational career started in 1909, with his service in Presidency College, Madras as a lecturer in philosophy. Five years later in 1914, he was promoted as Professor of Philosophy in the same college. In 1917 Radhakrishnan was transferred to the Arts College at Rajahmundry as a lecturer in Philosophy. He went to Mysore University as Professor of
Philosophy in 1918 at the request of the authorities of the newly established Mysore University and he held this post for a period of three years. In Mysore the same year he wrote *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*. During this short period of his stay in Mysore, 1920 his celebrated work *The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy* was published. In 1921, he was appointed to the most important chair of philosophy in India, the King George V Chair of Mental and Moral Philosophy in the University of Calcutta. He was invited to Oxford in 1926 to give Upton Lectures on Hindu View of Life and after that teaching and Lecture assignments abroad followed one after another. During this period he also founded the Indian Philosophical Congress in collaboration with other eminent men of philosophy in India. Radhakrishnan became the Vice-Chancellor of Andhra University in 1931. He was the first Spalding Trust Professor of Eastern Religion and Ethics at Oxford in 1936. In 1939 Radhakrishnan was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of prestigious Banaras University. He was the elected Fellow of the British Academy in 1940.

Besides his teaching work, Radhakrishnan carried on with his writing work, mainly dedicated to interpretation and explanation of different aspects of Indian culture, philosophy and religion. Between 1920 to 1929, he wrote as many as six books including two volumes of *Indian Philosophy* and also *An Idealist View of Life* contains his Hibbert lectures for the year 1929. Besides philosophy, Radhakrishnan kept in touch with developments in other fields of knowledge. At the Philosophical Congress at Harvard University in 1926 he delivered an address on modern civilisation and its emphasis on material progress. It was later published in the form of a book *The Future of Civilization*. Radhakrishnan had to occupy many important positions by virtue of his talents. He led the Indian delegation to UNESCO from 1946 to 1950. He was appointed Indian Ambassador to Moscow in 1949. Radhakrishnan became the Vice-President of India in 1952 and hold the tenure for 10 years. He was conferred the ‘Bharat Ratna’ in 1954. In 1962 he became the President of India for five years.
till 1967. Thus he realised the Platonic dream of philosopher becoming king. His appointment as President was hailed by Bertrand Russell who said, “It is an honour to philosophy that Dr. Radhakrishnan should be President of India and I, as a philosopher, take special pleasure in this. Plato aspired for philosophers to become kings and it is a tribute to India that she should make a philosopher her President.” The world renowned philosopher statesman passed away at the age of 87 on 17th April, 1975. Radhakrishnan has established himself as one of the greatest intellectuals of the country. His vast knowledge of ancient Indian Religion and Philosophy, along with his extensive acquaintance with the wisdom of the west created the image of his being the only bridge – builder between the east and the west. All kinds of honour started pouring in quick succession, and he passed through various phases of life taking upon his shoulders responsibilities one after the other- the responsibilities of a Professor, a Vice- Chancellor, an Ambassador, the Vice- President of India and lastly the responsibilities of the highest office that India could offer to him – that of the President of the Indian Union. It is due to Radhakrishnan’s tireless effort that the East recognised the need to master western science and the West realised the need to understand Indian Philosophy.

1.2 PHILOSOPHY OF RADHAKRISHNAN IN GENERAL:

Radhakrishnan is one of the greatest figures of the Indian Renaissance. He has a place of eminence amongst the most important thinkers of the contemporary world of philosophy and creative thought. Contemporary Indian Philosophy is greatly indebted to him for his contribution of immense scholarly works in the field of religious philosophy. He has contributed powerfully to the synthesis of the two hemispheres – East and the West. A man of very rare intellectual endowments, his fame rests securely on the contribution as the creative interpreter of the comprehensive religious and philosophical traditions of India and the West. His early education made him familiar with the knowledge of the East –
particularly of India, and his own scholarly adventure acquainted him with the wisdom of the West. But his fundamental convictions are deeply rooted in Indian traditions. His philosophy was grounded in Advaita Vedānta reinterpreting this tradition for a contemporary understanding. He defended Hinduism against ‘uninformed Western criticism’ contributing to the formation of contemporary Hindu identity. He has consistently defended Hinduism against all criticisms which tend to describe it as non-historical and negative. He has been influential in shaping the understanding of Hinduism, in both India and the West, and earned a reputation as a bridge-builder between India and the West. But he has a knack of presenting all ideas into idioms and models of Western thought. He seems to be presenting old and traditional ideas in a refreshingly novel manner. Among Contemporary thinkers he has done a great deal to shape what may be described as a ‘world philosophy,’ by bringing Eastern and Western thought closer together. C.E.M Joad, the famous interpreter of Radhakrishnan, has described him as the liaison officer between the East and the West. Joad in his Counter attacks from the East describes Radhakrishnan’s metaphysical position thus, “..........the function, the unique function which Radhakrishnan fulfils today is that of a liaison officer. He seeks to build a bridge between the traditional wisdom of the east and the new knowledge and energy of the west.” This statement does contain some elements of truth, and that is apparent from the fact that Radhakrishnan makes persistent efforts to bring about an east-west synthesis.

It is generally accepted that Radhakrishnan is one of the greatest modern exponents of Hindu thought possessing the true hospitality of the Hindu mind and defending successfully not only the essentials of Hinduism but the spirit which lies behind all religions. His work is important not merely because he gives an attractive description of a “mysteriously profound way of thinking,” but also because of his conscious attempt to construct a system of thought in which there is a place for the insights of other thinkers, both
philosophers and scientists of the modern world. There are some scholars who strongly maintain that the metaphysics of Radhakrishnan is a real fusion of the East and West, particularly because he attempts to answer responsibly the problem which has haunted philosophers and theologians of all time, namely the relation between the Absolute of philosophy and the God of religious experience. In his attempt to work out a solution to this problem, he is rightly described as not merely the distinguished exponent of a lofty spiritual philosophy, but as the initiator of a new synthesis.

The basic philosophical position of Radhakrishnan is an outcome of synthesis between the Eastern and Western traditions. He synthesises Advaita Vedānta especially of Śaṅkara and Absolute Idealism of the West. The spirit of Radhakrishnan’s philosophy consists fundamentally in the attitude of synthesis or the concept of organic unity. As Charles A. Moore observed, “His basic approach to philosophy is the recognition of and demand for organic unity of the universe and its many aspects of the many sides of the nature of man, of man and universe, of the finite and the infinite, the human and the Divine.” Thus Radhakrishnan provides an interpretation of the philosophy which does justice to intuition and reason, philosophy and religion and this world and the other world. So it is clear that he provides inevitably a synthesis of the old and the new and of the east and the west in order to construct a philosophy of religion based on Absolute Idealism of Indian origin. The philosophical thinking of Radhakrishnan is influenced by a number of factors of which Indian religious tradition, Advaita Vedānta philosophy and Hegelian Absolute Idealism are the most important. He does not advocate any philosophical system. As a neo- Vedāntin he reinterprets, reconstructs, purifies and extends the philosophical doctrines of the Upanishads and the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara in the light of modern science and technology. Radhakrishnan goes through the philosophical doctrines of the Vedas, the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gitā, the basic texts of the orthodox and heterodox schools and the
commentaries of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. Radhakrishnan himself says about the influences on him which lead him to develop philosophical views. He asserts, “I studied the classics of Hinduism, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gītā, and the commentaries on Brahma Sutra by the chief Acharyas, Śaṅkara, Rāmānuja, Madhva and Nimbārk and others, the dialogues of Buddha as well as the scholastic works of Buddhism and Jainism. Among the western thinkers, the writings of Plato, Plotinus and Kant and those of Bradley and Bergson influence me a great deal. My relation with my great Indian contemporaries, Tagore and Gandhi were most friendly for nearly thirty years, and I realise the tremendous significance they had for me.” Thus Radhakrishnan has two ancestral lines in theology, one in India and the other in the West from which he develops his idea of religion. His philosophy contains a deep spiritual awareness.

Radhakrishnan’s system of philosophy is constructed around the spirit of the Vedas, although he differs from some of the ancient teachers. The three fundamental principles on which his philosophy was built are spirit, intuition and religion. Radhakrishnan has propounded spiritualism and dynamic idealism. Idea of spirit is the root concept of his philosophy. But he differs from Hegelianism and other Indian Idealism. He assumes the spirit not as substance but as life. According to Radhakrishnan, “Spirit is life, not thing, energy, not immobility, something real in itself and by itself, and cannot be compared to any substance subjective or objective.” For him humanity and reason should be explained in the light of spirit. Radhakrishnan considers self, God and Absolute as the different names of the Universal Spirit which represents his philosophy of idealism.

Radhakrishnan is a philosopher of comparative religion. The centre of his philosophical investigation is religion. He gives a modern interpretation of Ethics, Metaphysics, Politics, Aesthetics and Education on the basis of religion. He attempts to reconcile the teachings of different world religions. By religion or dharma Radhakrishnan did
not mean any particular religion. Indeed he tried to glorify Hinduism which is clearly evident in his Hindu View of Life, but he seems to be more in favour of advocating a universal religion. According to Radhakrishnan religions may differ in their nomenclatures, rituals, ceremonies, however their essence is the same. He distinguishes between historical and universal religions. Historical religions are many – Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Jainism etc. He felt that they are the different dimensions of one universal religion, because the spirit of these historical religions is the same. By Universal religion, Radhakrishnan does not mean a new religion over and above historical religions. He did not want to dispense with historical religions and create a new one. He is also aware of the fact that the historical religions cannot be removed overnight. He wanted that the historical religions should be understood through universal religion by grasping the essence of religions or the religion of the spirit. Radhakrishnan speaks of the ultimate religion that is religion as conceived in the most general way. The universal character of the Bhagavad Gītā as expressed by Radhakrishnan can be applied to his view of religion also. According to Radhakrishnan, “The Bhagavad Gītā represents not any sect of Hinduism, but Hinduism as a whole, not merely Hinduism but religion as such in its universality without limits of time and space, embracing within its synthesis the whole gamut of the human spirit.”5 Since religion is such a universal phenomenon it becomes the subject of metaphysical enquiry in as much as metaphysics is concerned with the ultimate or universal reality. Radhakrishnan therefore points out that religion can be treated as a fit subject for metaphysical investigation. Radhakrishnan, by analysing and interpreting different religious concepts like the nature of the Absolute, relation of God and Absolute, the theory of Karma, and rebirth, the nature of the self, and the means to its salvation, removed many doubts and confusions that trouble a philosophic mind. For example, in explaining the relation of the law of karma and the idea of the freedom of the human will, Radhakrishnan writes, “The cards in the game are given to us. We do not select
them. They are traced to past Karma, but we are free to make any call as we think fit and lead any suit, only we are limited by the rules of the game.” Thus as we play we gain or lose.

Radhakrishnan’s conception of religion has a spiritual background. Spirit constitutes the centrality of his philosophy. His views on human being, world and God reflect this point. While discussing the nature of human being Radhakrishnan distinguishes between finite and infinite man and observes that the mind-body complex of human being is his finite nature. It is apparent and undergoes change and modifications. However, there is some permanent element in human. Radhakrishnan calls it the spirit in man. He said that the spirit in man cannot be ruled out on the ground that it cannot be perceived with the naked eye. So also Radhakrishnan discusses the significance of spirit in the evolution of the world. He believes in different phases or levels of evolution of the world. They are matter, life, mind and spirit. Though Radhakrishnan considers spirit as the highest stage of evolution, he said that matter, life and mind are necessary for the realisation of the spirit. Radhakrishnan considers God as the spirit. It is the universal spirit existing in man and the world. Thus we find that spirit occupies a significant place in Radhakrishnan’s conception of man, world and God. He extends this philosophy to his understanding of religion. He considers the different religions are the manifestations of the same spirit. On this ground he pleads for fellowship of religions. He wants different religions should prevail and must develop understanding, tolerance and brotherhood by realising the underlying spirit among them.

Radhakrishnan repeatedly emphasised that we have to live in religion. Our religious temper and commitment must find expression in our day to day actions. Religion can become the most powerful means of improvement of an individual and human society if our faith in God is total, if our acts conform to our ideals, and if there is no difference between our belief and behaviour. In the words of Radhakrishnan, “There is nothing special in loving those who love us or who are themselves lovable. Jesus asks us to love our enemies in the hope of
reawakening their humanness, their potential capacity for love. We are called upon to remove from enemy’s heart the fear of our own hateful intentions. How far do we carry out these instructions to be good even to those who hate us?“ Religion is the expression of human effort towards spiritual perfections. All religions are only varied historical expressions of one truth.

The fundamental doctrine of Radhakrishnan’s philosophy is that there is an absolute spirit lying behind and involved in the whole world process. He says, “Spirit is the reality of the cosmic process.” The acceptance of a spiritual reality is different from the physical that naturally leads to philosophical difficulties. A question arise here- how do we know the reality of the spirit? If our knowledge is confined to sense experience and thinking only, as many philosophers since the time of Hume maintain, then we have no ground to believe in the spirit. This will be considered as a metaphysical assertion and hence non-sense. Radhakrishnan is aware of these criticisms. The whole range of his writing is an answer to these and in support of his claim that Ultimate Reality is spiritual. Radhakrishnan considers the different experiences of knowledge and accepts three ways of knowing namely sense-experience, discursive reasoning and intuitive apprehension. The first two are generally accepted by all, while the last namely intuition is accepted only by few. Radhakrishnan is aware of the fact that the basic concept of his philosophy on the reality of spirit cannot be justified without accepting intuition as a means of knowing. Radhakrishnan regarded intuition as a non-sensuous immediate apprehension which the Hindus call aparoksha. It arises from a close relation between mind and reality. It is the kind of knowledge acquired by being and not through senses or through symbols. In other words intuition is the most direct knowledge that man is capable. The main point which Radhakrishnan wants to emphasise is the directness and certainty of intuition. So what is intuited carries with it certainty. From this Radhakrishnan argues for the spirituality of reality and the spiritual basis of the universe.
1.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM - GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE:

The main subject-matter of this study is the enquiry of the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute. There have been various attempts to solve the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute in the field of philosophy and religion. The problem of the relation between God and the Absolute may be variously described as the problem of the One and Many, of Immanence and Transcendence, of the Universal and the Particular.

God is the highest principle of the theological interpretation of the universe. Generally God of religion is conceived of as a personal being with whom man can enter into warm personal communion, whereas the Absolute of philosophy is conceived of as an Impersonal being, passionless emotionless and aloof, with whom man cannot enter into any personal communion. Absolute, is the Ultimate Reality from the metaphysical standpoint. Religion takes personal God for the Ultimate Reality. Philosophy accepts the Absolute but cannot give equal status to God. God is regarded as personal whereas the Absolute is above personality. Just as there can be so many concepts of God as found in various religions, so also there is a variety in the concept of the Absolute in so many philosophies. There is a basic unanimity among the theologians that God is a personal being responding to our prayers and similar unanimity exists among the Absolutists that the Absolute is an impersonal Reality. So God and Absolute seem to be two disparate entities. But the question is - are they really so? The answer lies in the solution to the problem of the relation between the God and the Absolute. But both God and the Absolute cannot be claimed to be equally real and ultimate at the same time. Then whether the claim of the theologians or that of philosophers should be acceptable?

If we deny the existence of either God or the Absolute then there would be no problem at all. But as neither the theologians nor the philosophers are ready to do away with their concepts of God and the Absolute, the problem persists. Their main problem is how to
preserve both without reducing any one or the other to insignificance and at the same time without landing the absurdity of having two Supreme Realities. In other words their main problem is how to reconcile them in a unity. The Absolute is the all comprehensive, the identical world-ground, all-consistent experience, the ultimate explanation of the world-experience in space and time. The particulars of experience depend as instances, upon their universal laws from the scientific point of view, and in wider philosophical reference, there is one universal principle upon which all particulars, actual and possible depend. The intellectual necessity of explaining and understanding the significance of the world-process leads to the conception of the Absolute Experience of the Idealistic Philosophy. When we consider the Absolute or this Ultimate Reality from the point of view of emotion, when we adore the Highest as the home of our values and try to establish a personal relationship with the infinite, the Absolute of philosophical reasons turns out to be God of religion. Thus Absolute or God is the same Ultimate Reality looked at from different points of view. But this identity of the God of religion and the Absolute of philosophy is not admitted by all. The Absolutists like Bradley and Śaṅkara believe that the Absolute of philosophy is the highest Reality and God is only a phenomenal manifestation of the Absolute to the religious consciousness. Therefore God is not the highest Reality and it can be regarded to be real only from the lower or finite point of view. The God of religion is necessarily a personal being, but personality cannot be the highest category of existence. The attribute of personality of a human type cannot be ascribed to the Absolute. Reality as personality involves self consciousness and therefore the duality of self and not self, whereby the personal self will be limited by the not – self. Absolute Experience being all comprehensive cannot be a person; for personality is true only with reference to man but not with reference to the non-human, impersonal nature.
For Bradley Absolute is neither personal nor impersonal but is a supra-personal, all inclusive experience. The personal God of religions is only the appearance of the Absolute Experience which is one. Śaṅkara being an abstract monist believes in the Reality of the one and in the unreality of the differences. Consciousness is the only self certified reality and this is an abstract principle of consciousness and as such not a personal being having consciousness as his quality. Absolute is bare consciousness which is unitary. Religious experience assumes the difference of the worshipper and the worshiped and is thus illusory from the highest point of view. The Absolutists in regarding God as a reality of lower category make religion impossible for nothing short of the Absolute Reality can be worshipped as God. Bradley’s Absolute Experience or the universal consciousness of Śaṅkara is an abstract experience which seems to be impossible. An experience which is not the experience of any person is inconceivable. Rāmānuja, the theistic monist, believes that the Absolute consciousness implies an Absolute personality of God. The Abstract one of the Absolutists, rejecting all the differences and plurality, makes the world of man and nature an illusion. Abstract One, at the expense of many cannot be highest reality. Reality must be a concrete unity, an identity –in-difference or a system. Such systematic experience which is the highest reality may be regarded as an experience of personal type and the duality of the self and not-self necessary for personality may be regarded as holding between two different aspects of the same reality.

Thus the Absolute of philosophy does not necessarily cancel the world of plurality. The particular things of experience are finite and relative to each other. They depend upon one another as parts of an all comprehensive system. This system is Absolute and not relative to any other thing which is outside of it because it is all inclusive. But the true Absolute must include the relative and the true infinite must include the finite and go beyond it. This concrete point of view is consistent with theism and seems to be the right point of view. If
the Absolute is not a total blank, if it be an identical experience systematically organizing diversified finite experience as its materials, then the Absolute can be regarded as the Supreme Person or the God of religion. Absolute and God are, therefore, the same reality from the intellectual and emotional point of view, respectively.

1.4: RADHAKRISHNAN’S IMPORTANCE ON THE REALTION BETWEEN GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE:

Radhakrishnan has been rightly described as a neo - Vedāntin philosopher. His philosophy is strongly influenced by the classical Vedānta system, particularly by the various theistic versions of it. Like the classical Vedānta system the philosophy of Radhakrishnan has its roots in the Upanishad. The spiritualistic philosophy of the Upanishads in which the deepest inner self is identified with the cosmic reality exerted profound influence upon Radhakrishnan. There is a special emphasis on the intuitive apprehension of the Ultimate Reality in the philosophy of Radhakrishnan. His basic philosophical position is of a kind of a synthesis of Advaita Vedānta and the philosophy of Absolute Idealism. Radhakrishnan takes up the monistic character of the Vedāntic Reality and combines it with some of the important aspects of Absolute Idealism. Like Vedānta he believes that the Reality is one, like Absolute Idealism he shows that everything is a necessary aspect of the One. Radhakrishnan put special emphasis upon the identification of God with the Absolute. This is inconformity with the thought of Rāmānuja. Almost like Rāmānuja, Radhakrishnan said that God is the Absolute considered as the ground of this world.

All these considerations bring us to the point that the philosophy of Radhakrishnan is rooted in the Vedāntic system of Indian Philosophy. But when we say that Radhakrishnan is a neo-Vedāntin philosopher then thereby we indirectly point out that there is some element of newness in the Vedāntic ideas put forward by Radhakrishnan. There is no doubt that Advaita
is the basis of religious thought which Radhakrishnan expounds and defends. But he is a non-orthodox Vedāntin with a mind not to accept the whole tradition of the Vedānta. Radhakrishnan represents most important interpretational developments in the Vedāntic thought in the present day. He accepts only those parts of the tradition which are logically coherent. Unlike an orthodox Vedāntin he does not recoil into the narrow circle of theosphy, but widens the Vedāntic thought to have touch with science and practical life. Radhakrishnan is himself conscious of his reconstruction of idealistic thought and of his fresh interpretation of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. He has made a categorical affirmation that his Advaita is not the Advaita of Śaṅkara, nor his idealism is that Bradley. Having realized the disqualifications of Bradley’s and Śaṅkara’s understanding of the relation between the Absolute and the world, and convinced of the plausibility and coherence of his own doctrine which is an original adaption of the view of Upanishads, Radhakrishnan emphatically holds that, “The way in which the relation between the Absolute and God is here indicated is not the same as that either of Śaṅkara or of Bradley, though it has apparent similarities to their doctrines.”

Radhakrishnan’s originally lies in boldly re-interpreting the much abused doctrine with special reference to the present world and its needs. “His idealism, though bearing the marks of Vedāntic, Platonic, and Hegelian influences, is distinguished from all of these by some of its peculiar stresses and specially by its appeal to the modern mind torn as under by conflicting ideals.”

Radhakrishnan holds that the Ultimate Reality is impersonal Brahman. He at times calls the Ultimate Reality- the Brahman and at other times, - the Absolute. Brahman is the logical ground of everything. It is the only reality, but it is not arrived at by carrying the process of abstraction to its maximum unit. It is that from which everything is born. Everything lives it. It is the presupposition of everything else- the source of all. The Absolute differs from finite beings. As the Absolute in itself is essentially non-dual, it is free from
subject-object distinction. The Absolute is eternal, perfect and self-evident. No argument can prove its existence. Similarly no definition can be ascribed to it. We cannot comprehend the nature of the Absolute fully. It does not admit of even internal differentiation. In a sense everything is an expression of the Absolute. But the Absolute is unaffected by these expressions. It is beyond all its expressions. The ontological basis of the existence of the world is provided by the Absolute. The Absolute is full of infinite possibilities. The world is the actualisation of one of them. The Absolute is the pure being. As such, Absolute is the foundation of all existences. It is pure bliss and an indeterminate being.

Upanishads also denotes the Absolute as Brahman. But Upanishadic concept of Supreme Reality is quite negative. Upanishads hold that the Absolute can be described only as “not this not this” (neti-neti). Thus in the Upanishads when the Absolute or Brahman is described as sat-cit-ānanda, it means that the Absolute is not non being (sat), not non consciousness (cit) and not of the nature of sorrow (ānanda). Though Radhakrishnan conceives the nature of Ultimate Reality in the light of Upanishads and Advaita Vedānta he describes it positively. In the philosophy of Rāmānuja it is found that the qualities of being (sat), consciousness (cit) and bliss (ānanda) give to Brahman a character of personality. Radhakrishnan says that though the Upanishads and Śaṅkara also make an effort to describe the nature of the Ultimate Reality in negatively, yet these negative descriptions involve some danger. To deny attributes means to describe it as vacuum. Radhakrishnan says, “By denying all attributes and relations we expose ourselves to the charge of reducing the ultimate being to bare existence which is absolute vacuity.”

Radhakrishnan is not so critical in using the negative method to describe the Absolute. He says, “We can speak of the Absolute only in the negative way.” But it does not mean that he has blindly followed Śaṅkara’s view of the Absolute. He takes it in the positive sense and holds that the negative account should not lead us to the suspicion that the Supreme itself is negative. It is the basis of all existent things.
Over and above the principle of the Absolute or Brahman, Radhakrishnan also introduces the concept of God in order to explain the order and harmony of the world. In a sense his conception of God is unique, on account of his studies of the Indian and Western ways of thinking. According to him the Supreme Reality is apprehended in a two-fold way, as personal and impersonal. The personal aspect is known as God whereas impersonal aspect is known as Absolute. In the early prose of Upanishads, ātman is the principle of the individual consciousness and Brahman the super personal ground of the cosmos. God is not merely the transcendent numinous other, but is also the universal spirit which is the basis of human personality and its ever renewing vitalising power. God is both the wholly other, transcendent and utterly beyond the world and man, yet he enters into man and lives in him and becomes the inmost content of his very existence.

Radhakrishnan regards God as a person. Personality involves self-consciousness and self-regulation. Radhakrishnan asserts, “The personality of God is possible only with reference to a world, with its imperfections and capacity for progress. In other words the being of a personal God is dependent on the existence of a created order.” Personality is being ascribed to God since there can be communion with God only if he is regarded as a person. That is why Radhakrishnan says, “God is conceived as a personal being, towards whom the individual stands in a relation of cooperation and dependence.” According to Radhakrishnan, Saguna Īśvara alone can respond to the call of prayer. Radhakrishnan also holds that the God is not an indifferent creator. He is the principle behind creation and therefore, lives and grows with the creation. He is the store house of all the possibilities that are to be actualised in this creation. This process goes on and thus God also continue to be in creation throughout its history.

Radhakrishnan holds that the reality of God as experience by the mystic is quite compatible with scientific truth. Radhakrishnan observes, “We have certain experiences
which we try to account for by the assumption of God. The God of our imagination may be
as real as the electron but is not necessarily the reality which we immediately apprehend. The
idea of God is an interpretation of experience.’

God is not an ethical principle, nor an
intellectual concept, but an observed reality present in each man. Man expresses his very
intuition of reality through concrete forms, he responds to the eternal reality.

We also have an acquaintance with such a similar account in the Advaita Vedānta
of Śaṅkara. But in Śaṅkara’s philosophy two principles are conceived as basically one, as
different ways of apprehending the same reality. Radhakrishnan also distinguishes between
the Absolute and God, although he does not reduce their distinction to the empirical and the
transcendental points of view as it has been done in the Vedānta. Radhakrishnan conceived
the Supreme as revealing itself in two ways- Absolute and Īśvara. God is the Absolute in
action; it is God, the creator. The real in relation to itself is the Absolute and the real in
relation to the creation is God. Radhakrishnan feels that the demands of reason have to be
reconciled with the demands of experience. Both metaphysical and religious aspirations have
to be satisfied. The Absolute is the object of metaphysical aspiration and God of the religious
aspiration. This implies that unlike Śaṅkara, Radhakrishnan is not prepared to reduce God to
unreality by making it a product of Māyā and ignorance. In so far as creation is real, God is
also real. God is an aspect of the Absolute. From the human standpoint God is regarded as
the Absolute. The real as infinite possibility is the Absolute, but when we limit the Absolute
to its relation with that possibility which has actually been realized in the form of creation,
then the Absolute appears as the creator, as wisdom, love and goodness - as God.
Radhakrishnan apprehended Supreme Reality in two ways – One is personal, while the other
is impersonal: God is the personal aspect, whereas the impersonal aspect is the Absolute.
Radhakrishnan wrote, “By reference to things that are seen we give concrete form to the
intuition of reality that is unseen. Symbolism is an essential part of human life, the only
Radhakrishnan thinks that to use concrete symbols for unseen reality is to impoverish the Absolute. God is a symbol in and through which religion sees the Absolute.

Throughout his exposition of his metaphysical position, Radhakrishnan repeatedly asserts that the Real is One. The Absolute or Brahman is indeed the ultimate reality, a self-active principle which manifests itself progressively in and through human beings and the empirical world. Although we cannot grasp fully the Ineffable Transcendent Reality with the help of finite and limited categories of the human mind, yet man is capable of grasping the Absolute because besides consciousness and self-consciousness man is endowed with spiritual consciousness or super consciousness. As we have no other alternative than interpreting the unknown by the known, the supreme principle is designated as Self or Spirit which is infinite and universal. In other words the Supreme is the self of the universe. Since the Absolute cannot be comprehended by concepts which are generally employed by the human understanding, the only course left is to describe the Absolute negatively or through apparently contradictory epithets. Our inability to describe the Absolute in terms of any categories of human understanding does not however imply that the ultimate reality is negative or void. The negative account only suggests that man’s sense of transcendence is not something imaginary or elusive in nature but rooted in the nature of human being themselves.

Radhakrishnan holds that God is not an appearance of the Absolute. When the Absolute is viewed from a specific point of view, we get God. The pure Absolute is the matrix of infinite possibilities of which one is actualized as God. Apart from this actuality even God is the Absolute. God in this system is a logical necessity. When he comes to examine the world, Radhakrishnan holds that it is both being and non-being. “Whatever falls short in any degree of absolute reality has in it admixture of non-being. In the world of
experience, we have a conflict between being and non-being. In and through their mutual hostility, the world exists. If there were no non-being, there would be no-being.Śaṅkara’s principle of Māyā was neither real nor unreal; and for Radhakrishnan the same principle is both real and unreal. The difference in the emphasis offers a more positive content to the thought of Radhakrishnan. This positive content is supplied by what he calls integral experience. It is the same as immediacy which transcends the rational intellect without becoming irrational. In this transcendence the relational universe gets transformed. The terms related become equal to one another. The experience of the non-relational is no other than self consciousness where in the self is both the subject and the object. Consciousness then is its own object, its own attribute. In the integral experience, the world as the Not –I comes back to the I and becomes identical with it. Consequently he postulates three levels of being. There is pure being which is reality; next we have the level of being and non-being which is the world in which we live as finite subjects; and finally there is the level of non-being.

One remarkable feature of Śaṅkara’s Advaita Vedānta is the dualism of Absolute and God. According to Radhakrishnan, the Upanishads also lay equal emphasis on these two conceptions of Brahman. Radhakrishnan holds that since intellect and intuition are not opposed there cannot be any fundamental opposition between the intuitional Brahman and the intellectual Brahman. While describing the nature of the Ultimate Reality, the Upanishads sometimes regarded it as the Absolute, which cannot be characterized by the phenomenal categories and at other times they identify it with the Supreme person whom we are to adore and worship. We have also two views about the nature of the world. In some passages the world is regarded as an accident of Brahman (the Absolute) and in others as organic to God. Thus in the Upanishads there are two views running together regarding the nature of Supreme Reality. One view regards the Absolute as Pure Being and makes the world an accidental appearance (vivarta) of it, whereas, the other looks upon the Absolute as a
concrete person of whom the world is a necessary expression. The former view is nearer to Śaṅkara’s conception and the latter nearer to Rāmānuja’s.

Śaṅkara emphasizes on the Nirguna aspect of Ultimate Reality whereas Rāmānuja lays emphasis on the Saguna aspect of the same. But thereby they do not deny the opposite positions, simply they are giving less importance to them due to their respective standpoints. While Śaṅkara emphasises on the intuitive aspect of Ultimate Reality, Rāmānuja emphasizes on its thought aspect. Their methods of approach have compelled them to hold separate positions. But they are not truly deviating from the original Vedāntic position of taking into account both the aspects of Ultimate Reality namely, Brahman and God. While Radhakrishnan criticizes Śaṅkara for his greater emphasis on Nirguna Brahman, he also criticizes Rāmānuja for his greater emphasis on Saguna Brahman. Radhakrishnan holds that the logically highest may not be the ontologically highest for the real is something larger and better than our thinking has room for. He also asserts that so long as Rāmānuja accepts logical judgement as providing the clue to the nature of Ultimate Reality, He cannot escape the difficulties incident to the theistic outlook. Rāmānuja’s Brahman may seem to be the highest to us, but not the highest in itself. However, Radhakrishnan praises Rāmānuja, as he is trying to give Ultimate Reality a realistic and concrete colour. Radhakrishnan seeks “to reconcile the apparently conflicting views of the Supreme as eternally complete and of the Supreme as the self determining principle of manifesting in the temporal process.” While the Brahman is the Supreme as Spirit, God is the Supreme as person. Brahman is “God as he is” and Īśvara is “God as He seems to us.” The difference between Brahman and Īśvara is not of essence but of standpoint. We cannot say that one is real and the other is unreal. Both are real. The difference is that Brahman is ‘the logical prius of God.’
REFERENCES:


15. Ibid, p 177.


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