CHAPTER-IV

PROBLEM OF GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE: RADHAKRISHNAN

4.1 INTRODUCTION:

The problem of Ultimate Reality is a very vexed problem in the history of philosophy both Indian and Western. Although it is a very old problem it has not lost its novelty considering the ever new theories springing up everyday. The Brahmāsutra of Śaṅkara starts with the proposal of the enquiry after Ultimate Reality and this proves the importance of this problem in philosophy and particularly in the Vedānta system. 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. The problem of God and the Absolute is one of the fundamental problems in the philosophy of East and West. Generally God is regarded as the highest principle of the theological interpretation of the universe whereas the Absolute is the Ultimate Reality from the metaphysical stand point. God is personal and the Absolute is above personality. There is a basic unanimity among the theologions that God is a personal being responding to our prayers and similar unanimity exists among Absolutists that the Absolute is an impersonal Reality. But both God and the Absolute cannot be regarded to be equally real and ultimate at the same time. Therefore it has given rise to the serious problem of God and the Absolute. There are various philosophers who have discussed the problem. The most impressive solution to the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute was offered by Radhakrishnan. In this chapter we shall make a study of the Radhakrishnan’s solution to this problem along with the views of some modern philosophers.
4.2: CONCEPT OF THE ABSOLUTE:

Absolute is that which is not in any respect subject to conditions or limited; the first being which is independent, subsistent, possessing within itself the reason for its existence and its qualifications, the fullness of being, the fullness of perfection. The term Absolute is used by the philosophers to signify the Ultimate Reality regarded as one and yet as the source of variety; as complete or perfect and yet as not divorced from the finite, imperfect world. The idea of the Absolute is generally associated with a transcendent Being divested of all concrete contexts and beyond all categorical determinations, principally spatial, temporal and causal. Such a transcendent Being is an abstract universal, unchanging and unchangeable, not an object of thought or discursive reason, but one of unique experience or intuition. “We may, in fact, conveniently define the Absolute as that structure of the world system which any and every internally consistent purpose must recognize as the condition of its own fulfillment. So deny the existence of an Absolute thus defined, is in principle to reduce the world and life to a mere chaos.”

An Absolute is the sort of entity which not only occupies a prime ontic category, but also occupies necessarily and unconditionally. An Absolute is such that it admits of no alternatives. If there is an *Absolute* of that essential sort, then it is meaningless to support that there might instead have been an Absolute of some other some what different nature or essence. When we make enquiry with our imperfect insight into modality, we find that there are alternative Absolutes, but with our perfect insight into modality all such alternativity would vanish. The Absolute may be articulated into a number of members, each of which requires and so includes all the others. An Absolute must be taken as containing within itself the source of the Absoluteness claiming realm of values; it must be such as to embody all such values and to explain their detailed content. And if the Absoluteness and the claim of values can be shown to rest confusion, then there are and can be no Absolutes.
Again, the Absolute may be conceived as a concrete individuality, which is at the same time a concrete universal encouraging reality of all that experienced, of matter, life and spirit in their relations and interrelations. It allows no gap among these different elements, each of which is directed towards the realization of values that are embodied in the Absolute. Matter, life and Spirit are thus no appearances, but are different levels of self-expression in the life of the Absolute. Another feature which distinguishes this conception of the Absolute is that on it the individual selves instead of being appearances have been given a scope for approximation to the unity and totality of Absolute values. In this approximation lies the progressive personality of the individual self which grows out of an antagonism between the self and the world setting up his rights and duties. The antagonism between the self of man and his not self pursues him and he is in the struggle so long as the ideals or values he will be striving after will be held out to him as so many external goals. This happens so long as he regards himself as a self centred moral person. The inward realization of the presence of the ideal by man within himself may be said to constitute the true significance of Divine Immanence of the sphere of religion. In religion therefore the horizon of human ideals is so widened as to merge into the wider sphere of the objective values and perfection which are embodied in the being of God. In religion antagonism between the individual self and the Absolute reaches the vanishing point though such a state does not mean annihilation but rather enrichment of the individual self in the Absolute. Religion thus conceived leaves a very thin line of distinction between God and the Absolute. But on the whole, the standard concept of the Absolute in metaphysics and the concept of God in popular theisms are appear very different indeed and pose a serious philosophical problem.

In the history of Absolutistic philosophy the Ultimate Reality has been presented in various ways and forms right from the classical upto modern times. Throughout the different ages there have been development and changes in the meaning of the conception of Absolute.
Some of the views are completely new, while some are reinterpretation of the ancient ideas in the light of new experiences. The expression ‘the Absolute’ stands for that unconditioned reality which is either the spiritual ground of all beings or the whole of things considered as a spiritual unity. The Absolute is that which is not in any respect subject to conditions or limited. It is the first being which is independent, subsistent, possessing within itself the reason for its existence and its qualifications. The Absolute is fullness of being, the fullness of perfection. Again sometimes it is conceived of as the source through which all being emanates. It contrasts with finite things, considered individually and known collectively as the relative. The Absolute has the archetypes, the potentialities and powers which get manifested in the world. The Absolute is pure consciousness, freedom and possibility. It transcends the space-time universe. The Absolute is infinite in its possibility but only one of its possibilities can be actualized. The Absolute is the being which is the home of all possibilities, the causal basis of all existence. It is infinite and has nothing outside to control it.

The variety of the conceptions of the Absolute is conditioned by the variety of philosophical trends and systems. In the history of philosophy, the Absolute was understood as the primordial and fundamental, the basic factor of the cosmos. In ancient philosophy the problem of Absolute was posed by Thales of Miletus. According to him, the Absolute principle or cause of all reality is water. For Aristotle the Absolute was being in the absolute sense, the most perfect Substance. The Absolute is identified with unity and good, the intellect, the self thinking thought. In modern philosophy, according to Descartes the Absolute is an infinite and perfect being whose essence is to be the cause of itself. The Absolute is the cause of the idea of the Infinite Being and of the idea of man himself who possess this idea. According to Spinoza, the Absolute is an infinite substance, uncreated, whose essence is existence, who is perfect and contains an infinite number of attributes,
including extension and thought. According to Leibnitz the Absolute is the necessary being whose very possibility implies actuality. The concept of Absolute occupies an important position in the history of philosophy. The finished example of the Absolute we find in the philosophies of Sunyavāda and Advaita Vedānta in the East and in the philosophies of Spinoza, Hegel and Bradley etc. in the West. Apart from the differences in details their conceptions are essentially the same. Hence the mark of an Absolute as conceived as Brahman, Sunyam, Substance or Reality is that it is beyond all forms and qualities, it is beyond conceptions. It is truly a transcendent existent. It is a category by itself. As reflected in human nature – it is such that its denial is logically self contradictory. Hence it is the Ultimate Reality, the Absolute. The world may or may not be, but the Absolute is.

4.3. CONCEPT OF ABSOLUTE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE UPANISHADS, ADVAITA VEDĀNTA, AUROBINDO, K.C. BHATTACHARYA, HEGEL AND BRADLEY.

4.3.1 ABSOLUTE IN THE UPANISHADS

According to the Upanishads the Absolute is not a metaphysical abstraction or a void of silence. It is the Absolute of this relative world of manifestation. The Absolute in the Upanishads is not only the ultimate ground of all being and beings, but also the ultimate truth of one’s inmost being. The Ultimate Reality may be viewed from two aspects. From the subjective side this Ultimate Reality is called Atman and viewed from the objective aspect, it is Brahman. Atman and Brahman are identical. Absolute manifests itself as subject and object and transcends both. 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 vitalizing power. Brahman the first principle of the universe is known through Atman, the inner self of
man. In the Chandogya Upanishads it is said, “Verify, this whole world is Brahman and also this soul of mine within the heart, this is Brahman.”

From the objective point of view the Ultimate Reality is called Brahman. This Brahman is of the nature of existence, knowledge and bliss. It is self-existent; it does not depend upon anything else for its existence. It is of the nature of consciousness. The term Brahman has been derived from the root word Bṛh meaning to grow, to develop to expand, to evolve. The essence and substratum of all things in the world according to Upanishads is Brahman. Chāndogya Upanishad describes Brahman as tajjālan. “Sarvam Khalu Idam Brahman, tajjalan iti-verily,” meaning this whole world is Brahman, from which he comes forth without which he will be dissolved and in which he breathes. Yājñavalkya says that just as a lump of salt has no inner or outer part but consists entirely of savour, so in truth, the self has no inner or outer part but consists entirely of knowledge. It is of the nature of bliss also. The Brhadāranyaka Upanishad also says that this is the supreme bliss.

Both in the Aitareya and Taithirīya Upanishads Brahman is described as the creator of the world. The Aitareya Upanishad states, “The self, verily was (all) this, one only, in the beginning. Nothing else what so ever winked.” Further, “let me now create the world.” According to the Aitareya Upanishad Brahman not only created the world but also the protectors of it immediately after creation of the world. The Taithirīya Upanishad also shares this view – “He (the Supreme soul) desired. Let me become many, let me be born. He performed austerity. Having performed austerity he created all this, what ever is here.” Apart from the views on Brahman as highlighted in the Aitareya and Taithirīya Upanishads, the Mundaka Upanishad says that Brahman has created the world. According to this Upanishad Brahman is the root cause to emanate the entire world. By referring to Mundaka Upanishad, Radhakrishan says, “From him are born life, mind, all the sense organs (also) ether, air, light, water and earths, the supporter of all.” Besides, the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad states that
being the creator of everything Brahman has made all things the whole of the world. Brahman is one, without a second. It is eternal, unchangeable, devoid of growth and decay. It is the ground or the soul of the world. The world emerges from Brahman, exists in Brahman and returns to Brahman. Brahman is infinite, all pervading and all permeating. There is nothing which lies outside of the being of Brahman.

The Ultimate Reality is called Ātman and Brahman from the subjective and objective aspects respectively. Brahman and Ātman are identical. Brahman is Ātman. In the Upanishads, the subject and the object, the self and the not – self are identified by saying that – “That thou art”, (tat tvam asi). The Absolute manifests itself as subject and object, the self and not – self and overcomes and transcends the opposition between them and comprehends them. The different conceptions of Brahman correspond to the different stages of Ātman. In subject we find the waking, dreaming, sleeping as lower stage and the fourth the turiya or Ānanda is the highest state. This Ātman is known as Brahman which is a non – dual universal consciousness, where subject and object become one. The Absolute is Pure Existence, Pure knowledge and Pure bliss - all in one.

The Upanishads describe Brahman in two ways – one is cosmic Brahman or Brahman endowed with attributes and the other is acosmic Brahman or Brahman without any attribute. As a cosmic Brahman is Saguna, all comprehensive, full of good qualities – Sarprapañcha. Brahman as the cosmic is attributed with name and form and is immanent in the world. The cosmic Brahman is regarded as the cause of production, maintenance and destruction of the universe. Brahman is that from which the things of the world come into existence, by which they are supported and into him they are reabsorbed. The world with all things is the body of God who is their soul. God is not only the soul of nature but He is also the soul of souls. The souls are souls in relation to their bodies, but in relation to God they become His body and He is their soul. Therefore Brahman is not only the ground and sustainer of the world but also
the inmost essence of one’s higher self. By the cosmic aspect the Upanishadic thinkers try to show that Brahman is an all inclusive unity of the matter and spirit. The apparent dualism of the matter and spirit is resolved in the transcendent unity of Brahman.

The acosmic Brahman is the transcendental Absolute, the turiya or the fourth, indeterminate, indescribable and anirvacaniya. It is the foundational consciousness, the fundamental postulate of all knowledge. It has no limiting adjuncts. It is beyond space, time and causality. It holds the subjective and the objective world in a transcendent unity. Brahman is the indubitable ultimate knower which is presupposed by all affirmations and negations, all doubts and denials. It is self – luminous and self proved. Brahman is without beginning and end, eternal, permanent and is not affected by any change. It is existence, knowledge and bliss. Existence, knowledge and bliss are not the attributes of Brahman, but these are the essence of Brahman. But the nature of this Brahman is not attainable by our intellect. It is not the subject of our consciousness. The Absolute can be best described only in negative way, though it is not itself negated by it. Yājñavalkya describes it – “This is the imperishable, O Gārgi, which wise people adore – not gross, not subtle, not short, not long, without shadow, without darkness without air, without space, without attachment , without taste, without smell , without sight, without ears, without speech, without mind, without light, without breath, without mouth and without either inside or outside. It does not eat anything nor can anything eat it.”

Let this description should be mistaken as more solipsism and pure nothing, Yājñavalka adds in immediately that there is nothing outside of Ultimate Reality which it may see, and the assumption of ultimate as non – entity lead to the impossibility of the world of appearance so, whatever is, owes its being to this transcendental reality.
But this way of apprehending the Ultimate Reality in the Upanishads is the root of the celebrated distinction made by Śaṅkara between God and the Absolute. The former is called lower Brahman (Apara Brahma) or Īśvara, and the latter is higher Brahman (para Brahma) or the Absolute. God is the personal aspect of the Absolute and the Absolute is the impersonal aspect of God. Matter, self and God are only manifestations of the Absolute. But Rāmānuja has rejected this distinction. For him the Absolute is the personal and the immanent God and matter and selves alike form His real body, He, being the soul of nature and the soul of souls. Rāmānuja interprets the Upanishads in the sense of Brahma-parināma-vāda. For him Brahman transforms Himself as the world of matter and of souls. On the other hand Śaṅkara interprets them in the sense of Brahma – vivarta- vāda. Brahman unreally appears, through ignorance, as the world of matter and of souls. Śaṅkara does not deny the existence of a personal God. He is the highest appearance admitted by Advaitism.

It must be admitted that the cosmic and acosmic Brahman are not two different entities. They are only the two aspect of the same reality. The Sarprapañcha conception must be understood negatively as that the world is not outside of Brahman and the Nisprapañcha conception positively as that Brahman is more than the world. Acosmic Brahman is the basis of the cosmic Brahman. Cosmic Brahman is immanent in the world and is conditioned by Māyā, the inscrutable power by which Brahman conceals its real nature. The cosmic Brahman is both immanent and transcendent to the world. Man encased in his body and attached to passions cannot meditate upon Impersonal Brahman. Upanishads have provided also for a personal Brahman. He who knows Brahman becomes Brahman. Taking the Upanishads as a whole we find that there are at least two different ways of looking at the infinite. One of the trends describes Brahman as a homogenous non-composite consciousness that is, perfection without a second. It is negatively described as neti neti (not this, not this) and the finite has no place in it. The world of matter and souls are described as its
appearance. There is no other reality than Brahman. The relation between Brahman and other appearances is one-sided. The appearance is dependent on Brahman, but Brahman is in no way touched by the impurities of appearance. The Upanishadadic seers trace all that exist to Brahman. Brahman is the fullest reality, which is all inclusive. It is the identity in difference. The Absolute is the ground of all finites.

4.3.2 ABSOLUTE IN THE ADVAITA VEDĀNTA OF ŚAṆKARA

The thoughts of the early Upanishads got a systematic form in the philosophy of the Vedānta. All most all the important germs of the Upanishadic philosophy is contained in the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. According to Śaṅkara there is only one Supreme Reality and it is Brahman. The doctrine of Brahman plays the central role in the orthodox religions of India and it is the life line of the Vedāntic thought. The knowledge of the unknown eternal behind the known temporal is the main goal of the triadic canon or the Prasthānātraya of the Vedānta - the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gitā and the Brahmasutra. The main aim of Brahmasutra is to establish the ritualistic Vedic thought on the foundation of spiritual knowledge. Brahmasutra is said to be the summary of the Upanishads and it endeavours to define and describe the meaning of eternal Brahman and His temporal Māyā. This book begins with the sutra or verse of Brahman knowledge – “Athāto Brahmajijñāsa” ‘Now therefore, the desire to know Brahman.’ Therefore the opening sutra of the Brahmasutra undoubtedly explains that it is aiming at the knowledge of Brahman, the Supreme Reality. There are different interpretations of the ‘word’ ‘atha’ by different commentators. Śaṅkara considers the word ‘atha’ to mean ‘after acquiring the four Sādhanās (requisites) which are indispensable for the study of Vedānta. According to Śaṅkara, “The enquiry into Brahman should invariably follow the acquisition of the four requisites, whether the aspirants are householders or sannyasins or those who do not belong to any asrama or are even devas” Śaṅkara in his
commentary on the first sutra of the Vedānta sutra, explains the four conditions, essential for
the student of Vedānta which are known as the ‘Four-Fold aid’ (Sadhanā-catustayah).

The first condition is the knowledge of the discrimination between what is eternal and
what is not eternal, Nityānitya Vastuviveka. One should realize that the self alone is real and
everything else is transitory and perishable. The second condition is renunciation of the
enjoyment of reward here and in the other world, Iha- amutrartha – phala – bhoga – virāgo.
One must give up all desires for sensuous enjoyment, whether in this world or in the next. It
is thus the detachment from all selfish ends and an attainment of Niskāma Karma. The third
is ‘Sama-damadi Sadhāna Sampad. It implies that an aspirant must have control over the
senses as well as the mind. There are six means which the aspirant must fulfill. They are
Sama and Dama, i.e. the control of mind and senses. The next one is Uparati, which is
renunciation in spirit; the next one is Titiksā which means resignation and then Samādhi,
which means concentration. And the last of them is Sraddhā i.e. the belief in the teaching
imparted. The fourth and the last requirement is ‘Mumukshatvam’, i.e. the longing for
liberation. This longing, the desire for self-realisation, the inner urge for liberation can help
man to attain the state of perfect knowledge. Having acquired these qualifications one may
very well enquire about Brahman and know it. But without these qualifications it is not
possible to know Brahman. Therefore, the word ‘atha’ should be understood to mean that the
enquiry about Brahman is to be made after one has acquired these qualifications.

The aim of Brahmaṣutra is the knowledge of Brahman, ‘Brahmajñāna’ which does
not imply any epistemological enquiry, but the spiritual realization of Brahman. There is a
general belief that the spirit of science is opposed to the spiritual view of the world. But
Brahmasutra itself is an example of spiritual view of the world, which is still relevant to the
scientific view of the world. Radhakrishnan stated that in and through our religious
achievement, we cannot ignore scientific outlook in any field of knowledge. Even ‘the
Oxford group of scientists who founded the Royal Society of England were religious minded.” In India also the foundation of Vedāntism are based on scientific basis.

The word Brahman, as its etymology suggests means an eternal being which is pure, conscious and free as well as omniscient and omnipotent. The word ‘Brahman’ has been derived from the Sanskrit root ‘bṛh’, which means ‘to grow’ or to ‘evolve’. Śaṅkara derives Brahman from the root bṛhat, to exceed atisayana. It means eternity, purity, intelligence. Its main features are being, consciousness, infinity and freedom.

Consistent with the first sutra, the second sutra, define Brahma as ‘Janmadyasya yaṭah”, which means ‘Brahman is that omniscient, omnipotent cause, from which proceeds the origin etc (i.e. subsistence and destruction) of this world.” Thus the second sutra says that the world has a pattern and it is the duty of a philosopher to find it out. According to Radhakrishnan while science explains ‘how’ things happen, it doesnot tell us ‘why’ they happen. In the Brahma sutra, the ‘now’, ‘why’ of the world creation is explained by the Sutrakara. Thus ‘from the nature of the world, the Sutrakara infer the existence of one Supreme, personal and self subsistent Mind, to whose creative and ruling activities the world owes its existence, nature, coherence and consummation.” This is the tatastha laksana of Brahman and its Svarupa laksana as scripture declare it as ‘Truth, Knowledge and Infinity (Satyam Jñānam, Anantam, Brahma). The most distinguishing feature of Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara on the metaphysical side is its conception of Nirguna Brahman (unqualified Brahman) as the Ultimate Reality.

Śaṅkara in his commentary on the Brahma sutra brings together a cosmological and teleological argument of Brahman. According to him, “We can not trace the world with its order and design to ‘non-sentient pradhāna or atoms or non-being, or a being subject to rebirth to its own nature or to a human creator’. It can not be traced to the world soul or
‘Hiranyagarbha’ for he is subject to the changes of the world. The universe has its root in being, san-mula, has its basis in being, sad āśraya and is established in being, sat-pratisha.”

This being which transcends all distinctions of subject and object is the Supreme Brahman. And when we view this Supreme Brahman as the creator and governor of the universe, He is said to be Īśvara or the personal God.

Brahman is the cause of the world and so he is omniscient. The third sutra supplies the reason for our thinking that He is omniscient. This sutra affirms that Brahman is the source of the Veda, ‘Śāstra’ yonitvat.’ Śaṅkara gives two interpretations of this sutra. (i) Śāstra- yoni, the cause of the scripture, (ii) that of which scripture is the cause or source of revelation or Pramāṇa. The first interpretation means that Brahman is the cause of revelation of the Vedas. No one but an omniscient being could be their source. The second interpretation means that only the Vedas can prove to us that Brahman is the cause of the production etc. of the world. By the word ‘scripture’ we understand the Vedas and other inspired writings from which all our knowledge is ultimately derived. We know on scriptural authority, that the Vedas have come from God, without any special effort being made on His part for this purpose. The Supreme Īśvara is the source of the Veda. He breathes forth all knowledge effortlessly. It is common knowledge that an author always knows more than what is contained in his books and so it goes without saying that the great being which could produce so effortlessly, what is in fact the mine and source of all knowledge should be all knowing. The Supreme is omniscient; His knowledge extends to all things. The Veda is said to be apauruseya, independent of human origin. Those who hold that Īśvara creates the Vedas admit that the creator, even though omniscient and omnipotent, creates the Vedas in accordance with what they were in earlier creations and has not freedom in regard to it. Even as the world is beginningless so are the Vedas. This is one interpretation of this sutra. But the sutra can be interpreted in another way also. According to the other interpretation, the sutra
says that the scripture is the source of the knowledge of Brahman. “Sāstram Yonih Karanam Pramānam.” Scripture is the means of right knowledge through which we understand the nature of Brahman, i.e. on scriptural evidence we know, that Brahman is the ground of the world - of its origination, subsistence and dissolution. Śaṅkara says that the source of knowledge is knowledge itself. The origin of a body of scripture possessing the quality of omniscience cannot be sought elsewhere but in omniscience itself.

The knowledge of the true nature of thing is not dependent on human intellection. It depends on the thing itself. The knowledge of Brahman depends on the thing itself because its content is an existent thing. It is not an object of the senses. By nature the senses have objects as their content and donot have Brahman as their content. Brahman is not perceived by the senses. It is inferred from the world or learnt from the texts or experienced by the individual.

The fourth sutra declares that Brahman is the meaning of all scriptural passages. The differences among the scriptural passages are only apparent and are capable of reconciliation. ‘Tat tu samavayāt, but that is the result of the harmony.’ Śaṅkara discusses this sutra by stating the objection that the Vedas deal with the ritual and the Vedānta passages are not intended for ritual. We cannot have an injunction with regard to an already existing thing and so the Vedas dealing as they do with ritual can not be the source of the knowledge of Brahman. If it is said that the Vedas enjoin us to contemplate, we have to note that contemplation which depends on the establishment of differences of the contemplated, contempler, contemplation cannot occur in the case of Brahman which is devoid of all differences and is to be know only through the Vedānta. The Vedas give us not only injunctions with regard to ritual but also Brahma knowledge. The authority from Brahman is the sacred teaching.
Śaṅkara in his famous Adhyāsa Bhāṣya which is an introduction to the Vedānta Sutra propounds that there is only One Reality, which is Knowledge, Bliss and Infinitude. Besides this reality nothing is real. The Real and Brahman are one and the same. There is nothing besides it to describe it. All that is, is Brahman. It has no second to it. According to him, Brahman alone is the Ultimate Reality from the transcendental point of view. It is a non-dual entity completely bereft of all possible attributes and disassociated from external and internal determinations. Bramhan alone is everlasting. Brahman itself appears to our finite experience as the world of multiple and finite existences. Brahman is called kutasthanitya, unchanging, self-sufficient, unconditional and perfect. Brahman is the noumenal background of the changing, phenomenal world. Brahman is in comprehensible by our thought, beyond the reach of mind and transcends all speech and language. According to Śaṅkara Brahman is absolutely non-empirical. It is beyond the reach of empirical thought. It is inapprehensible by logical knowledge. It is pure inwardness of which no conceptual interpretation is possible. It is indivisible, inalienable. Brahman is neither external nor conditioned by external causation.

According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is the only reality and the world is non different from Brahman. Here non-difference does not mean identity, for the world is not identical with Brahman. Here non-difference means that the world has no existence apart from Brahman which implies the apparent identity or the illusory nature of the world even as the illusory snake is seen in the rope. The world is full of changes, but the Absolute can not be changed. It is unchanging underlying unity behind all the changes. Infact, change cannot take place unless there is some unchanging unity. Brahman is self sufficient and perfect. It doesnot need the help of anything else. It is thus self sufficient and perfect. Therefore Śaṅkara says that the relation between the world and Brahman is one of non-difference like the pot and the clay. For Badarāyana, “The world is not an illusion, or a dream like structure but a real, positive something, which has its origination, existence and absorption in Brahman.”

17 Badarāyana
holds that the power of creation belongs to the pure, stainless Brahman, even as heat belongs to fire. Brahman develops itself into the world without undergoing any change. According to Radhakrishnan, Badarāyana does not make it clear how Brahman develop or create this world. He does not care to explain how Brahman turned into the world which is not acceptable from the philosophical point of view. Rāmānuja taking this advantage states that the world is the creation of the Lord by his wonderful power which creates this world. Śaṅkara holds that the Ultimate Reality is Brahman, the indeterminate spirit and argues that the world of knower, known and knowledge is somehow in Brahman. So there is no question of granting reality (real status) to the world. He explains the situation philosophically and maintains that Brahman is not transformed into the world (parinama) but appears as the world (vivarta). Therefore he introduces the concept of Māyā in order to explain the situation. The entire system of Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara may be summarized in the following line: “Brahma satyam jagat mithyā jivo brahmaiva nāparah,” meaning Brahman is the only Reality; the world is ultimately false; and the individual soul is non different from Brahman. Brahman and Atman or the Supreme Self is synonymous terms. The world is a creation of Māyā.

According to the Upanishads Brahman can be defined from two points of view-positive and negative, Savīśeṣa and Nirviśeṣa, Saguna and nirguna, determinate and indeterminate. The scripture describes Brahman as ‘Neti Neti’ as well as ‘Saccidānanda.’ Śaṅkara holds that Brahman may be explained from different standpoints. From the viewpoint of the liberated soul, it is unconditioned and from the viewpoint of finite soul, it is the cause of the world. To say that Brahman is reality is to say that it is different from the phenomenal, the spatial, the temporal and the sensible. Brahman is what is assumed as foundational, though it is in no sense substance. According to Śaṅkara, Brahman is absolutely non-dualistic, “One without a second, ekam evādvitiyam” (C.U. vi-2-1). This
Absolute Brahman is the Ultimate Reality. He is beyond cause and effect. The spatio-temporal phenomena are contained in him. Brahman is not in any point of space, though it may be said to be everywhere, since all things imply and depend on it. The nature of Brahman is inexpressible, because when we say anything of it we make it into a particular thing. Brahman has nothing similar to it, nothing different from it and no internal differentiation, since all these are empirical distinctions.¹⁹

Though Brahman is said to be non-definable (Anirvacaniya), there are two definitions of Brahman which may be designated as svarupa laksana or essential definition and tatastha laksana or accidental definition. The former definition describes Brahman as Saccidānanda and the latter as cause, sustainer and destroyer of the world. In this latter definition Brahman is helped by Māyā and is named as Īśvara. The essential definition of a thing consists of the essential nature of that thing. In the Taittiriya Upanishad Brahman is defined as: “Satyam jñānam anantam Brahma,”²⁰ i.e. Brahman is pure being, pure consciousness and infinite. Again in the Brhadaranyaka Upanishad Brahman is described as Vijñānam anandam Brahma²¹ i.e. Brahman is knowledge and bliss. Thus Brahman is Existence, Intelligence or Consciousness and Bliss. These are not attributes of Brahman in the sense that Brahman is spoken of as being qualified by them. It is not that Brahman has existence, intelligence and bliss as its gunas. Sat, cit and ananda are all one in substance. Brahman is Existence, Intelligence and Bliss is to imply that Brahman cannot be distinguished from non-existence, non-intelligence and non-bliss i.e. from what is asat, acit and not-ānanda. Brahman is limitless; it is not limited by anything.

According to the Advaita Vedānta, the term ‘sat’ refers to ‘truth’ and its nature never be anarta or false, which undergoes change, whereas the meaning of ‘sat’ is always unchanging. Brahman is ‘sat’ in the sense that its nature is never contradicted. That means uncontradicted existence is what is called ‘sat’ or Brahman. The idea of Brahman as true
existence is conveyed by the phrase trikālābādhyā i.e. what persists uncontradicted in the past, present and future. Brahman or Absolute is the timeless reality. The significance of defining the Advaitic Absolute as ‘sat’ is not only that Brahman is pure uncontradicted existence but also that Brahman alone is such existence.

Again Brahman is defined as cit or jñāna (consciousness) also. The term cit means consciousness itself and not the agent of the act of knowing. Thus Brahman is called cit which means Brahman is consciousness itself and being of the nature of consciousness it is self shining. Brahman illumines not only itself but also all other objects, by its light everything else shines. Again Brahman is infinite, because there is nothing besides it. Further, if Brahman is defined as existence, knowledge and infinite, then it may be thought that it is something devoid of any emotive aspect. Therefore it is said that Brahman is not only existence, consciousness and infinite, but of the nature of bliss also. It must be remembered that the infinite bliss is not like worldly bliss, which is born of sense object contact and finite and hence relational, because the bliss of Brahman is infinite and unrelational. According to the Vedāntin, bliss is not an attribute of Brahman, but the essence of itself, i.e. Brahman is not blissful, but bliss itself.

These three aspects of Brahman i.e existence, knowledge and bliss are not different from one another. If they be different from one another, we shall be forced to accept sort of difference in the being of Brahman and in that case Brahman will no longer remain akhanda or indivisible. Hence, it is held that each of these three aspects is identical with the others and also with Brahman itself, Brahman itself is pure existence, pure consciousness and pure bliss – all in one. Brahman cannot be defined as mere existence and consciousness, different from bliss, because Brahman is the only source of all happiness. So, it is pure bliss. But, ultimately the three are one. From the metaphysical standpoint Brahman is pure existence, from the
epistemological standpoint it is pure consciousness and from the ethical standpoint Brahman is pure bliss. It is an Absolute.

Sat, cit and Ānanda are not the višeṣāna or adjective, qualifying Brahman. Višeṣāna means a quality which distinguishes one entity from another. Brahman is one without a second and is indivisible. It is free from all differences or bhedas i.e. Bhedarahitam. Differences are of three kinds. They are (1) Sajātiya bheda or the distinction between two things belonging to the same class, as between an oak three and a pine three, (2) Vijātiya bheda i.e. the distinction between two things belonging to different communities as between a three and a stone, (3) Svagatah bheda i.e. distinction between different parts of an individual entity as it refers to different parts of the same object like roots, trunk, branches, stacks, leaves etc of a tree. Brahman is devoid of all these conceivable differences. It is devoid of homogeneous difference, as it is one and without a second. There is no other Brahman from which it is to be distinguished. It is devoid of heterogeneous difference, as there is no other reality dissimilar to it. Brahman has no internal variety, as Brahman does not admit of parts. Therefore it is said in the scripture, ‘Sarvam Khalu idaṁ Brahman’ i.e. Brahman is all these. Brahman is one and there is no multiplicity in it. So Brahman is free from Svagatah bheda. The worldly things are made up of parts and admit of differences. So, the pure identity of Brahman cannot be explained in terms of empirical description. Brahman is neither a quality, nor a substance, neither a cause nor an effect and is without beginning and end.

The Tatasthalaksana of Brahman is that ‘it is the cause of the world’ or that ‘Brahman is the cause of the origination, sustenance and destruction of the world. This Tatasthalaksana definition of Brahman is found in the Tattiriya Upanishad. In the Tattriya Upanishad there is a discussion between Bhrigu and his father Varuna about Brahman. When Bhrigu asked his father Varuna to explain about Brahman, the Varuna replied, “Yato vā imāni bhutāni jāyante
yena jātāni jivam yatpratyantyabhisamvisanti” i.e. it means, ‘From which all these beings takes birth, that by which they live after being born, that towards which they move and into which they merge – that is Brahman.” The Chāndogya Upanishad described Brahman as Tajjālan. “Sarva khalu idam Brahma Tajjalam santa upāsīt” i.e. “All that is Brahman. (This) is born from, dissolves in and exists in That. Therefore one should meditate by becoming calm” Therefore according to Śaṅkara we should have before us in the name Tajjalan as summarizing of the three attributes of Brahman as creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe. Brahman is not only the creator, but also the preserver of the universe. The worlds came from Brahman and He alone preserves them all. It must be noted that Brahman is regarded here as a cause, not in the ordinary sense of cause and effect. He is the cause in the negative sense, rather than in the positive. Brahman is the sole reality and if there is anything which can be called the cause of the world, then it is Brahman. The Advaita Vedāntins thus advocate the Brahman sat-kāranavada. When Śaṅkara speaks of Brahman he maintains that Brahman is both the material as well as the efficient cause of the world. Now a question arises here – if Brahman is the efficient cause, then what is the material cause upon which it is to be moulded into the form of the world? If it is a material cause also, does it undergo transformation in order to become the world? According to the Advaita Vedāntin neither there is a second to Brahman, nor does the Brahman undergo any transformation. There is no real transformation of Brahman into the world. Śaṅkara is credited with the performance of maintaining the Advaita character of the world as it is and shows only that it has no reality apart from Brahman. Though the world comes from Brahman, yet there can be no separation between the two.

The Upanishadic philosophers describe Brahman as having two aspects: Nirguna and Saguna. Nirguna Brahman is devoid of all qualifying characteristics and it is also called the Supreme Brahman or Para Brahma. When Brahman becomes conditioned by Upādhi or
Māyā it is called Saguna Brahman or Apara Brahma. Śaṅkara regarded Nirguna Brahman or unqualified Brahman as the Ultimate Reality. The unqualified Brahman is devoid of all qualities. Nirguna Brahman is the negation of all attributes and relations. It is beyond space, time and causality. Though it is spaceless, yet without it space cannot exist, though it is timeless yet without it time could not exist. Again though it is causeless yet without it the universe could not exist. Only if one admits the existence of Nirguna Brahman as an unchanging substratum one can understand proximity in space, succession in time and independence in the chain of causality. No description of it is possible except by the denial of all empirical attributes, definitions and relations. The Upanishads employ the technique of negation to describe the attributeless Brahman. The impossibility of knowing Brahman either by speech or mind or eye has been emphatically expressed in Brhadāranyaka Upanishads. Śaṅkara also interprets the Upanishadic formula ‘neti-neti’ – not this not this. In the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad it is said, “asthulam, ananu, ahrasvam, adirgham, alohitam, asneham, acchayam, atamah, avayu, anakasam, ascungam, arasam, agandham, acaksuskam, asrotram, avak, amanah, atejaskam, apranam, amukham, amatram, antaram, abahym, etc”.

i.e. It is neither gross, nor fine, neither short, nor long, neither glowing red (like fire) non adhesive (like water). It is neither shadow nor darkness, neither air nor space, unattached, without taste, without smell, without eyes, without ears, without voice, without mind, without radiance, without breath, without a mouth, without measure, having no within and no without. In the Svetasvatara Upanishad Brahman is described as “Niskalam niskriyam santam niravadyam niranjanam etc” i.e. That which is without actions parts, without actions, tranquil, blameless, unattached etc. The celebrated formula occurring so often in the Brhadāranyaka Upanishad, ‘neti neti (not this not this) and others establish Brahman as devoid of quality, action and difference etc. It is said Brahman being qualitiless and actionless, transcends the world, it is not at all concerned with the creation, sustenance and
dissolution of the world and also with the empirical life of the Jivas. Śaṅkara also interprets
the Upanishadic formula neti-neti. Śaṅkara declares in his commentary on the Brahmasutra
that, “Bhava, questioned about Brahman by vaskalin, explained it to him by silence. “He said
to him, learn Brahman, O friend and became silent. Then on a second and a third question he
replied. “I am teaching you indeed but, you donot understand. Silent, is the self.”^27

Śaṅkara also accedes to the view that Brahman is the only reality devoid of all
qualities, incomprehensible, indeterminate. It is without beginning and end. It has nothing
prior to it and posterior to it. Brahman transcends past, present and future, which exist in the
empirical world. It is not affected by time which changes into days and years in the world. It
is uniform in nature and devoid of the nature of the world and so Brahman is Nisprapancha.
Even though Brahman is described in a negative term by the scripture it has been described
in positive terms also. When Brahman is described as Nirguna, it does not mean that
Brahman is devoid of any character. Nirguna technically means that a thing that is
phenomenal does not belong constitutively to Brahman. Positively Brahman has been
described as Saccidānanda, ‘Existence – consciousness and bliss’. Existence- consciousness
and bliss are identical with each other. Though they are not synonymous but are united and
identical with Brahman.

Another set of passages describes Brahman as Saguna Brahman. Saguna Brahman or
Apara Brahman is the Brahman endowed with qualities and actions and concerned with the
world process. Brahman is a transcendental reality, a pure being and is devoid of activity
because activity makes Him non-eternal. Brahman is unchangeable, eternal and so it can not
be active. But a problem arises here - how can we explain the creation of the world by an
inactive and changeless Brahman? Śaṅkara solves this problem by saying that the world is
not a creation of attributeless Brahman. Brahman conditioned by Māyā is the creator,
preserver and destroyer of the world. It is said that Brahman is endowed with infinite super
qualities like omniscience, omnipotence, love etc. The second sutra of the Brahmasutra states that the Brahman is that from where this world originates etc. The same idea has been described in the Chāndogya Upanishad where Brahman is described as Tajjālan. The full description of Brahman as the creator, sustainer and destroyer of this world is given in the Taittiriya Upanishad. Śaṅkara tries to explain the world, of objects with the concept of Brahman. Śaṅkara regards Brahman both as the material as well as efficient cause of the world. According to the Advaita Vedāntins the Ultimate Reality is non-dual and Brahman does not undergo any transformation. The world is an appearance of Brahman. Brahman is not only the cause of the world, but also the sustainer and destroyer of the world. Śaṅkara upholds Vivartavada. Thus Saguna Brahman or God in the Advaita Vedānta is conceived, not as identical with the Absolute, but as the Absolute associated as it were with Māyā the creative power of the omniscient Lord. The concept of Saguna Brahman is more or less an empirical postulate which is practically useful. He creates the manifold world through his power which is called Māyā.

But a question arises here – what is the real nature of Brahman? Is Brahman Nirguna or qualitiles, actionless and differenceless, or is it endowed with quality, action and difference? Those who are the believer of a personal God and the Vaiṣṇava Vedāntins hold that Brahman is necessarily endowed with quality, action etc. According to them the significance of the Upanishadic Brahman centres round the concept of Saguna Brahman. They hold that Nirguna Brahman simply speak of the essence of Brahman with the cosmic quality eliminated from it, though in reality Brahman is never devoid of quality etc. Going against this view the Advaita Vedāntins on the other hand hold that Brahman is essentially Nirguna and Niskriya. Brahman cannot be both determinate (Saguna) and indeterminate (Nirguna). In the Brahmasutra Bhāṣya Śaṅkara says.” Na sthānato api parasyobhaya – lingaṁ sarvatra hi,\textsuperscript{28} meaning “Even from (difference of) place a two told characteristic cannot (be
predicated, of Brahman, because throughout (the scriptures teach it to be otherwise i.e. without any qualities). This sutra says that Brahman cannot be both qualified and non-qualified at the same time. Both these cannot be predicated of one and the same reality which cannot have two contradictory natures at the same time as it is opposed to experience. It is not possible that one and the same entity itself should be as formed and formless, because here a contradiction arises. Moreover it is not possible that a thing having one only, should have different characteristic, merely because of its being effected by limiting adjuncts. Śaṅkara makes this point clear with an example that as a crystal which in itself is white remains clear even though it is painted with red colour. That crystal appears as red which is not illusory. Similar is the case with Brahman also. Therefore it is to be firmly held that Brahman alone is absolutely real, devoid of all differences and qualities. Therefore, it seems to us that Śaṅkara along with Upanishadic seers, is conscious of the fact that to ascribe any positive attribute to Brahman means to limit it. Unqualified Brahman is unreal, because Brahman is devoid of all qualities. Regarding the unqualified Brahman of Śaṅkara Prof. Paul Deussen also says, “In any case of the name Brahman in the work (Vedānta Sutra) indicates something impersonal only in the sense, however that its being is raised far above all personality.” Saguna Brahman is a phenomenal appearance, the apparent aspects of Nirguna Brahman and is conditioned by Māyā. Thus Nirguna Brahman is the metaphysical principle of the universe. It appears to be Saguna and Sakriya only when it is endowed with Māyā. The Svarupa laksana definition of Brahman speaks of the absolute nature of Brahman as Nirguna and Niskriya, while the Tatathalaksana deals with the Saguna aspect of Brahman. Brahman denoted by Svarupa laksana is Nirguna and Niskriya, as it is akhand or indivisible and not at all concerned with the world process. Again Brahman denoted by Tatathalaksana is Saguna and Sakriya because it is endowed with qualities like omniscience, omnipotence etc. and is concerned with the world process. When the Nirguna Brahman is associated with theguna
ridden Māyā, it is spoken of as Saguna and is conceived of as having a form, a name, of having qualities and of acting in relation to the world.

The Advaita Vedāntins hold that the Saguna Brahman or Īśvara is postulated for those who are at a lower spiritual level and hence are not capable of meditating upon the Nirguna Brahman. The Advaita Vedāntic Philosophers try to bring about a consistency among the two sets of Upanishadic passages spoken about by subordinating the Saguna passages to the Nirguna passages. However it doesnot signify that the Saguna passages are meaningless or that they do not expose the nature of Brahman, because in the ultimate analysis Saguna passages also signify the Nirguna Brahman through laksana or implication. This signifies that the cosmic activities like creation sustenance etc cannot exist in any other reality except Brahman. It is Brahman endowed with Māyā that performs these activities. This is why the Saguna passages also ultimately imply the Nirguna Brahman.

The two phases of Brahman - Nirguna and Saguna accepted by the Advaitins are however not different from each other. The same Brahman looked from the absolute standpoint is called Nirguna Brahman and looked from the empirical standpoint it is regarded as the Saguna Brahman or Īśvara i.e. Brahman endowed with Māyā. The difference between Saguna and Nirguna Brahman is therefore, only a difference of view point, there is no actual difference between them. From the Pāramārthika or transcendental point of view, Īśvara is also an appearance. The world with all its varieties of being devoid of any transcendental reality, Īśvara its creator also must be regarded as unreal; He is real only from Vyavahārika or phenomenal point of view. However it is held that Brahman, the Absolute can be attained through Īśvara since he is the highest revelation of the Absolute.

Nirguna Brahman is not for man bound by Ajñāna. It is meaningful only to those rare few, who are bold and fearless, ready to renounce all duality. Who has come out of the
darkness of ajñāna into the light of jñāna can realize it. The Saguna Brahman is connected with the religious predicament which involves the duality of deity and devotee and is sustained by it. In the goal of religious endeavor which is a mystic experience, the devotee is merged in the deity. Here the Saguna Brahman is called God or Īśvara, who is the highest reality to the man of religion. God is as real and Supreme to the devotee or the Upasaka as the Nirguna Brahman is to the Brahman jñāni. Those who are not able to climb to the abstract heights of contemplation and realization of the Nirguna Brahman are the worshipper of the Saguna Brahman. Thus Śaṅkara states that there are two orders of Brahman, the Nirguna and Saguna. The former is Para or higher Brahman and the latter is Apara or lower Brahman. By these terms he simply denotes that Brahman is differently gazed at from two levels. He maintains that when Brahman is looked on with a relative experience from lower level, Brahman becomes the maker of the world and He is God. God for the individual schemes is Supreme Being – He is regarded as the highest Reality. Except the gifted few, endowed with divine personality the path leading to the realization of Nirguna Brahman is through Saguna Brahman. The aspirant who has earned the divine grace of God by unwavering devotion to Him can attain the Nirguna Brahman by jñāna, born of instruction (upadesa). Īśvara is the highest preceptor of the Supreme Truth and it trained the devotee to develop an attitude of detachment towards the world, freed of its entanglements and habituates it to unfettering concentration so necessary for Brahman realization.

Thus it is found that the concept of Saguna Brahman is not an inferior one as it often conceived by the opponent. Worship of Saguna Brahman is essential for the Māyā – bound Jiva, it is an essential concomitant of Nirguna Upāsana. Therefore Saguna Brahman is real and essential in the Vyavahārika level where as Nirguna Brahman is real in the Pāramārthika level.
The doctrine of Māyā is the keystone of Śaṅkara Vedānta. It stands as the mile-stone of the Advaita concept of Ultimate Reality. According to Śaṅkara Brahman is only ontological reality, which is inactive and changeless. But if Brahman is the only reality, then the world of multiplicity becomes difficult to explain. It is Śaṅkara who boldly and logically announced the doctrine of Māyā as an explanation of the relation between the world appearance and Brahman. Śaṅkara borrows the word Māyā from the Upanishads and with the help of this concept He explains the world. It was the versatile genius of Śaṅkara, which could adjust the position of real Brahman and unreal world, through the help of the concept of Māyā. Through the theory of Māyā Śaṅkara proved that Brahman is the only Absolute Reality and the world is an appearance. Māyā is a magical power of God. As the burning power of the fire is indistinguishable from fire, so also Māyā is indistinguishable from God. Māyā is the inherent potency (Shakti) of Brahman, which is coeval with Him. Māyā is absolutely dependent on and inseparable from Brahman. It is non different from Him. The relation of Brahman and Māyā is unique; it is neither identity nor difference nor both. The world is merely a play or Lilā of Īśvara. It is due to Avidyā or Māyā that one God is seen in many forms. So for Śaṅkara all human experiences are appearances of the Absolute, as name and form manifestation of Brahman. This name and form manifestation is another name for Māyā.

Śaṅkara describes Māyā as the root cause of the world appearance. In most cases, Śaṅkara has used the term ajñāna, avidyā, māyā, prakṛti avyakta etc as synonymous. Māyā or ajñāna occupies a pivotal position in the Advaita Vedānta as it is regarded as the cause of all multiplicity and empirical activity. Māyā acts as a medium of the projection of this world of plurality on the non dual ground of Brahman. It is beginningless (Anādi). It has been taken as something positive and negative but not real. In its positive aspect it projects (vikshepa) and in its negative aspect it conceals (Avarana) the Reality (Brahman) and acts as a screen to hide
as it is non-apprehension as well as misapprehension. Māyā is indescribable and indefinable for it is neither real nor unreal nor both. Māyā is not real, for it has no existence apart from Brahman and it is not unreal as it projects the world of appearance. And it is not both real and unreal, for this conception is self-contradictory. It has a phenomenal and relative character. It is an appearance only. Māyā is of the nature of Adhyāsa (Superimposition). It is the superimposition upon one thing of the character of another thing. Just as the snake is imposed on rope, similarly the Jivas engrossed by Māyā see the attributeless Brahman as the world of many names and forms. Māyā is a wrong cognition which can be removable by right knowledge.

Māyā is the substratum and object of Brahman. The locus (Ashraya) as well as the object (visaya) of Māyā is Brahman. Māyā does neither affect Brahman nor deceive Him. Just as the imposition of the blue colour on the colourless sky does not affect the sky itself or just as the magician is not influenced by his magic similarly Brahman is not influenced by Māyā. Māyā is used as the name of the dividing force, the finitising principle, that which measures out the measurable and creates forms in the formless.30 It is neither real as the Brahman nor unreal as the flower of sky. When we try to link up Māyā with Brahman, Brahman becomes transformed into Īśvara and Māyā denotes the sakti or the energy of Īśvara. However, Īśvara is not in any way affected by his Māyā. Māyā is not a substance and so cannot be regarded as the material cause. It is only a modus operandi which coming itself from the material cause (Brahman) brings about the material product i.e. the world.

For Śaṅkara, Māyā and Avidyā are one and the same. The difference between them is only considering them from different point of views. When we look at the problem from the objective point of view, then we speak of Māyā and when the same is viewed from the subjective side we have the Avidyā. Thus, just as the one and the same reality is viewed as Brahman and Ātman, so also Māyā and Avidyā are the different names of the one and the
same power of ignorance. Māyā is both subjective and objective, individual and universal, that out of which the conditioned forms of intelligence and of objective existence arise. For Śaṅkara, Avidyā does not imply the individual ignorance, but it is the impersonal force which transcends all individual consciousness which is the same as Māyā. Śaṅkara does not make any difference between Jiva and Īśvara. For him the distinction is like the difference between pot - ether and ether at large. So also the Jiva is different from Brahman only due to limiting adjunct which is the result of ignorance. Thus the individual self is not different from God; the individual soul has the reality of its own. It is superimposed on the supreme self due to ignorance.

Māyā is of the nature of three qualities, of satta, rajas and tamas and is the seed of the material world. At the time of dissolution, this universe is absorbed in Māyā and Māyā exists in the being of Īśvara. Again in the beginning of creation, the world is manifested from the bosom of Māyā resting in Īśvara. For Śaṅkara, “Īśvara is Brahman conditioned by Māyā”31. Māyā is His energy, inherent force, by which He transforms the potential into the actual world. As a power of Īśvara, Māyā is inseparable from Him. Brahman endowed with Māyā is said to have three gradations, in consonance with the three gradations of the manifestations of Māyā. Thus Brahman possessed of undifferentiated Māyā is Īśvara, the omniscient and omnipotent; Brahman endowed with subtly differentiated Māyā is called Hiranyagarbha or Sutratman, the inner self of the totality of all the subtle elements; while Brahman endowed with Māyā differentiated further into gross and perceptible objects is called vira or vaisyvanara, the inner self of the totality of all the gross objects. These three stages of Brahman namely Īśvara, Hiranyagarbha and Virāt are generally regarded as the states of deep slumber, dream and waking, respectively, while Brahman in its highest essence is regarded as lying beyond these three states and is described as ‘turiya’ or the fourth state.
Brahman by its definition is conceived as absolutely perfect and eternally pure. The knowledge of Brahman does not depend on the active energy of man, but is analogous to the knowledge of those things which are the objects of perception, inference and so on and thus depends on the object of knowledge only. “A mere intellectual understanding of reality is not enough. The end of all knowledge is spiritual realization, anubhāvasanam eva vidyaphalam. Knowledge and renunciation lead to the experience of self, svānubhava or ātmānubhava. This is the aim of religion. These experiences are recorded in the Upanishads.” According to Śaṅkara the world we find is due to our ignorance or nescience. Once the ignorance is removed with the help of right knowledge the duality is gone and the oneness of the Supreme Reality is visible. “Śaṅkara says that Brahman is known for one’s own self, ayam ātmā brahma. No one thinks that he does not exist. Each one cognizes the existence of himself. Sarvo hy ātmāstitvaṁ pratyeti na na aham asmi iti.”

For Śaṅkara Ultimate Reality is pure intelligence, citmātra, devoid of all forms. Brahman is devoid of qualities. Whatever the qualities are conceivable can only be denied of it. Brahman is the only reality and the phenomenal world is necessarily an unreal appearance of the Absolute. We are experiencing a real world. The world may be an appearance to those who have realized the Brahman, but for others like us it is a real creation of God. Thus in conformity with the Upanishadic tradition Śaṅkara has successfully accommodated the concept of Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. Both Nirguna and Saguna are not two different entities. The same Brahman is Nirguna from transcendental point of view and Saguna from empirical point of view. His Saguna Brahman thus helps to develop the religious attitude of the devotee. Brahman is one which has no second, nothing outside it. Brahman, Īśvara or Jiva stand to each other as reality and appearance. Personal God or Īśvara is the cause of the world, the home of contingent experience. Truth or Brahman is one but for the ordinary intellect which can perceive only through the categories of space, time and
causality, the spaceless, time less and causeless appears as determinate Brahman. From the Vyavahārika standpoint Īśvara or the personal God acts as a subject to the world of objects. It is the self conscious subject that wills. Īśvara is not the transcendental or the Eternal subject which is indeterminate but is the determinate Brahman which is a necessity of our empirical or devotional self.

4.3.3. ABSOLUTE IN AUROBINDO'S PHILOSOPHY:

Sri Aurobindo, one of the greatest mystic philosophers of modern era, expounds his metaphysical doctrine concerning Ultimate Reality as ‘Integral non-dualism.’ The metaphysical outlook of Aurobindo is basically that of the Vedānta. But unlike the various traditional exponents of different schools of Vedānta, Aurobindo propounds his doctrine not only from the extent of scriptural texts, but also on the basis of enlightenment gained through his own intuitive mystic vision, which bridges over the gulf of two diverse doctrines of Nirguna and Saguna Brahman. He translated, annotated, reinterpreted and expounded many of the creative and non-technical sources of Indian philosophy- the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavadgītā and the latter epics. He gives a new thought to the modern world comprising a spiritual synthesis and an integral view of reality for the welfare of the world, in a form appropriate for the present times. According to Aurobindo, Reality is integral and expresses itself as an inalienable unity of all things and differentiates itself in the process of manifestation of the world. Aurobindo synthesizes the various systems of thought into one inclusive whole, which reconciles the various conflicts of the human reasoning about Ultimate Reality and which seeks to know the reality in its indivisible wholeness and fundamental oneness.

As regard to the concept of Ultimate Reality, Aurobindo synthesizes the two rival thoughts which are quite opposed to each other. He integrates the concept of Brahman into
one synthetic whole which merges into one central metaphysical idea, namely Sacchidānanda, which revolves all disputes of unqualified and qualified, changing and changeless, personal and impersonal, determinate and indeterminate aspects of Brahman. The dual distinctive description of Brahman does not mean that there are two Brahmanas. But the differences signify only differences of thought, of concept and of ideas, not of Brahman. Aurobindo holds that Suguna and Nirguna are the two poises of one Brahman. Synthesizing the two contradictory views Aurobindo clarifies that, “The silent and the active Brahman are not different, opposite and irreconcilable entities, the one denying, the other affirming a cosmic illusion; they are one Brahman in two aspects, positive and negative and each is necessary to the other.”

This dual description does not mean that there are two Brahmans, but they are the two aspects of the same Reality, one is eternal, silent, static and another is dynamic, becoming. Ascetics claim that the silent, inactive, pure, self existent and self enjoying self or Brahman is the sole reality. For instance, for Śaṅkara Brahman is the only reality. It is a non-dual entity completely bereft of all possible attributes and disassociated from external and internal determinations. Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja, both are one sided. While Śaṅkara takes the view of indeterminate and impersonal Brahman, Rāmānuja takes the view of determinate and personal Brahman. But Aurobindo says that the silent self is not opposed to the world of becoming. The becomings of the divine activity derive their energies and their potency of variation and harmony from the impartial support of the Supreme Brahman. Aurobindo contends to bridge the gulf between the dualism of Nirguna and Saguna, formless and formed, impersonal and personal, determinate and indeterminate. Aurobindo reconciles both the opposite views and through the unification of two distinct concepts he shows that their various thinking about Brahman are only the fragments of mind and not the real nature of Brahman.
Aurobindo’s philosophy of the Life Divine is known as “Realistic Advaita”, which is contrasted with illusionistic Advaita of Śaṅkara. However Aurobindo’s philosophy is in true with Upanishadic thinking and he believes in Sachchidānanda – Existence- Consciousness – Bliss – as the ultimate truth. But the real import of the term Realistic Advaita is that according to Aurobindo, this creation is the manifestation of that One Reality and therefore, the manifested world and all that has become is as real as Brahman. “An Omnipresent reality is the Brahman, not an omnipresent cause of persistent illusions.” Aurobindo is of the opinion that the Vedāntic formula ‘One without a second’ must be interpreted in the light of the other truth - “All this is Brahman”. The criterion of reality is that “Truth has to be sought in larger and complete affirmation.” For Aurobindo Reality have two aspects – Non being and Being, silence and word, the static and the dynamic. The former is the basis and support of the latter. The Absolute has an eternal, real and creative power which creates the cosmos. There is One truth, One Reality, the being and the many are His becomings. The truth behind all dualities, all contradictions, and all variations, seen in the various levels of consciousness is Brahman, the omnipresent reality.

According to Aurobindo, Reality is integral, the one that becomes manifest in the individual and the cosmos, that transcends and holds them. The main tenet of Aurobindo’s philosophy of the Life Divine is “Brahman; Īśvara is all this by His Yoga-Māyā.” Reality has three fundamental aspects, Ātman, Purusa and Īśvara with its consciousness force. Reality is Saguna in as much as it is capable of manifesting qualities, and Nirguna as it is not limited by any sum of qualities. Akṣara or silence or kṣara or movements are complementaries and transcendent, but also capable of gradual creative self expression by self limitation and self determination. “It is perfectly understandable that the Absolute is and must be indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be limited by any determinations, or any sum of possible determinations, but not in the sense that it is incapable of self determination.” The Absolute
can not be defined with any quality, property and power, not because they donot belong to it, but because it cannot be fully conceived and expressed by these. It is immanent as well as transcendent. The Advaitins described the Absolute negatively by denying all determinations. Aurobindo thinks that such negation in another way limits the Absolute by denying it even the freedom of self expression and self determination.

Aurobindo regards the Absolute as both immanent and transcendent reality. In its immanent aspect, the Absolute is Super mind, whereas in its transcendent aspect, the Absolute is Existence – consciousness – Force and Bliss. The Supermind is the creative aspect of the Absolute. It is God, the creator of the universe and One that evolves and manifests itself in the cosmos. The cosmic evolution and Divine manifestation depend on the Supermind. The Absolute and Supermind are not two ultimate realities. The Absolute involves Supermind. Reality is both transcendent and immanent, unmanifest and manifest and self-absorbed and creative. There is no distinction between the two aspects in Reality; God is the projected and cosmic aspect of the former. In the view of Aurobindo, being is the Ultimate Reality. He called, it Sachchidānanda. He maintains that Brahman the Supreme reality, is one, ineffable, pure Existence, without quality, quantity and form. But pure existence which is without quality, quantity and forms, does not mean that It cancels them but it means that It exceeds them so that they can pass into It to get transmuted and again come out of it in the cosmic movement.

Aurobindo analysed the Upanishadic concept that the Reality is Sachchidānanda in the light of his philosophical insight. The Absolute Reality, as Aurobindo cogitates is indeterminable, indefinable and unconditioned. It positively expresses itself to our consciousness as Sachchidananda i.e. – Pure Existence, Pure consciousness and Pure Bliss. When the self can transcend itself from its egoistic outlook by liberating itself from its identification of finite mind and body, the self enters in the domain of spiritual experience.
At this stage the self can realize its basic Reality which is Existence – Consciousness – Bliss, the triune principle that constitutes the nature of Absolute, but it does not mean that these are distinct parts of the Reality. Sachchidānanda is one with a triple aspect. In the Supreme, the three are not three but one; Existence is Consciousness, Consciousness is Bliss and they are thus inseparable. They are not only inseparable but so much like each other that they are not distinct at all. In other words, it is a fully conscious and blissful infinite existence. The importance of this concept for humanity lies in its implication that Brahman is our deepest and secret Reality. It is our true self and it is possible to recover this Reality of our being by removing the veil of ignorance that hides it from us and imprisons us in a false identification. This is the metaphysical bias for Aurobindo’s Yoga, the discipline given consciously unite our phenomenal existence and life with our essential Reality. The Absolute or the Sachchidānanda is an indivisible, fundamental reality. Aurobindo holds that the Absolute is not merely existence, consciousness and bliss, but also consciousness force or cit-sakti.

In order to understand Aurobindo’s concept of Sachchidānanda, we have to understand his theory of evolution. For Aurobindo the Divine stands for the creator who centers into his creation, sustains it and is still above it. According to Aurobindo evolution is the descent of the Divine Consciousness. The Absolute is dynamic. He expresses Himself in the world of spirit and matter. Aurobindo holds that the Absolute manifests itself in two ways, namely in His static aspect and in his dynamic aspect. In his static sense the Absolute is the Being or Reality, which is also called Sachchidānanda. In its dynamic aspect He is Becoming or Supermind. He is the effectual reality. Supermind is not separate from Sachchidānanda or Being. Supermind is the link between the Being and Becoming. Aurobindo states that the Becoming is not separate from the being but present in it, constituted by it, inherent in its every infinitesimal atom and in its boundless expansion and extension. All is fundamentally the essential divine. Brahman, the Supreme Reality is not
only indeterminate and transcendent but also capable of gradual creative self expression by self-limitation and self-determination. Aurobindo observes, “It is perfectly understandable that the Absolute is and must be indeterminable in the sense that it cannot be limited by any determination, or any sum of possible determinations, but not in the sense that it is capable of self determination.” The Absolute can not be defined with any quality, property or power and it is not because they donot belong to it but because it cannot be fully conceived and expressed by these. It is all these and yet much more than these.

Aurobindo following the Vedas and the Upanishads which is often reinterpreted in the modern light conceives seven chief poises or aspects of Reality. These are Matter, Life, Mind, Supermind, Bliss (delight), Consciousness – Force and Existence. These may be regarded as an ascending series of evolutionary steps from to the Absolute or as the steps of the descent of the Absolute to matter. Aurobindo regarded these as the seven fold chord of Being. But these seven poises are aspects and not successive stages in time because the Absolute is above space and time. Aspects which appear to our mind outside one another, or one after another exist in an eternal, unbroken, interpenetrating unity in the Absolute consciousness. Each aspect expresses the indivisible Infinite in a unique way. Man explicitly contains within itself matter, life and mind - the manifestations of Reality. Man has also an inner and abiding psychic entity known as the soul. Around this soul, the body, life and mind of man are organized into an individual’s entity or ego and it stores up the individual’s experience and persists through the changes of the body, life and mind. When we add this formation of the Absolute to the seven fold poises then we would have eight chief aspects or poises of Reality. These eight-fold poises of Reality are the following–

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existence</th>
<th>Matter</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consciousness- Force</td>
<td>Life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bliss  Psyche
Supermind  Mind

The first column represents God’s descent to the world; the second represents the individual’s ascent towards God. Aurobindo wrote, “The Divine descends from pure existence through the play of Consciousness – Force and Bliss and the creative medium of Supermind into cosmic being, we ascend from matter through a developing life, soul and mind and the illuminating medium of supermind towards the Divine Being.”38

Brahman, the Absolute has no needs no desires and has no deficiency, but it has the potentiality for creating names and forms. It is absolutely free and not even bound by his own freedom. Brahman is Sachchidānanda, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss. It manifests itself in the infinite names and forms, enjoys the delight of his variation. It is ānanda or delight out of which the world was originated, ānanda sustains it and ānanda is the goal of the world. Sachchidānanda is the higher trinity, the source of all cosmic manifestations whose creative activity is called the Supermind. This Supermind is the Real idea or the ‘knowledge - will’ in which the Divine knowledge and will are blended in perfect unison.

**Pure Existence:**

The Ultimate Reality or the Absolute is the Pure Being or the pure, infinite, ultimate Sad Brahman. It is not only concept but fact as well. Aurobindo wrote “Sad Brahman, Existence pure indefinable, infinite, Absolute is the last concept at which Vedāntic analysis arrives in its view of the universe, the fundamental Reality which Vedāntic experience discovers behind all the movements and formation which constitute the apparent reality.”39

The Pure Existence without quality or quantity or form is the only Reality, which is to be considered as fundamental reality lying behind the phenomenal world. The Pure Existence is
not the absence of the attributes, but it exceeds and goes beyond them. Aurobindo realizes the presence of the Omnipresent Reality in the phenomenal world. He holds that if we can transcend ourselves from our egoistic outlook and observes this world in an impersonal manner then we perceive a boundless energy of intimate existence. This is free from the limitations of space and time. Such energy exists for itself and behind its existence there is an aim which it wants to fulfill. Though the things of this world are different from the point of view of quality or quantity but their self is equal. Omnipresent Reality equally exists everywhere as a form of energy. Reason shows that the world of becoming is an aspect of Pure Existence. Pure Existence is beyond space and time, without quality and quantity. The Absolute is infinite, indefinable and static. But when it is said that Reality is without any forms it means that it surpasses them. For the Pure Existence the whole is not different from part. All the limited forms are able to find their identity while it merges in the Pure Existence.

The Absolute is the substance and reality of all things. Everything in the universe is made of Divine Existence. The nature with matter, life and mind are Divine in existence. All that exists in the cosmos are involved forms of the Divine existence. Therefore the Absolute is not a unitarian existence which remains passive and inert. Rather it is a hierarchy of forms projected by its immanent aspect. Aurobindo criticized the philosophy of Śaṅkara who took the world to be a magical show and an illusion. According to Aurobindo Matter is Brahman. The Absolute manifests in many modes. Creation is an involved and unmanifest condition of the Absolute. Therefore, the different realities are real.

Pure Existence is manifested in two forms – Being and Becoming. They are the two sides of Reality. To explain the nature of Reality as Pure Being is to make it inert, passive and dead, but to think of it as Pure Becoming is to reduce it to a flow and succession of events. To know the eternal aspect of the Absolute is to know the truth of cosmos. Being is
the Supra-cosmic Reality and also the truth underlying the entire manifestation. The truth of Becoming is the truth of Being. Really there is no distinction between the Being and Becoming. Aurobindo explains it, “The Absolute manifest itself in two terms- a Being and Becoming. The Being is the fundamental Reality; the Becoming is an effectual Reality; it is a dynamic power and result, a creative energy and working out of the Being, a consistently persistent yet mutable form, process outcome of its immutable formless essence.”

The Being is One which has multiplicity and manyness in it. The oneness is infinite and contains the infinite plurality in itself. The One is the all and It is all existence.

For Aurobindo, the Absolute Reality is supra-cosmic as well as intra cosmic. It is omnipresent. This intra-cosmic Reality is expressed as Becoming. This other form of Reality which is also called the representation of the movement, changing and multiplied aspects is the expression of the Absolute as Becoming or the World-Existence. It was Heracleitus, who for the first time asserted the Absolute as Becoming and he regarded Becoming as Real. According to him the universe is above all things, a process, becoming which represents the movement. Aurobindo evinces the Reality of Becoming, since he places reliance on the World – Existence as the coherent part of the Absolute. The acceptance of Becoming in Aurobindo’s philosophy indicates the act of movement, change, multiplicity and finite factors in the Reality. Therefore, the whole universe is as real as the Absolute.

The Absolute is both personal and impersonal. It is the transcendent conscious being and the All- person. He is the highest self, the universal indwelling Person. The Absolute is also impersonal Existence, the source, power and the foundation of all realities. According to him, the Divine Being or the Absolute reality is one as well as many and at the same time beyond all these relations. It includes and suppresses all partial truths. Aurobindo upholds the Upanishadic assertion that Absolute Reality is One without the second. According to him, the Absolute, the Self, the Divine, the Spirit, the Being is one; the Transcendental is One and
cosmic is One. But at the same time also observe multitudinous in the cosmic world having various forms of unconscious things and conscious selves being different in nature.

Again Aurobindo holds that the Absolute Reality is not only Pure Being or Existence, but it expresses itself in multidimensional being too in which it is conceived as – Ātman, Purusa and Īśvara. Brahman is the Absolute which embraces all these realities. Ātman is the fundamental aspect of the Brahman and it is self existent reality. Ātman is the individual as well as universal self but at the same time it transcends them all. Inspite of all these features the fundamental nature of the Ātman is transcendent, which is the substratum of all existences. The Absolute Reality in its immanent form is Purusa, which is very closely associated with Prakrti. It is the organic form of the Absolute Reality. Absolute Reality as, Īśvara is the ruler of the world. As Īśvara, it is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient and the creator, preserver and destroyer of the world. Nothing is beyond Īśvara and He is the material, efficient as well as the final cause of the world. He is divine and associated with Sakti. Īśvara is the most comprehensive of all the aspects of Reality since all are united in a single formation. But Īśvara is neither the personal God of popular religions, nor the Saguna Brahman nor Nirguna Brahman as both Saguna and Nirguna aspects touch only the partial approach of the Absolute Reality. On the otherhand according to Aurobindo, “Īśvara is Brahman, the Reality, Self, Spirit, revealed as possessor, enjoyer of his own existence, creator of the universe and one with it, Pantheos and yet superior to it, the Eternal, the Infinite, the Ineffable, the Divine Transcendence.” Aurobindo has attempted to reconcile all these three dimensions of all Absolute Reality into an integral unity. In other words all these conceptions represent the integral aspect of the Absolute Reality in the monistic form.
CONSCIOUSNESS- FORCE:

According to Aurobindo, the Absolute is not merely Pure Existence, but it is Consciousness -Force also. He agrees with the ancient Indian concept that Force is inherent in Existence. Aurobindo holds that we have to accept both Shiva (Brahman) and Kālī (Sakti). He also states that we should seek to know what is this measureless Movement in Time and Space with regard to that timeless and spaceless Pure Existence. There is a relation of inseparability between Existence and Force, Shiva and Kālī, Brahman and Shakti. They are merely two states of Brahman, one in ‘rest’ and the other in ‘motion’. It would be irrational to differentiate Existence and Force and to suppose latter as unreal. All the phenomenal existences are possible due to this Force. All the phenomenal existences are determined by Force that is the movement of energy. The phenomenal world is nothing but an act of consciousness that is already involved in the act of Force, the play of Energy. Consciousness takes the form of matter, life and mind. The consciousness is Force, because without it, the latter would be reduced to passive and static existence. The Force is operating in nature and it creates the world, evolves it and manifests Divine in it. But like the materialist philosophers Aurobindo does not conceive Force as an unconscious and blind energy. It is the Consciousness – Force that takes different forms of realities and causes them to evolve. As the Absolute is both Consciousness and Force, creation, manifestation and evolution takes place. The unity, order and harmony of the universe can never be explained if the Absolute were mere Force or Consciousness. If the Absolute were either Consciousness or Force, then the cosmic evolution, divinization, ascent of the lower principles and descent of higher principles in them could not be explained. The material, vital, mental and spiritual realities are made of Consciousness and Force. The Consciousness - Force has dual status one is rest and another is movement. Rest means self- concentration in Force and movement means self diffusion in Force. By admitting the two possibility of Force we can meet the opposition
between Existence and Force. Though the Absolute manifests itself as Force, in its static as well as dynamic aspect, it is beyond that also.

The Consciousness is not mental Consciousness, because the latter is an involved and lower form of the former. It is implicit in mind, life and body. It is eternal consciousness which is involved in realities. The mental Consciousness cannot be called the creator of the universe. The universe can never be asserted as the product of mind, however universal, great and wide its extent may be because the mind has subtle limitations and cannot access to the qualities and power, which we visualize in the cosmos. The Consciousness which is working behind the universe is neither mental, vital nor physical. Consciousness is there as a common element among all the physical beings, vital beings and the mental beings. According to Aurobindo this is infinite universal consciousness which is sub-consistent, consistent and super consistent. This infinite universal consciousness is thus inherent and embedded in all the material, plant, animal and human organisms. In higher and spiritual principles consciousness is more open, manifest and explicit. Everything is of the existence of Consciousness. Consciousness takes different modes. It takes inanimate forms and involved in them. Therefore, it is argued that consciousness is found everywhere without any gap at all. It is continuous and immanent in all types of existence.

One importance point analysed by Aurobindo regarding the consciousness –Force is that Force is the root of all world process. Consciousness is implicit everywhere in this world, whether it is animate or inanimate. In inanimate realities it is thickly implicit and in animate it is more explicit. Aurobindo wrote, “For the Force that builds the world is a Consciousness – Force, the Existence which manifests itself in them, is conscious Being and a perfect emergence of its potentialities in form is the sole object which we can rationally conceive for its manifestation of this world of forms.” Aurobindo calls the Consciousness – Force ‘The Mother.’ The Mother is the kali or the Divine power which is the operative
principle of the universe. She creates and operates the universe, but she is veiled in her action by Her Yoga-Māyā, when She works in the lower nature. She appears in three forms – transcendent, universal and individual. These three poises work as a mediator between man and nature, stand as a creator of this universe and links it with the Supreme. Maheswari, Mahākali, Mahālakshmi and Mahāsaraswati are the four leading powers of this Force. Explaining this point Aurobindo wrote, “Maheswari lays down the large line of the world-forces, Mahākali drives their energy and impetus, Mahālakshmi discover their rhythms and measures, but Mahāsaraswati, presides over effective combination of forces and unfailing exactitude of result and fulfillment.” There are innumerable other powers of innumerable types besides these four main powers.

The Consciousness – Force takes different modes by involving itself separately in the things of this world. Conscious creative force of the Absolute shows an element of purpose or design in its actions. Not only human beings but even the most lower kinds of animals are capable of perfectly adjusting themselves with their environment. It is through this conscious force, that Brahman can reveal itself as the world and the individual souls. This revelation is based on the three essential characteristics of Conscious – Force, infinite self-variation, self-limitation and self – absorption. Ordinarily the individual perceives him as a limited and imperfect being. But he can exceed such limitations and can find himself as a universal and transcendent being. As the underlying consciousness is the same, there is no essential difficulty in rising from one state to another state. The second characteristic of Conscious Force manifests itself in the form of individual self-limitation and cosmic self-limitation. This power is an essential element in the Absolute Reality so that by limitation of actions it may constitute the substratum of the universe and also control the universe. The third power of self-absorption takes place in two ways - Superconscience and Inconscience. The state of Superconscience, the Infinite consciousness dives deeply into itself, into a state of pure self -
awareness. Again it takes a plunge into the stage of Inconscience and appears as absolute non-being. Both these states are that of total self absorption of the Infinite consciousness. These two states may exist at the sametime in one infinite consciousness.

**PURE BLISS:**

The eternal and infinite Being is not only Pure Existence and Conscious Being, it is Pure Bliss also. The Pure Bliss is the fundamental nature of the Absolute Reality which is essential for the consummation and realization of the Absolute Reality. The Bliss of Brahman is manifested uniformly both in being and in becoming. It is not limited to any particular status. The Absolute is Joy and Delight. It is for the Delight that the Absolute creates and sustains the world. The Bliss of Sachchidananda is not confined merely to the transcendental sphere of its Being; it expresses itself in the finite forms also. The world is the result of the Bliss of the Absolute Reality. The purpose of creation is nothing but the sheer joy of the Absolute.

Aurobindo states that there is no limit to the Delight of Sachchidananda. It is expressed in each aspect of existence and consciousness and therefore is capable of infinite variety. Aurobindo wrote, “The self-delight of Brahman is not limited, however by the still and motionless possession of its absolute self-being. Just as its force of consciousness is capable of throwing itself into forms infinitely and with an endless variation, so also it’s self-delight is capable of movement, of variation, of reveling in that infinite flux and mutability of itself represented by numberless teeming universes. To loose forth and enjoy this infinite movement and variation of its self delight is the object of its extensive or creative play of Force.”

The bliss of Brahman is eternal, indestructible and absolute. This Delight is different from the joy and pleasure to which we are accustomed. Divine Bliss is causeless and self existent. But the relative and the finite can rise above their limitation in proportion as
they share this eternal Bliss. Bliss is the cause of creation, evolution and manifestation. The creation is only for the sake of joy. According to Aurobindo, it is Ānanda out of which this world is born, it is Ānanda that sustains it and it is Ānanda that is its goal and consummation. Delight is existence and the secret of creation.

Aurobindo says that Supermind is the creative aspect of Sachchidānanda and it is regarded as the creator of this world. As Sachchidānanda is infinite power, infinite truth, infinite existence and infinite bliss, it is not possible that all creative powers get manifested simultaneously. Sachchidānanda has infinite possibilities and Supermind selects some of them and actualizes them in explicit manifestation. Without the Supermind the infinite potentialities of Sachchidānanda could not have manifested. The Supermind manifests some of the possibilities of Sachchidānanda and also withholds its infinite potentialities from manifestation. The creation and manifestation of the Divine takes place through the Supermind. The Supermind is the guiding truth that has the union with Sachchidānanda. As a mediator in between the world and Sachchidānanda on one hand Supermind is the complete knowledge of Sachchidānanda or truth consciousness and on the otherhand it is the culmination and consummation of mind. Aurobindo neither identifies Absolute and Supermind nor posits an unbridgeable gulf between them, for Aurobindo conceives the Absolute both as immanent and transcendent, personal and impersonal. Supermind is the dynamic creative power of Sachchidānanda. As a true knowledge of Sachchidānanda, Supermind is the creator, the Real-idea and supreme truth consciousness. In Supermind the self knowledge is combined with the Consciousness Force or will of the Divine. Supermind is not something over and above the reality; it is non dual with Sachchidānanda.

Attaching great importance to Supermind, Aurobindo considered it as a conscious Reality expressive of Real being. The Supermind is primarily comprehensive; it starts from unity not division. Through the Supermind mind can rise to the Absolute and conversely the
Absolute can descend to mind. The Supermind is the Creative Idea, the creative medium of the manifestation or the descent of the infinite Sachchidānanda into the Inconsistent. The Spirit’s Divine play of the ascent and the descent is made possible through the Supermind. The Supermind is the God aspect of Sachchidānanda. This is not only a principle of knowledge but power of knowledge and not only a will to light and vision but a will to power and work.

The Supermind is called by Aurobindo the Conscious - Force, Knowledge-Will, Truth Conscious, Rta-cit and Seer will. It is Conscious - Force or knowledge will because it is the immanent Divine Consciousness itself and has the omnipotence to create and evolve the universe. It is the creative consciousness in which knowledge and Force do not have exclusive existence. Supermind is also regarded as the Divine law, the Rta-cit which governs all the activities of the cosmos. Supermind is an extended form of Sachchidānanda in space and time. Sachchidānanda is the transcendental principle whereas Supermind is its immanent aspect. The manifestation of Sachchidānanda is possible only through the creative Supermind. Supermind is comprehensive as well as creative consciousness. It has the knowledge of the eternally stable and immutable One but at the same time it has the power to draw out of the One its hidden multitudes. Supermind manifests the many, without losing itself in their differentiations by its power of projecting and apprehending consciousness. Supermind is the creative medium through which the Reality involves itself in cosmic existence. Aurobindo wrote, “This all containing, all originating, all consummating Supermind is the Divine Being not indeed in its absolute self-existence but in its action as the Lord and Creator of its own worlds. This is the truth of that which we call God.” In Aurobindo’s philosophy the reconciliation of Sachchidānanda and God has been adequately shown. According to Aurobindo, the Supermind or God is the real creative power of Sachchidananda. There are various systems of philosophy which have the conception of
Absolute but not of God and again there are some other schools that conceive of God’s existence and deny the existence of the Absolute. In the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara, Absolute is regarded as real, whereas God is regarded as illusory. The Advaita Vedāntins denies the existence of God, the immanent aspect of Brahman and accepts the theory of Māyāvāda which takes cosmos to be illusion. Aurobindo adequately showed the reconciliation between Sachchidānanda and God. Supermind, the immanent aspect of Sachchidānanda is the creator, the redeemer, the saviour and manifester of the transcendental Conscious – Force, Truth and Bliss. For Aurobindo, the Supermind is not distinct from Sachchidānanda. Sachchidānanda is both transcendent and immanent, pure being and immanent force. It is both the Absolute and the God taken together. The Supermind is not an illusory power of Sachchidānanda. It cannot be differentiated from Sachchidānanda because it is the creative aspect of the latter. It is ever engaged in creation and manifestation of the powers of Sachchidānanda. All creations, manifestations of the transcendent possibilities of Sachchidānanda are performed by the Supermind. The Supermind guides the cosmic evolution and brings union of nature with God. The cosmos and Sachchidānanda are the two extreme principles and Supermind is the intermediary one. The revelation of Sachchidānanda through the Supermind is the ultimate fact of the universe.

Therefore for Aurobindo, the Absolute is all inclusive. All is Brahman. In its transcendental aspect, the Absolute is Existence Consciousness – Force and Bliss. Supermind is the immanent and creative aspect of the Absolute. Absolute is the unitary principle that embraces the whole reality, as It is self-coherent, all inclusive and integral. All things are in Brahman, Brahman is in all things and all things are Brahman. There is nothing untrue or unreal in the Brahman. In his philosophy Aurobindo tries to resolve the contradictory and conflicting and rival ideas about the nature of reality by the higher reason. He expounds his metaphysical doctrine through his mystic vision. He arrives at his integral approach to
Brahman which reconciles and synthesizes the various contradictory and conflicting concepts of reality and through which he tries to have more and more integral experience of the indivisible wholeness of the reality. He is always vigilant to observe, examine, compare, improve and develop his thought through his dynamic approach to the Reality. He never claims to reach the Absolute in totality. Aurobindo’s Absolute is a fundamental principle, shining with its full brightness in the midst of all development of science and technology.

4.3.4. ABSOLUTE IN K.C. BHATTACHARYYA’S PHILOSOPHY

K.C. Bhattacharyya is one of the greatest synthetic personalities of modern Indian philosophy. The philosophy of K.C. Bhattacharyya has its roots in the ancient Indian philosophy particularly of the Advaita Vedānta, Sānkhya, Yoga and Jaina philosophies. He also assimilates the Western thoughts particularly the philosophy of Kant and Whitehead in him. Though K.C. Bhattacharyya’s writings are extremely few, it is difficult to understand for the ordinary reader due to his very conscious and condensed style of writings.

K.C. Bhattacharyya’s conception of the Absolute is to be found in his paper, “The Concept of the Absolute and its Alternative Forms.” Here in a highly involved and condensed style he has presented his conception of the Absolute. Bhattacharyya appears to be deeply influenced by the Vedāntin conception of the Absolute and also by Jaina Anekantavāda. But his approach and conclusions are distinctly his own. According to him, the Absolute is indefinable, indescribable and even in the strict sense unthinkable. One can find here an echo of the Advaita Vedāntin idea of Brahman being Anirvacaniya. According to Bhattacharyya we can almost attempt to give an idea of the Absolute in terms of symbols. Symbols admit of alternatives and hence alternative formations of the Absolute are also possible. This is the main idea running through Bhattacharyya’s conception of the Absolute. Bhattacharyya relates everything to experience. Reality becomes the ultimate pre-supposition
of experience. This experience of the ultimate is neither subjective nor objective. To relate the subject and object in knowledge is the function of reason. The Ultimate Reality transcends the duality of subject and object as it transcends reason. It is apprehended not by reason but by intuition or spiritual consciousness.

Bhattacharyya pointed out that some philosophers have committed the mistake of describing the Absolute. Kant realised the futility of the attempts to describe the Absolute. But even he committed the mistake of describing the Absolute (in his language the noumenon) the unknown and the unknowable. The Absolute, according to Bhattacharyya is pure indefinite. The Absolute is free from all determinations. It cannot be described either subjectively or objectively. Subjects and objects are limited realities and so definite. Definite realities are either inferior to the Absolute or are unreal. So the Absolute transcends both the subjective and the objective. The subjective has content. Similarly the objective also has content. But the Absolute is free from all contents. The Absolute understood as the indefinite cannot be placed either in the subjective realm or in the objective realm. The Absolute is not even thinkable. Thinking in the literal sense is not possible or applicable with regard to the Absolute. We use the word ‘thinking’ here almost in a figurative sense. The Absolute can only be believed in terms of symbols. It is purely indefinite.

The starting point of philosophy, according to Bhattacharyya is reflective consciousness. "Reflection is an awareness of content as to mode of consciousness." It means that content and consciousness are mutually related and imply each other. This relation between content and consciousness as described by K.C. Bhattacharyya is 'implicational dualism.' To clarify his concept of the Absolute Bhattacharyya brings in the idea of implicational dualism. The Absolute can be understood in reference to this relation. Generally, a distinction is found between content and consciousness. Content means the object about which we are conscious. This distinction is called the implicational dualism. We
find three kinds of consciousness: thinking, feeling and willing. Corresponding to the consciousness of thinking we have the concept of truth. Here truth is neither subjective nor objective. It is neither a fact, nor a belief nor a form. It is the real substance. Feeling and felt together constitute the values of the object. Willing leads to freedom. The relation between the willing and willed content is the relation between two willed contents. According to Bhattacharyya, Absolute is that which is beyond the implicational dualism. Absolute transcends the implicational dualism between content and consciousness. Again the Absolute is not the consciousness. Bhattacharyya observes, “The Absolute may be generally defined from the standpoint of reflection as what is free from the implicational dualism of content and consciousness.”

Though the Absolute can be reached only though relation, yet in itself it is free from any kind of relation or from the dualism of content and consciousness. According to Bhattacharyya the indefinite character of the implicational dualism of content and consciousness implies that this dualism cannot be final to thought. This indefinite relation neither can be defined as a distinction nor as an identity, because it is evident that the content is somehow distinct from consciousness but it is not clear that the content and consciousness are identical. This refers to a stage which may be characterized as the supra-reflective stage. Bhattacharyya’s conception of Absolute is connected with this idea of supra-reflective stage. The Absolute is that which is free from the implicational dualism of content and consciousness. Of course there is a consciousness of identity of content and consciousness at certain levels. But according to Bhattacharyya if there is any such consciousness of identify then it is not to be taken in the literal sense. Thus Bhattacharyya defines the Absolute as ‘what is free from the implicational dualism of content and consciousness.’

Bhattacharyya says that if we have to reach the Absolute, then this implicatory distinction should be changed into non-implicatory distinction. This means the consciousness is freed from content and to say that the content is freed from consciousness
and to say that consciousness is freed from content is to reach the state of Absolute. Consciousness becomes or turns into the Absolute because it is the characteristic of the Absolute, that it is independent, self-existent, free from everything.

Bhattacharyya pointed out that the implicational dualism that he wrote about is of three types corresponding to the three kinds of consciousness. Consciousness is generally taken to be constituted of knowing, feeling and willing. There may be implicational dualism belonging to the realm of feeling or to the realm of knowing or to the realm of willing. In knowing, as the content is unconstituted with the consciousness, so the content is freed from any reference to consciousness, and so we have truth as the Absolute for knowing, that is free from subject. In this respect Bhattacharyya is in agreement with the realistic philosophers to some extant that an object may exist even when it is not known. The character of truth as an Absolute for knowing is a believed matter. It is not understood either in subjective or in objective attitude. The Absolute of willing is freedom. In willing, consciousness may be freed from content, so we have freedom of will. Freedom is understood as negation of being because the willed content without being constituted with willing is nothing at all. In feeling, the implicational relation of content and consciousness may be freed from their distinction as a constituted unity, so we value and is the Absolute for feeling. The Absolute is to be free from these types of implicational dualism. Consequently we can have three alternative formulations of the Absolute. It can be said that the Absolute can be conceived in a triple way. There are therefore three alternative forms of the Absolute – the Absolute of knowing, the Absolute of willing and the Absolute of feeling. The Absolute of knowing can be viewed as truth. The Absolute of knowing is unknowable. The Absolute of willing can be viewed as freedom. The Absolute of willing is contentless. The Absolute of feeling is to be viewed as value. The Absolute of feeling is transcendental. Thus truth, freedom and value are three alternative formulations of the same Absolute. According to Bhattacharyya they are not to be
regarded as three Absolutes or One Absolute. In the words of Bhattacharyya the Absolute is not a known content and the question of ‘one and many’ arises only in the content of known content. Therefore it is meaningless to talk about three Absolutes or One Absolute.

It is difficult to determine the mutual relation of truth, freedom and value. In the Absolute their mutual relation is called ‘alternation’ and each one of these is called an alternative form of the Absolute. Bhattacharyya wrote, “In one direction their identity and difference are alike meaningless and in another direction their identity is intelligible but not assertible. Truth is unrelated to value, value to reality and reality to truth, while value may be truth, reality value and truth reality. The Absolute may be regarded in this sense as an alternation of truth, value and reality.”

Bhattacharyya emphasized that the Absolute is not a synthesis of three forms of truth, freedom and value but a totality of them. The three forms of the Absolute cannot be brought into a unity in a higher synthesis because each of them is incompatible with each other. In his ‘The Concept of Philosophy,” Bhattacharyya described these mutual relation in this way that it is nonsense to say that the Absolute is a unity of truth, freedom and value. It is each of them. These are neither separate nor one. We speak only separately about them.

There are three types of philosophical system based on the three kinds of experiences of the Absolute. The Advaita Vedânta conceives the Absolute as truth (positive being), Buddhism conceives it as freedom (positive non-being) and according to Hegal Absolute is value (positive indetermination). The Absolute may be truth or it may be in opposition to truth, the freedom beyond all being or it may be value, as the indeterminate togetherness of truth and freedom. Truth, freedom and value are the alternative forms of the Absolute. Bhattacharyya wrote, “The triple Absolute is apparently the prototype of the three subjective functions, knowing, willing and feeling.”
Bhattacharyya draws a distinction between truth and reality. According to him reality can be enjoyed but truth cannot be enjoyed. Truth is extra-religious or transcendental consciousness. Transcendental consciousness will not remain as consciousness if it is not spoken of or if it is not the consciousness of the subject. It is informative or descriptive so to say. But in knowing the Absolute the transcendental consciousness cannot do anything because transcendental consciousness ends with the belief that truth can be symbolized only. It does not help us to know the truth. The truth or the Absolute can be known negatively only where the subjective consciousness or the transcendental consciousness is also dispensed with. Truth is believed but literally unspeakable. Hence it is self-revealing. But Bhattacharyya does not think that the reality is self revealing because reality is not beyond speech.

Bhattacharyya says that the Absolute is only a possibly believed entity that is only negatively understood. It is only speakable in terms of symbols, in itself, it is indefinite. According to Bhattacharyya, the Absolute is that, what I am not. Truth, freedom and value are only the symbols of the Absolute. They are not three Absolutes. Absolute is beyond the distinction of one and many. Absolute is experienced only in supra-reflectional state. Truth, freedom and value are also not the three aspects of the Absolute. Each of them is Absolute. They are the symbols of the Absolute. The Absolute self is not only no judgement but is not even literally spoken. Still it is not meaningless and symbolizes what is positively believed, namely truth. What is believed and is not literally speakable (and is as such undeniable) is truth. Bhattacharyya maintains that the Absolute is a matter of believe but not a matter of knowledge. He cannot be known in the judgemental form which is informative in its character.
4.3.5. ABSOLUTE IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEGEL

In the contemporary western philosophy idealism has been chiefly based on the essential principles of the philosophy of Hegel. According to idealism, objects have no existence apart from their ideas. Metaphysically idealism is the theory which maintains that the Ultimate Reality is spiritual in nature. The main tenet of idealism is that the universe exists within the mind and some kind of synthesis is found between man and nature. Hegel’s philosophy concentrates on the idea of spirit which according to him is a self-conscious being– knower and known at the same time. According to Hegel the Ultimate Reality is the Absolute spirit or idea or reason. There is no other reality external to it. This supreme whole incorporates each and every aspects of reality into an organic self-conscious unity. Absolute is an Idea becoming conscious of itself. Since it is the universal principal, it embraces the subjective as well as objective existence within it. This Absolute spirit is not an ego or mind limited by the non- ego, nor a transcendental principle beyond the ego and non-ego. The Absolute is immanent in nature and mind as universal reason. The Absolute self or thought which is all inclusive and all coherent is the fullest reality.

Hegel was regarded as master of Absolute Idealism. Absolute Idealism has some common points with all forms of monistic idealism and it treats the finite world and finite spirits as differentiations of the one all inclusive Absolute. But it differs from them in its insistence on the idea of logical development as essential to the very being of the Absolute. Hegel had proceeded from the foundations laid by his predecessors mainly Fichte and Schelling. Hegel gives importance on the logical method of Fichte which is a threefold rhythm of thesis, antithesis and synthesis and tries to show how from the Absolute idea everything else can be derived or deduced by this method. Again by identifying logic with metaphysics i.e. thought with being he tries to give a scientific basis for the world - view of Schelling. By Absolute Schelling means the true In-itself and the subject and object, mind
and nature are two aspects of one Absolute Reality. The Absolute which includes both matter and mind is the principle of identity underlying them. Hegel rejected Schelling’s bare principle of identity on the ground that it reduced the Absolute into ‘monotony and abstract universality’ – a kind of eternal ‘night in which all cows are black.’ Hegel dislikes Schelling’s one sided emphasis on the aspect of identity and object. Hegel discovered a living principle of differentiation at the very heart of identity. Hegel interpreted this principle of differentiation within the unity of Absolute in terms of what he called the dialectic movement of concepts. For Hegel, concepts are not static self-contained entities but are ever passing beyond themselves into each other by their own immanent dialectic.

Hegelian Absolute embraces both the spirit and matter. As Hegel was an idealist so for him what is called material is ultimately spiritual. The Absolute comprehends both Matter and Spirit, Subject and Object, Thought and Sensibility, One and many. For Hegel the Ultimate Reality is not an abstract unity, but a concrete whole related to many. Hegel discovered a living principle of differentiation within the unity of the Absolute. As P.T. Raju comments, “Hegel is fond of reiterating that his Absolute is not a bare one, but one in many, an organic whole, a perfect and harmonious system of an indefinite number of indefinite selves.”

Hegel calls the Ultimate Reality as the Absolute Spirit. His Absolute spirit is a concrete universal which is neither differenceless nor relationless. There is a relation of mutual dependence between the Absolute and the world. The Absolute for Hegel is both ‘itself’ and ‘non-itself,’ its ‘itself’ is through the other self which is the ‘not-self.’ A ‘not-self’ is a necessary moment of the self-expression of the Absolute.

For Hegel the Absolute is an active dynamic spiritual principle. It acts, grows and develops. Hegel should be understood as a kind of inverted Spinozist. For Spinoza, ‘substance’ is the Ultimate Reality, and it is one and infinite. This substance is neither mental nor material. Mind and matter are the two attributes though which substance can be
conceived. The attributes and modes are dependent on substance and therefore they are not ultimately real. All reality is identical within God or substance and nothing is real except God. Hegel conceives that the Absolute is not a passive substance but a living subject. The Absolute is an active moving process, a process of evolution. The Absolute is not static. Hegel observes. “The true Absolute must not merely be thought of as a substance, i.e. something immediately there whether this be a knower or something known. It must be thought of as a subject.”

The Absolute is Truth: Truth is whole and whole is becoming and therefore the Absolute is a process, a dynamic totality. In this totality each movement has its proper place. This wholeness or the totality of the Absolute is self-unfoldment of the implicit into the explicit or the potentiality into actuality. Reality is both prior and posterior to its development. All stages before reaching the Actual are merely provisional. The terminal of the developing process in the Absolute is the most adequate Reality which does not keep apart and beyond the lower aspects, it rather comprehends them all. The whole process proceeds dialectically. The Absolute passes through its three movements, namely Absolute in- itself, Absolute for- itself and Absolute in -and - for itself. At first step, the Absolute is Being- in- itself as it posits itself as Pure Thought, Pure Identity. But it is only abstract form of the Absolute and thus one sided. It further proceeds and opposes to itself as object or the other. At the second stage it is Being for itself. This other also cannot be treated as the final stage as the status of the Absolute still remains in contradiction. There is the third stage, ‘the Absolute – in - and – for -itself, which reconciles the earlier two stages, transcending the contradiction between them and here all otherness melt away. Together they constitute the complete construction of the life of the Absolute.

The Absolute is the highest synthetic principle and is purely spiritual, free and self fulfilled as there are no contradictions in it. Though the Absolute is self- fulfilled, yet
according to Hegel, it is also self fulfilling itself, because the self – fulfilled Absolute in and by itself is pure identity, yet at the same time the ground of distinction also. The Absolute fulfills itself through the opposition of subject and object, finite and infinite, soul and body. Pure identity is meaningless. Reality is always – identity- in- difference. The self-consciousness is the goal towards which the developing Absolute moves. The meaning of this developing process lies in the identity of being and non-being by the developed mind which identifies itself with the universal purpose. But this identification of beings and non-beings does not imply that these are not distinguishable but only means that distinction is not absolute. The whole truth therefore means identity in difference.

The Absolute is indeterminate as well as determinate. In its first aspect or immediacy, it is indeterminate, and therefore it is free from all determinations. Being is the most abstract aspect and thus the simplest and the least affirmation we can make. It is Being, Pure-Being, without any further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy, the Absolute is similar to itself alone and also not dissimilar from any other. It has no differentiation either within itself or relatively to anything external. The Absolute, in the form of immediacy is purely indeterminate. No determination can be imposed on it, as it is pure indeterminateness and vacuity. Again the Absolute in its ‘other’ is existent determinateness. It is being but with determination or quality. Both these aspects of the Absolute - indeterminate and determinate do not contradict each other rather, they are mingled in it. On the one hand, the Absolute is indeterminate when it is in its form of immediacy and has no quality – either positive or negative. But on the other hand, it is determinate while it has qualities and the qualities cannot be separated from determinate being in any way.

Reality is the unification of both infinite and finite and that is the genuine or true infinity. Both the finite knower and the known object are manifestations of the inclusive Absolute thought or idea. They are thus at bottom identical. For this reason, the object is not
unintelligible to the subject. Hegel observes, “Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work. It is also the soul of all knowledge which is truly scientific.”

The Absolute idea, which is an active dynamic spiritual principle, goes on expressing itself according to the dialectic method through thesis, anti thesis and synthesis. Thesis is the first moment of the dialectic method. Here the Ego posits itself in the form of the finite ego. In the antithesis the finite ego passes over into its opposite. And the two are reconciled in a higher synthesis. This synthesis again gives rise to a new triad and that to another triad. This process continues till a synthesis in which all oppositions are resolved and preserved. Absolute is such a synthesis. The Absolute is the highest and most concrete of all synthesis, where subject and objects are identified. The final goal of the dialectic method is the Absolute, as the Absolute is eternally evolving and manifesting itself in and through the various objects of nature.

For Hegel the Absolute is self thinking thought. It is the concept or category of self-consciousness, personality, self-thinking thought which knows itself in its object and its object as itself. It is the totality; the whole of reality and this totality is a process. The Absolute accordingly is a process of self-reflection in which reality comes to acknowledge itself. Hegel never conceives of Transcendental Reality. Rather he assumes Reality as a whole that comprehends subject with object, Absolute returns to itself in the sphere of human consciousness. Hegel corresponds with Aristotle that Absolute (or God) is self thinking thought. Both assume that self thinking Thought is the telos, who as the final cause draws the world. But while Aristotle assumes the self-thinking thought as an already constituted self consciousness, a Transcendental Deity, which has no subjection on the world, for Hegel, the self thinking thought is not so. On the other hand it is a ‘Reason immanent in it’, or the universe’s knowledge of itself. According to him, the whole process of Reality is a
teleological movement towards the actualization of self thinking thought. Hegelian Absolute
does not transcend the limit of the universe. It exists in the forms of spirit of all spirits.

The Absolute or thought according to Hegel is concrete. The concrete experience
requires an object of knowledge as well as the knowing mind. Knowledge always implies the
distinction between the subject and object, knower and known, self and not self. The subject
and object, self and not self, being necessarily related to each other and yet not identical with
each other, must be regarded as correlative moments in the life of a higher principle, namely
the Absolute. On the one hand the Absolute manifests itself as finite minds and on the other
hands as finite objects. The Absolute transcends and overcomes the opposition between them
and comprehends them in all embracing unity of self consciousness. The ultimate principle,
according to Hegel, is neither a mere subject nor a mere object, but the Absolute spirit which
is expressed in finite spirits and nature. There is no opposition between thought and nature.
The laws of thought are ultimately the laws of nature.

According to Hegel Thought and Being are identical. Thought pervades not only our
mental states but the world of objects as well and the natural object consists of thought, but in
a latent and unconscious form. Thought, Hegel states, is the universal principle which is an
important factor in the subjective and objective orders of existence and it guides their
working. Moreover Hegel emphasizes the fact that all consciousness whether conceptual,
perceptual or volitional, can be deduced from Thought. Thought is the ultimate form of all
consciousness. It is all inclusive unity and not an empty universal. For Hegel, the real is
rational and the rational is real. The reality can be apprehended only in its rational
reconstruction and the rational that consists of the notion and idea is the real. The rational is
the final truth; the truth of facts and it is not of less important than it is a bare uninterrupted
content of the perspective consciousness. Infact Hegel holds nothing beyond thought for
there can be nothing exclusive of reality. Hegel removes the opposition between thought and
reality and regards them as correlative and inseparable moments in the Absolute Spirit. Hegel wrote, “Becoming is the first concrete thought and therefore the first notion: whereas Being and Nought are empty abstractions. The notion of being, therefore of which we sometimes speak, must mean Becoming, not the mere point of Being, which is empty. Nothing, any more than Nothing, which is empty Being. In Being then we have nothing and in Nothing Being: but this Being which does not lose itself in Nothing is Becoming. Nor must we omit the distinction, while we emphasise the unity of Becoming: without that distinction we should once more return to abstract Being. Becoming is only the explicit statement of what Being is in its truth.”^54

The Reality according to Hegel is self conscious unity. It is neither passive nor indeterminate nor devoid of self determination. It is not indeterminate consciousness but self conscious existence. The Absolute is not unitarian and identity consciousness but it is the self- conscious existence which unites all the principles and powers within itself. Absolute for Hegel, is an organic whole, a perfect and harmonious system of an infinite number of finite selves. It is not a bare unity, but a unity- in -diversity. There is interrelation between the different aspects of the Reality.

As an absolutistic thinker, Hegel believes in One in many and therefore his faith on the Absolute idea is not a single one. Hegel’s Absolute is no more a sense object but a supra- sensible deity of imagination representing the unity of infinite and finite. In Hegel’s philosophy, the Absolute is discovered in all the stages of his dialectic method. One of the fundamental techniques of Hegel is that the principle of development is taking to the knowledge of the Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality or the Absolute manifests and realizes itself through dialectic of many triads. Human reason can discover and comprehend the nature of the Absolute only by following the course of this triad. For Hegel the Absolute moves around self consciousness and he is untwisted by the move towards the goal of His
knowledge on self – contention. Hegel has made it clear that at one stage in the process of evolution, the Absolute reveals as God in human mind. The relational aspect of man and the Absolute whom Hegel identifies as God leads to a standard of concordant excellence between the two. Hegel says that God as the Absolute or concrete universal is a system in which there are the finite individuals. Such relation between God and man signifies that it is the relationship between whole and parts. Reciprocal relation of man and God grounds in the matter of consciousness for each other than man becomes conscious of God is so far as God is conscious of Himself in man.

4.3.6 CONCEPT OF THE ABSOLUTE IN BRADLEY’S PHILOSOPHY

Bradley is essentially a neo-Hegelian philosopher. Like Hegel, Bradley also considers the Absolute as an all inclusive whole. The main vision of Bradley’s philosophy is the vision of Reality as a harmonious undivided whole of experience in which all aspects of infinite experience are included, but are not parted and related. Following the Hegelian terminology Bradley calls the Ultimate Reality as ‘Spirit.’ Bradley wrote, “The spirit is the unity of the manifold ………… The universal here is immanent in the parts and its system does not lie somewhere outside and in the relations between them.”55 Though Bradley’s Absolute Spirit embraces all differences in an inclusive harmony, it is not conceived in a relational form like that of Hegel. Bradley’s Absolute is above relational form and it has absorbed in bewildering mass of phenomenal diversity in a higher unity. The whole of Bradley’s philosophy contains diversity and it is not partitioned by relations. According Bradley it is a whole in which distinctions can be made but divisions donot exist. According to him the finites somehow must be at unity and self consistent.

Bradley holds that Reality is Supra-relational whole and it does not contradict itself. Bradley takes for consideration the immediate experience as s starting point of knowing the
Absolute Reality. Bradley wrote, “As a fact and given we have in feeling diversity and unity in one whole, a whole implicit and not yet broken up into terms and relations. This immediate union of the one and many is an ‘ultimate fact’ from which we start.” Bradley considers all infinite objects as appearances of Reality and maintains that all appearances are not equally perfect.

According to Bradley everything is experience and experience is a whole. Experience of every psychical centre involves intellect, will and feeling and there is an antagonism and outwardness amongst these aspects of experience. The result of this antagonism and outwardness is that things and events, their attributes and relations are cognized by the intellect and objects of volitions and emotions that occupy psychical centres, appear as independent entities. According to Bradley, as Reality, being always the whole of experience, these partial aspects fall short of reality and are therefore appearances. For Bradley, the immediate experience is felt unity, not yet parted by any relation and distinction.

Bradley arrives at the Absolute standard of Reality by a dialectical examination of all the notions commonly accepted as valid. He examines all the categories such as primary and secondary qualities, substantive and objective, relation and quality, space and time, motion and change, causation and activity with which our intellect or thought interprets the world and finds them all satisfactory. Bradley condemns all these contradictory notions as appearances. He wrote, “Ultimate Reality is such that it does not contradict itself.” Therefore non-contradictions must be the criterion of Reality. Non contradiction also means consistency. Reality is not only self-consistent; it must be self- subsistent also. Bradley holds that the Absolute is one system and its contents are nothing but sentient experience. Hence it will be a single and all inclusive experience, which embraces every partial diversity in concord. He considers all finite objects as appearances of Reality. According to him Ultimate Reality can be realized theoretically. Bradley does not accept that an individual with
perfection is the Absolute. It implies that Absolute cannot be regarded as a perfect individual. But this view of Bradley should not be confused as that the self is an independent entity besides the object. Sentient experience is a whole in which divisions donot exist. Subject is not different from the universe. The relational form of our knowledge also points to a substantial totality which transcends and yet contains all diversity. Bradley holds that we have the knowledge of a whole in immediate experience. The subject and object are one here. The conception of the Absolute as experience is inevitable, but the immediate experience cannot be defined, because, Reality is a matter of definition, but not of observation. And on the contrary experience cannot be defined but observed.

Bradley conceives the Absolute as one all comprehending Reality. He reconciles the existence of this Ultimate Reality with everything finite that exists by his doctrine of Degrees of Truth and Reality. All finites are regarded by Bradley as appearances of Reality and hence imperfect and unreal. But all are not equally imperfect. He explains it by saying that of two given appearances the one which is more wide, or more harmonious, is more real. It approaches nearer to a single, all containing individuality. The truth and the fact, which is to be converted into the Absolute, would require less rearrangement and addition, is more real and truer. This is the meaning of degrees of truth and reality. To possess more the character of reality and to contain within oneself a greater amount of the real, are two expressions for the same thing. But like Śaṅkara, Bradley does not conceive that appearances are non-existent or disappear at the dawn of knowledge. The apparent plurality of the world is constituent elements of the Absolute and reveals the nature of whole in same degree, but not in some degree.

But it is to be noted that according to Bradley only the imperfect or appearances admit of degrees. What is perfect is absolutely so and there is no question of degrees here. Therefore the Absolute or Reality has no degrees. Bradley holds, “The Absolute considered
as such, has of course no degrees; for it is perfect and there can be no more or less in perfection. Such predicates belong to and have a meaning only in the world of appearances.\footnote{58} The Absolute is unmoving whereas appearances are conditioned by change, movement and are therefore perfect. Therefore the doctrine of degrees of reality has a meaning and applicability only in the realm of appearance. The Absolute is present among the finite appearances in different degrees. The concept of degrees of reality is closely associated with the concept of degrees of truth. Bradley rejected the possibility of Absolute truth and Absolute falsity. The false judgement means that it is incapable of giving a complete picture of Reality. On the other hand every judgement is true as all refer to reality. So every judgement is both partially true and partially false.

Though in Bradley’s philosophy, Absolute is considered as a vital principle, it is not similar to God. Bradley holds that if one identifies the Absolute with God, He is not the God of religion. Moreover any attempt to make one distinct from the other turns God to a limited element in the entire whole. Bradley’s Absolute is associated with nothing in the end and therefore, his Absolute cannot be God. According to Bradley God possesses the ‘good’ in highest degree. He will be thought into a state of finite individual. Bradley wrote, “Sufficiently superior to us to be worshipped, God will nevertheless be imperfect. And with this it may be said that religion is saved.”\footnote{59} According to Bradley God of religion is not identified with the Absolute. By saying that the Absolute is one Bradley means to say that the differences exist within the Absolute in a harmonious way. There is nothing beyond the Absolute. The whole is such that all the appearances exist as distinct entity but there is no division among them. According to Bradley, this Absolute cannot be known. Because when one knows Him he will not remain as the Absolute. For Bradley Absolute is not God. The Absolute is related to nothing because all relations imply limitation and therefore imperfection. In religion the finite wills of men stand in practical relation to God as in
worship and prayer. Though religion, likes to regard its object of worship as a perfect being, makes God imperfect by the very relation of the finite and the infinite will which it involves. Hence the God of religion is a lower category as it involves want of comprehensiveness of the whole of experience which is Truth. Philosophical speculations aim at the knowledge of the ultimate truth, while religion always relates with the practical truth. Bradley believes in God, but he denies identifying God with the Absolute. God is different from Absolute and cannot be called that God is one with the Absolute. The Absolute is an all inclusive whole, harmonious blend of the appearances. The appearance gets its reality in the Absolute.

4.4 PROBLEM OF GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE

The problem of which has haunted philosophers and theologians of all time is the problem of the relation between God and the Absolute. The problem of the relation between God and the Absolute is very clearly stated by Radhakrishnan in the following words: “The great problem of the philosophy of religion has been reconciliation of the character of the Absolute as in a sense eternally complete with the character of God as a self-determining principle manifested in a temporal development which includes nature and man.” The problem of the relation between God and the Absolute is a vital problem in the philosophy of the East and West from the Upanishads to the modern period. Many eminent theologians and philosophers of the West and East have given thoughts of this problem. But it is mainly Radhakrishnan who has been credited for being the great reconciler of the two characters of God and the Absolute and the initiator of a new synthesis. Let us have a glimpse of it.

The Upanishads occupy a unique place in the development of Indian thought. The philosophers of the Upanishad speak to us of the One Reality behind the flux of the world. In solving the question of the nature of Ultimate Reality, the Upanishadic thinkers seek to supplement the objective vision of the Vedic seers by a subjective one. The Ultimate Reality
is called Brahman and Ātman viewed from the objective and subjective aspects respectively. In the early Upanishads, Ātman is the principle of the individual consciousness and Brahman is the super personal ground of the cosmos. But the distinction diminishes and the two are identified. Absolute manifests itself as subject and object and transcends both. The Upanishadic teachings identifies the subject and object, the self and not self, by saying that- ‘That thou art (tat tvam asi), ‘I am that’, ‘I am non-dual bliss’, etc. 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. Brahman, the first principle of the universe, is known through Ātman, the inner self of man. God is both the wholly other, trascendent and utterly beyond the world and man and yet he enters into man and lives in him and becomes the inmost content of his very existence.

The three terms that are constantly use in Indian religious vocabulary are Brahman, Ātman and Īśvara and these terms bring out the different aspects of the Supreme. Brahman is that which is the immense, the vast, the ultimate, permeating the entire universe and yet eluding any conceptual definition. We experience its living reality, its otherness, its unconditionedness by all that is of this world. Brahman is the transcendent and abiding Reality which is far beyond the world of succession, though it gives meaning to the process and supports it all through. Though in one sense Brahman entirely transcends us, in another sense it is intimately present in us. The Eternal Being, Brahman is Spirit, Ātman. That which we indicate with awe as the Absolute is also our own transcendental essence. It is the ground of our being, that in which our Reality consists. To bring out that God is both transcendent and immanent, that He is a presence as well as a purpose, the conception of Īśvara is used. It affirms the ever present pressure of God on the here and now. He is the lord and the giver of life. Īśvara is the Absolute entering into the world of events and persons, operating at various levels, but most freely in the world of souls. Īśvara as the divine presence is maintaining,
helping and preserving the whole world. It is the pure, Absolute Brahman acting. Upanishads put it as the divine Intelligence, as the lord of all, the all-knowing, the indwelling spirit, the source of all, the origin and the end of all creations.

The Upanishads describe Brahman as having two aspects— one devoid of qualifying characters—acosmic Brahman or Brahman without any attribute and the other with characteristics—cosmic Brahman endowed with attributes. It must be admitted that the acosmic and cosmic Brahman are not two different entities; they are only two aspects of the same reality. The sarprapanca conception must be understood negatively as that the world is not outside of Brahman and the nirprapanca conception positively as that Brahman is more than the world. A cosmic Brahman is the basis of the cosmic Brahman. Cosmic Brahman is immanent in the world and is conditioned by Māyā, inscrutable power by which Brahman conceals its real nature.

There is not a single text in the Upanishads, which supports the doctrine of two Brahms, the higher and the lower. In the later Vedānta, a distinction is drawn between the Absolute Brahman and personal Īśvara. The Upanishads have not themselves made any distinction between the object of philosophical contemplation and that of religious devotion, worship and surrender. “The Upanishads did not draw any hard and fast line of distinction between the simple one of intuition supported by Śaṅkara and the concrete whole of Rāmānuja. If we separate the two, it will become impossible for us to admit any distinction or value in the world of concrete existence. The Upanishads imply that the Īśvara is practically one with Brahman.”61 In this connection we can mention the views of Radhakrishanan. According to him, God with whom the worshipper stands in personal relation is the very Absolute in the world context and is not a mere appearance of the Absolute. Although Radhakrishanan would sometimes admit that Īśvara is only a symbol of the Absolute and that He has less of reality than the Absolute being yet he affirms in may
places of his writings that such distinction between the Absolute and God are only logical and not chronological.

In the later Vadānta, as in the philosophy of Śaṅkara a distinction is drawn between the Absolute Brahman and the personal Īśvara. According to Śaṅkara Ultimate Reality, the Brahman is an undifferentiated unity. Brahman is not an organized whole and therefore excludes all internal relations. For Śaṅkara there is only one Supreme Reality and he termed it as Brahman. In Śaṅkara’s philosophy Brahman is described as Nirguna. It is Nirguna in the sense that it is Trans empirical. Because Brahman is described as Nirguna it does mean that Brahman is mere blank, a mere negation, a mere non-entity. On the other hand Brahman is regarded to be full of being. It is identified with pure being itself. Brahman is of the nature of being attributness. Any attribute or quality is a determination. Every determination is a negation. Therefore Brahman is beyond all negations or determinations. It is absolutely homogeneous. All differences or bhedas are to be excluded from Brahman. Śaṅkara draws a distinction between the higher Brahman and the lower Brahman. The higher Brahman is Nirguna beyond all attributes. The lower Brahman is Saguna. It alone has attributes. In Śaṅkara’s philosophy the lower Brahman is identified with God. Śaṅkara describes God as the omniscient, omnipotent cause from which proceed the origin, subsistence and dissolution of the world. This world is created and sustained by God. God who controls the world is Saguna. Along with other qualities God possesses knowledge, power and goodness surpassing all others.

The entire philosophy of Śaṅkara is expressed in a beautiful verse which runs as follows- “Brahma Satya Jagatmithyā Jivo Brahmaiva nā parah, i.e. “The Brahman is the only Reality and everything else this world of manifestation is unreal, as mere appearance, the individual soul (Jiva) is non-different from Brahman, the Absolute. Now the fundamental problem of the Advaita Vedānta is, if Brahman be the one, Absolute Reality, then how can
we explain the world appearance at all and what is the status of the world appearance. The various systems of Indian philosophy since the time of Vedic religion have advanced various interpretations of the nature of the world appearances, and the reality behind it. But the most of the interpretations are theistic and dualistic in character. What goes to the credit of Śaṅkara is that his interpretation provides for the reconciliation of dualistic theism with non-dualistic absolutism by giving us a two-fold conception of the Absolute, both as devoid of attributes (Nirguna) and as endowed with attributes (Saguna). However he does not place these two conceptions on the same level of existence which may involve self-contradiction. Śaṅkara clearly distinguishes the higher from a lower Brahman. The higher Brahman, Brahman viewed from the aspect of knowledge (Vidyā), is free from all adjuncts, all name and form. It is Nirguna Brahman and it is knowledge of this Brahman that constitutes liberation. According to Śaṅkara, Saguna Brahman or God is the lower Brahman, it is Brahman viewed from the aspect of ignorance (Avidyā).

According to Śaṅkara, it is God who creates the world-appearance. The question of the relation between God and Brahman arises when we try to explain the world. Śaṅkara observes that the entire visible world, with which both science and history are concerned and which provides the theatre for all our activities, and which we believe to be there from the beginning of time and running to an indefinite future as altogether illusory, because it comes in conflict with the scriptural description that reality is absolutely non-dual and tolerates no other. The world comes to us as an other, as something different from us. Therefore, we have to regard the world as mere appearance, i.e. it is something which we cannot deny but which at the same time can not really be there. The fundamental difficulty of the Advaitic theory is how to explain this false appearance. To regard that the infinite Brahman is the cause of the finite world and creates it, is to admit that the infinite is subject to the limitation of time. We cannot simply apply the relation of cause and effect to the relation of Brahman and the world.
We cannot say that Brahman is the cause and the world is the effect, because this would distinguish Brahman from the world and make it into a thing related to another thing. The relation between Brahman and Īśvara is a special application of the general problem of the relation between Brahman and the world. According to Śaṅkara the world though it hangs on Brahman does not affect Brahman by distinguishing that kind of casuality where the cause without undergoing any change produces the effect.

The Nirguna Brahman, by itself can not be the cause of the world. Brahman becomes the cause of the world only through the instrumentality of Māyā or Avidyā. That is why Śaṅkara describes Māyā as the causal power without which Brahman cannot deemed as the cause. The relation of Brahman and Māyā is unique; it is neither identity nor difference, nor both. Māyā acts as a medium of the projection of this world of plurality on the non-dual ground of Brahman. Māyā is used as the name of the dividing force, the finitising principle, that which measures out the immesurable and creates forms in the formless. According to Śaṅkara, “There are names and forms conceived in nescience which constitute the essence of Īśvara and which are incapable of determination either as true or false. These names and forms are the seeds of this world of flux. They are called prakṛti or the power of Māyā of the omniscient Lord.”62 When we try to link up Māyā with Brahman, the latter becomes transformed into Īśvara. Māyā denotes the Sakti or energy of Brahman. The world is empirically real but transcendentally unreal. The world is merely a play or Līla of Īśvara. It is due to Avidyā or Māyā that one God is seen in many forms. The Vedāntic position is that Brahman causes the world, not as Brahman or the Absolute but as Īśvara, i.e. Brahman as modified by an Upādhi. The Upādhi of Īśvara is Māyā and it is by virtue of this that He is creative and self differentiating principle, but there is this difference. The Vedāntins hold that the Ultimate Reality must be understood as pure unity, and it is only at a lower stage that difference should be introduced.
Śaṅkara claimed that God is a lower category than the Absolute. According to Śaṅkara God has no independent reality. For him God is not identical with Brahman. Though he does not consider God to be identical with Brahman yet he thinks that God is associated with the creative power of the all knowing Lord. This creative power is Māyā. So from the Vedāntic point of view behind the creation of the world God may be considered both as the material and efficient cause. The Absolute or Brahman is the only Ultimate Reality. He is the undifferentiated Eternal Being without any second, whose appearance is God. The Absolute is unconditioned and unrelated, and cannot be the God of religion, who is conceived as a personal being related to the finite individuals through prayer and worship. By this distinction between the Absolute and God, Śaṅkara however does not mean that the God of religion is unreal and illusory. To us, the persons of the empirical, God is the highest object of worship and through worship and devotion to this God, man attains liberation by realising himself to be identical with Brahman.

Thus in the philosophy of Śaṅkara a distinction is drawn between God and the Absolute. The Absolute is beyond all the characterizations and descriptions. It is regarded to be wholly transcendent. It is considered to be beyond the creator-created dichotomy. According to Śaṅkara it can be described only negatively. In the philosophy of Śaṅkara God in relation to the Absolute is a lesser reality. For ŚaṅkaraĪśvara or God is the phenomenal appearance of the Absolute. That God is an appearance of Brahman can merely be signified as “neti-neti.” Śaṅkara asserts that God vanishes only from the level lying beyond human knowledge. Though initially Śaṅkara makes a great effort to establish God as the all powerful cause of everything finally he has brought God into a lower state of deceptive appearance i.e. Māyā. It is quite clear that in the Advaita Vedānta philosophy of Śaṅkara Brahman is the central point of discussion and at the same time it can also be observed that he keeps God in a momentous position. Nevertheless, from the empirical stand point God appears and
disappears when viewed transcendentally. Śaṅkara neither identifies God with the Absolute nor says that it 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. Śaṅkara puts so much emphasis on Absolute or Brahman that God merely appears and disappears in his philosophy. God ceases to exist with the cessation of Māyā.

Rāmānuja, the exponent of the theistic school of Vedānta sets forth the doctrine of determinate and qualified Brahman, where God is identified with the Supreme Brahman. His doctrine of Saguna Brahman is completely opposed to that of Śaṅkara’s doctrine of Nirguna Brahman. In Rāmānuja’s philosophy Brahman and God are non-different. Rāmānuja’s Brahman is what Īśvara (God) in Śaṅkara’s philosophy. God has empirical reality, but has no ontological reality. 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. For him Brahman is the Supreme Reality as well as the personal God. It is true that Śaṅkara lays emphasis on the Niguna aspect of Ultimate Reality while Rāmānuja lays emphasis on the Saguna aspect of the same. But thereby they are not denying the opposite positions; simply they are giving less importance to them due to their respective philosophical positions. While Śaṅkara emphasizes on the intuitive aspect of Ultimate Reality, Rāmānuja emphasises 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 aspect of Ultimate Reality, namely Brahman and God.

Thus in the Rāmānuja’s qualified monism there is no distinction between God and Absolute. He criticised Śaṅkara’s monism and established the ontological Reality of God, the individual souls, and the world and regarded the souls and the world as attributes or modes of
God. God is both the transcendent and the immanent ground of the world according to Rāmānuja. God is a person and not a mere totality of other persons. As an immanent inner controller God is the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world. God is changeless though his body undergoes modification. God is also transcendent. God is the Supreme person and the limitations or imperfections of the world can not exhaust him. Brahman is the Supreme Person endowed with innumerable Supreme and auspicious qualities and devoid of all impure qualities. Brahman is identical with God. There is no distinction between the indeterminate Brahman and the determinate Brahman. Rāmānuja’s Brahman is determinate and Saguna. Brahman and God are non-different. Brahman is not Nirguna, in the sense that it is possessed of infinite number of qualities like omniscience, omnipotence and Brahman is the material as well as the efficient cause of the world. While Śaṅkara conceives Brahman as devoid of homogeneous, heterogeneous and internal differences, Rāmānuja says that though Brahman is devoid of homogeneous and heterogeneous differences, Brahman is possessed of internal distinctions. Matter and finite selves are integral part of Brahman.

Spinoza was regarded as the first great Absolutist thinker of modern Europe. In the Absolutism of Spinoza, Substance is the absolute principle which is identical with the universe and vouches for reality of nothing except itself. Personality which always involves the reality of the individual selves and antithesis amongst them is an impossible category, because everything including selves is an unreal mode of the Absolute Substance, which swallows up all. For the same reason the question of personality does not arise at all in the case of Spinoza’s Absolute. Therefore his concept of God is an impersonal reality, and it would not be wrong to say perhaps that such Absolute may be set down as devoid of consciousness as there is no content for the Absolute to be conscious if it. The doctrinal contribution of Spinoza to philosophy may be summarized in the one word that is the concept of the Absolute. For Spinoza, the Ultimate Reality is the substance which he identified with
God. God as the Absolute must be both epistemologically and ontologically independent. God is self existent and self conceived. God must be admitted to the universal Reality. Being universal, God must be absolutely indeterminate and infinite because there is nothing which makes Him determinate. All determination is negation and since the finite or the conditions necessarily presupposes the infinite or the unconditioned, the Absolute must also be regarded as the cause or ground of phenomena. The Absolute is immanent in the world as the ground of it and transcendent to it as indeterminate. The Absolute must be understood not in relation to the finite but as the negation of the finite. Since the conditioned is not self-supporting and must be rejected, the affirmation of the unconditioned is necessary. God is therefore absolutely infinite and indeterminate, unique and universal, self evident and necessary being. Thus in the philosophy of Spinoza 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. The Substance of Spinoza is exclusively a principle of identity and not of difference. For Spinoza God is absolutely infinite substance with thought and extension and other infinite attributes. His idea of God is pantheistic, God and the world are one but He is also more than that. Spinoza’s God has neither personality nor consciousness, intelligence, will and feeling. He is not affected by any emotion of pleasure and pain. God is the indwelling and not transient cause of everything. All the ideas in the universe added together constitute the thinking of God. God and nature mean the same substance, but He is more than everything.

A more recent from of monism is Absolute idealism with which the name of Hegel is intimately associated. Like all other forms of monism it treats the finite world and finite spirits as differentiations of the one all inclusive Absolute. But it differs from them in its insistence on the idea of logical development as essential to the very being of the Absolute. According to Hegel the Ultimate Reality is the Absolute Spirit or Idea or Reason. This Absolute Spirit is not an ego or mind limited by the non-ego, nor a transcendental principle
beyond the ego and non-ego. The Absolute is immanent in nature and mind as universal reason. God, for Hegel is the symbolic from of the Absolute. Now a question arises here: can this God be conceived of as the highest in religion? According to Hegel, the Absolute mind passes through different stages and finally revealing itself in art, religion and philosophy of human mind. For Hegel, what is Absolute from the philosophical standpoint is God from the religious stand point. Hegel identifies the Absolute of his philosophy with the God of religion. For him philosophy is the rational explanation of the true content of religious faith. But the only difference between the Absolute and God is that, the Absolute is the Ultimate Reality interpreted in terms of pure thought, whereas God is the same reality represented pictorially, i.e. interms of imagination and emotion.

For Bradley the Ultimate Reality is Spirit. This Spirit is an organic whole where the whole is immanent in each of its parts. According to him the Absolute is one and He is the all-inclusive being. For Bradley the Absolute is timeless and in itself it has no history or progress. “Nothing perfect, nothing genuinely real, can move. The Absolute has seasons, but all at once bears its leaves, fruit and blossoms.” Bradley refuses to admit God as the all inclusive Reality but makes Him as an aspect of that Reality. God, according to Bradley cannot be identified with the Absolute. He distinguishes the Absolute from God by admitting that the idea of God tends to pass into that of the Absolute. For Bradley Absolute is not God. God has no meaning outside the religious consciousness and this is practical, for Absolute is related to nothing. The Absolute for him can not be God, because in the end the Absolute is related to nothing and there cannot be a practical relation between it and the finite will. When we begin to worship the Absolute on the universe and make it the object of religion we in that moment have transformed it. Bradley holds that the God of religion is an appearance and in the Absolute, God and religion are equally lost. Religion naturally implies a relation between man and God. As both God and man are relative, so both are finite. They are the
adjectives of a whole. Although God is conceived of as independent of all relations, yet he has no existence apart from his worshippers. If there is no worshipper who stands in relation to God then He will become an empty being. It is the unity of man and God, which in various stages and forms, wills and knows itself throughout. We may say that in religion God tends always to pass beyond himself. He is necessarily led to end in the Absolute, which for religion is not God.

Bradley holds that the essence of religion lies in having communion with God, who is the embodiment of all values. In religious experience one becomes one with God and so in that moment of union, we seem to attain to divine perfection. But in that case there arises a dilemma. If the union with God is not complete the finite self does not become the Absolute Reality and if the union is complete, then the possibility of devotion also disappears, since the individuality of the worshipers is lost in the Reality of God. So even in religious experience either we do not attain perfection or else we go beyond religion into a stage of supra-religion. God is supposed to have a personality. God having personality becomes a finite being. In the words of Bradley, “If you identify the Absolute with God that is not the God of religion. If again you separate them God becomes a finite factor in the whole. And the effort of religion is to put an end to, and break down, this relation— a relation which, nonetheless, it essentially presupposes. Hence short of the Absolute, God cannot rest, and having reached that goal, he is lost and religion with him.”

Bradley holds that God is but an aspect and that must mean an appearance of the Absolute. So Bradley’s God stands on the same footing as other finite objects. Bradley says that each appearance is preserved in the Absolute though it undergoes transmutation. The very nature of appearance undergoes changes. In that case we can not speak of persistence of Appearance in the Absolute. Bradley’s God being short of the Absolute and having marks of finitude can not be the
highest reality. And God which is not highest reality cannot be the God of religion. Thus according to Bradley God of religion is not identified with the Absolute.

Thus in Bradley’s Absolutism a distinction is drawn between God and the Absolute and therefore between religion and philosophy and between practical and ultimate truth. For Bradley the Absolute is not God. The Absolute is related to nothing because all relation implies limitation and therefore imperfection. In religion the finite wills of man stand in practical relation to God as in worship and prayer. Religion therefore makes its God imperfect by the very relation of the finite and the infinite will which it involves. Hence, the God of religion is a lower category as it involves want comprehensiveness of the whole of experience which is Truth. Bradley wrote, “For if God is perfect, we saw that religion must contain inconsistency and it was by seeking consistency that we were driven to a limited God.”

Bradley here raises the familiar question of personality and discusses its applicability to the God of religion. Personal idealist makes much of God’s personality and the theists regard it is one of the attributes of God. But Bradley takes a different meaning of personality from what the personal idealists and theistic writers attach to it. Personal idealists emphasise antithesis and not union between finite wills and the will of man. But Bradley thinks that our religious consciousness involves both antithesis and union before the human will and the divine. So he is not categorical in his assertion as to whether the God of religion must be a person. All that he says is that in this double relation between the divine and the human will one may apply personality to God. But he holds that there is a far more essential truth in religious consciousness in the fact that we feel the presence of God’s will in ours, and all of us in our religious communion feel a feeling of satisfaction in common, which should not be denied us. In fact, for Bradley the God of religion is a finite reality and therefore different from the Absolute Reality which is the universe. For Bradley the Absolute Reality is Superpersonal, it is not personal. Religious activities like worship, prayer etc. implies person.
There is relation between finite beings and God. But relation makes God imperfect. Bradley’s Absolute is neither a self-conscious spirit, nor a person. Selfhood and will are marks of imperfection. God can not be the perfect real or the all inclusive whole of Bradley. For Bradley the Absolute is supra personal or impersonal whereas God is personal, whose personality implies the duality of the worshipper and the worshipped. So according to Bradley the God of religion is not identified with the Absolute of philosophy. The Absolute is beyond all duality and relation and transmutes all finite experiences with their contradictions in an ineffable way. God is an aspect, an appearance of the Absolute. An appearance is an incomplete reality.

Hastings Rashdall, in his essays on ‘Personal Idealism’ and in his ‘Theory of God and Evil’, makes a distinction between God and the Absolute and takes God in the ordinary sense of a finite personal being. According to Rashdall belief in God is the postulate of morality. We may be able to give some meaning to morality without the postulate of God, but not its true meaning. If the existence of God is not a postulate of all morality, it is a postulate of a sound morality; for it is essential to that belief which vaguely and implicitly underlies all moral beliefs and which forms the very heart of morality in its highest, more developed, more explicit forms. Belief in God involves something more than the belief that there is a universal mind for which and in which the moral ideal exists. There can be no meaning in the idea of morality for a Being who is mere thought and not will. The belief in God is essential to the logical justification of the idea of objective validity which is implicit in the moral consciousness. Objective morality implies the belief in God. The Absolute must include God and the created spirit (self) taken together. The Absolute is the being which alone truly is and of which all other beings may be treated as attributes or predicates.

According to Rashdall, the Absolute can not be identified with God. God is a person since he possesses the characteristics essential to personality. God is a Supreme self to which
the world of persons and things is an object. Rashdall proves the existence of God as the unity of self-consciousness, by a two-fold argument. The first argument states that the world that we know exists in our experience and we cannot say that the world that we know exhausts all possible worlds. For long before we were born and long after we shall be dead, there must have been and will be other worlds which far transcend the world of our knowledge. That implies there must be a consciousness inclusive of, but indefinitely larger, than any of our finite selves and that consciousness is God. Secondly, our moral consciousness certifies to the existence of an absolute moral ideal contrasted with our ideals which are relative and the absolute moral ideal presupposes for its existence a supremely moral self who is God. Now from the metaphysical and moral grounds we conclude that God as the unity of consciousness unifying individual consciousness must exist. Thus Rashdall establishes the reality of a spiritual self who is the subject of the world. But that does not prove that God is identical with the Absolute, for the Absolute though including God and all other consciousness is here not a single self-consciousness but a community of selves. The Absolute may include God and finite spirits, but yet need not be itself a unity of self-consciousness. Rashdall wrote, “The Absolute can not be identified with God, so long as God is thought of as a self conscious being. The Absolute must include God and all other consciousness, not as isolated and unrelated beings, but as intimately related (in whatever way) to him and to one another and as forming with Him a system or unity. And in so far as God is not any of these spirits when once they have come in to being, however they may ultimately related to Him, He is not in the most obvious sense of the word, infinite. We may, if we like, call God infinite in the sense that there is no other Being but what proceeds ultimately from His will and has its source or ground in Him; ................ but the term infinite would seem more properly to belong to that Absolute which includes God and other spirits.” According to Rashdall, metaphysical and ethical consideration alike requires us to
recognise a real distinction between God and the lesser spirits who desire their being from Him, yet remain in intimate relation to and dependence upon Him and with Him make up totality of real beings in the world. “If we must use a word which might will be dispensed with, God and the spirits are the Absolute - not God alone. Together they form a unity, but that unity is not the unity of self-consciousness.”

Rashdall while emphasizing the unity of God and the finite selves says that the Ultimate Being is a single power, if we like we may even say a single Being, who is manifested in a plurality of consciousness. God is thus one of the eaches, a separate appearance of the Absolute. He has all the limitations of personality. The Ultimate Reality is One, a single power, a single Being which is manifested in a plurality of consciousness. One consciousness which is omniscient and eternal and many consciousnesses which are of limited knowledge, which have beginning and some of which, it is possible to have an end. Rashdall is anxious to ascribe personality to God and because he thinks personality involves contrast between the self - hood of the person and the other selves; he has made a separation between the Absolute and God as a person. 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. There is that logical unassailability of the concept of the Absolute, there is the religious surrender to a personal God. Whereas the head demands an impersonal Absolute, heart demands a personal God. Rashdall never degrades God to a human level. From the religious standpoint God is still the Supreme though out of an absolutist necessity, He is perforce to be supposed to be less real than the Absolute and limited in that sense.
From the above discussion we find that Spinoza, the God-intoxicated philosopher of the modern period, takes God to be in the sense of the Absolute. He begins with the Cartesian dualism of thought and extension, but arrives at the conclusion that there is only one self-subsistent being and that being is God. According to him God is not only real, but is the only reality and nothing else can exist apart from God. He is the Infinite Substance which is single, eternal, independent, indeterminate, self-caused and Immutable. Spinoza denies personality and consciousness to God. God has neither intelligence nor feeling nor will. He has no end to achieve and he does not act according to any purpose. One, who knows the true nature of things, will love God, but this intellectual love of God is the love of God for himself, because man is merely a mode of God. Actually God can not be related to anything for there is nothing outside of him with which he can be related. Spinoza’s God is thus clearly the all-inclusive, impersonal, non-relational Absolute. In Hegel’s philosophy also God and Absolute are used as identical terms. According to Hegel, the Ultimate Reality is the all-inclusive, universal, self-loving idea which contains within itself the entire logico-dialectical process that unfolds in the actual world, and this idea is God or the Absolute. Like Spinoza, Hegel holds that the Absolute is the only substantial reality and all existences have truth only in the Absolute. The finite world of particular things and beings is only a differentiation of the one all-inclusive whole. There is nothing outside of it and so, what we call the evolution of the world is actually the logical self-development of the Absolute itself. Hegel accepts the dependence of the world upon the Absolute, but this dependence is not casual, but a purely logical dependence. The world flows from the Absolute, not as an effect flows from its cause in time but as a conclusion flows from its premises. Hegel identified the Absolute of his philosophy with the God of Religion.

However, all Absolutist philosophers do not use God in the sense of the Absolute. There are thinkers who hold that though supreme personality is admissible as an object of
worship, one must distinguish between the Supreme person and the Supreme Reality. God is
the Supreme person but not the Supreme Reality. The Absolute alone is the Supreme Reality
and God is only an appearance of the Absolute. Śaṅkara and Bradley hold a similar view and
draws a distinction between God and the Absolute. For Śaṅkara Brahman (the Absolute) and
Īśvara (God) are positively distinct. Brahman is non-qualified, unconditioned and bereft of all
Upādhis, whereas Īśvara is qualified, conditioned and limited by Upādhis. Brahman is non-
relational whereas God stands only in relation to the world. Brahman is eternal whereas God
exists only so long as the world exists. But since Reality is one, the two, God and the
Absolute can not be ontologically different. The Absolute which is the object of Vidyā
(knowledge) is itself viewed as God from the standpoint of Avidyā (ignorance). Īśvara is
Brahman in its conditioned aspect. But since condition does not belong to the real nature of
Brahman Īśvara has only a phenomenal status. He possesses existence only from empirical
point of view. In the philosophy of Śaṅkara Īśvara stands to Brahman as appearance to
reality. Bradley goes a step further than Śaṅkara regarding God’s phenomenality. Like
Śaṅkara, Bradley also distinguishes God from the Absolute, but while Śaṅkara regards God
to be appearance of the Absolute, Bradley takes God to be an appearance within the
Absolute, i.e. mere finite element within the whole. Religious consciousness, according to
Bradley seeks to worship God as the highest reality - the Supreme, infinite, all-in-all; but on
the other hand it ascribes personality to him and thereby makes him finite, for personality
essentially implies finitude. God is rendered by the very nature of religious consciousness to
be self contradictory appearance. Thus we see that Śaṅkara and Bradley reduce God to a
mere theophany with an uncertain status which may at any moment be withdrawn in to the
Absolute.
4.5 RADHAKRISHNAN’S SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF ‘GOD AND THE ABSOLUTE’:

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. As a philosopher, Radhakrishnan is fully aware of the fact that it is not possible to give a naturalistic or a materialistic description of the Absolute. The ultimate must be such that it can fully account for everything - the universe and even itself. He conceives the Absolute as “Pure consciousness and pure freedom and infinite possibility.”68 The first two characters have described more or less, in the Vedāntic manner, whereas the third character has been explained in the manner of Hegel’s Absolute Idealism. For Radhakrishnan, the Absolute is pure consciousness, because consciousness is the most ineffable and the constantly existing phenomenon. We can not think of any kind of existence without relating it to consciousness. It is always there. It is an infinite possibility because infinite worlds could arise from it. The universe is only one possibility of the Absolute. It is pure freedom because its act of actualizing a possibility is not determined by anything, it is a free act. Radhakrishnan feels that the qualities of existence, order, demand an ontological foundation and that can be provided by nothing less than the Absolute. Absolute is spiritual in nature, which is a free spirit. There is nothing beyond it. Its freedom is uninterrupted. The Absolute is described as infinite. It is incapable of increase. The Absolute is complete in itself because it lacks nothing. It is changeless because it is infinite. The wholly perfect is the Absolute. Radhakrishnan asserts that the Absolute is beyond all its expressions. He says, “Pure being which is the Absolute can only be indicated. It can be alluded to but not described.”69 Radhakrishnan is convinced that the nature of the Absolute cannot be comprehended fully. In it all is found and all is lost.

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According to Radhakrishnan the universe is a spiritual unity. The real is an Absolute who is pure, passionless, perfect, changeless and eternal. Radhakrishnan at times call the Ultimate Reality as Brahman and at other times the Absolute. He wrote, “The Ultimate Reality is res completa, that which is complete in itself determined by itself and capable of being explained entirely from itself.” Thus according to Radhakrishnan Brahman is the Ultimate Reality from which everything is born, in which everything lives and into which everything enters at the end. He believes that the ultimate explanation of the universe has to be monistic. The Absolute in itself is essentially one. Like the Advaita Vedāntist Radhakrishnan also believes that the Absolute does not admit even of internal differentiation-the svagata-bheda as the Vedāntist calls it. The differentiations that appear to be there are so only from the point of view of creation. It is true that everything, in a sense, is an expression of the Absolute, but these expressions do not in any way affect the monistic character of the Absolute. Radhakrishnan observes, “The same Absolute reveals itself in all these but differently in each. The Ultimate Reality sleeps in the stone, breaths in the plants, feels in the animals and awakens to self-consciousness in man.” Radhakrishnan’s monism has its roots in teleology.

Like Hegelianism the root concept of the philosophy of Radhakrishnan is also the idea of Spirit. But unlike many Hegelians and Indian idealists who take the Spirit as substance Radhakrishnan takes it as life. “Like Eucken he is a philosopher of life.” As he puts, “Sprits is life not thing, energy, not immobility, something real in itself and by itself, and can not be compared to any substance subjective or objective.” There is only one creative energy. It is the essence of the Spirit. Brahman or the Absolute is the total spiritual reality, manifest and unmanifest, actual and potential, realized and unrealized. The universe is but the temporal manifestation of the Absolute. As a matter of fact, the self, God and Absolute-all are names of the one universal spirit in its different aspects. The self is the
manifestation of the spirit in the human centre through the body and mind of man; God is the spirit as manifest in the world at large, whereas the Absolute is the total spiritual Reality. Everything of the universe is the expression of the Absolute.

The Absolute of Radhakrishnan is spiritual in nature and it is a free spirit. There is nothing beyond it. Its freedom is uninterrupted. The Absolute is described as infinite. The Absolute spirit being the Ultimate Reality is self grounded and is also the foundation of everything else. The Absolute is changeless because it is infinite. It is eternal too. It is eternal in the sense of being timeless. Time is irrelevant to the Absolute. Radhakrishnan calls the Absolute the whole of perfection. Everything else is imperfect. The wholly perfect is the Absolute. Radhakrishnan holds that the Absolute is beyond all its expressions. His conception of Ultimate Reality is not pantheistic in character; it keeps on swinging in between pantheism and theism.

Like the Upanishads Radhakrishnan also conceives that the Reality has four poises. These are the Absolute or Brahman, the creative spirit or Īśvara, the world spirit or Hiranyagarbha and the world, or Virāt- Svarupa. This order is only a logical succession and not a temporal one. They are the four aspects of one whole, the transcendental universal Being anterior to any concrete reality, the causal principle of all differentiation, the inner most essence of the world, and fourthly the manifest world. They are co-existent and are not alternating poises. Brahman is the primordial existence. Radhakrishnan agrees with Śaṅkara in maintaining that this aspect of Reality is unconditional, indeterminate, infinite and transcendent reality. It is free from activity. Īśvara is immanent, omniscient omnipotent, creator, destroyer and maintainer of the world. God assumes the subject – object distinction. In this respect Radhakrishnan’s concept comes closer to Rāmānuja’s God. Hiranyagarbha is the world spirit in subtle form and virāt is the world spirit in its gross form. When the Supreme Reality is viewed in relation to the cosmos we call it God. Brahman is the
transpersonal ground and Īśvara is the personal God, the former is the object of Nirvikalpaka Samādhi and the latter is the object of Savikalpaka Samādhi.

One of the important characteristics of Radhakrishnan’s metaphysics is that for him the Absolute is not only pure existence, pure consciousness, pure bliss, an indeterminate, formless and impersonal being, but also God, the murta, the personal creator. The Absolute is full of infinite possibilities and the world is the actualization of one of them. According to Radhakrishnan, “The abstract possibility and the concrete realization are both contained in the one reality, which is Absolute – God. The two aspects represent the absolute silence of the spirit and its boundless movement. The silence is the basis of the movement, the condition of power. The distinction is only logical. The silence of the spirit and its energizing are complementary and inseparable. The infinite is both amurta, formless and murta, formed. The co-existence of the two is the very nature of Universal Being. It is not a mere juxtaposition of two opposites. The Divine is formless and nameless and yet capable of manifesting all forms and names.”

From the above analysis it is prominent that Radhakrishnan putting forward a solution of the apparently conflicting views of the Supreme as eternally complete and of the Supreme as the self-determining principle manifesting in the temporal process. God is not something over and above the Absolute. God is the Absolute viewed from the point of view of the world. Radhakrishnan holds, “While the Absolute is the transcendent divine, God is the cosmic divine. While the Absolute is the total reality, God is the Absolute from the cosmic end, the consciousness that informs and sustains the world. The possibilities or the ideal forms are the mind of the Absolute or thoughts of the Absolute. One of the infinite possibilities is being translated into the world of space and time.”

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. 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. 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 explaining this in a clear way asserts, “We call the Supreme the Absolute when we view it apart from the cosmos, God is relation to the cosmos. The Absolute is the precosmic nature of God and God is the Absolute from the cosmic point of view.”

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 holds that God is not an ethical principle nor an intellectual concept or a logical idea, but a perceived reality present in each man. Man expresses his very intuition of reality through concrete forms. Through such concrete forms he responds to the eternal reality.

The Absolute is full of infinite possibilities, while God is specific possibility. God appears as the ground of one of the specific actualized possibilities of the Absolute. The
actualized part of the possibilities of the Absolute is being while the unactualised part of the Absolute is non-being. God is trying to make this non-being into being. God has an infinite power but He is an expression of the Absolute. Though God is an expression of the Absolute, He cannot be conceived as mere appearance or mere expression of the Absolute. He is not assumed only for worship. God is actual being. He is a Supreme person. He is higher than his creation. God is not to be believed as a distorted reflection of the Absolute. God is the real symbol of the Absolute Reality. Therefore God has assumed double forms - the transcendent and immanent. In His creative aspect He is immanent. But the Absolute is beyond it. Radhakrishnan asserts, “The question of immanence and transcendence does not arise with reference to the Absolute.” Hence for Radhakrishnan God and the Absolute are two different aspects of the same reality. Brahman and Īśvara are one. God is not a separate principle from the Absolute. For Radhakrishnan “Īśvara is Brahman with creative power.”

The Absolute is impersonal while God is personal. But the Suprapersonal and personal are the modes of expressing the same and one reality.

God is not something over and above the Absolute. God is the Absolute viewed from the point of view of the world. “While the Absolute is the transcendent divine, God is the cosmic divine. While the Absolute is the total reality, God is the Absolute from the cosmic end, the consciousness that informs and sustains the world.” The Absolute seems to be God from the point of view of one possibility that has been actualized. In other words, when we view the Absolute in relation to the possibility that has been actualized it appears as power, wisdom and love and as creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world and to that we give the name God. For Radhakrishnan, God is the Absolute with reference to the world. The Absolute is the logical prius of the world, which means the Absolute is, in its one possibility, the logical ground of the world. When the Absolute is considered to be the logical ground of the world then the Absolute is God.
The Absolute is impersonal, while the God is personal. But for this reason 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 he is a person requires an environment. In one sense the unrealized potentiality of the Absolute is the environment of the creative personality of God. God can be regarded as a creator because he attempts to actualize the unrealized potentiality of the Absolute. Radhakrishnan stated that God is attempting to transform the non-being into being, the unrealized into the realized. When the unrealized potentiality of the Absolute is fully realized than the distinction between the creator and the created vanishes. The distinction between God and the Absolute also then vanishes. In the language of Radhakrishnan in that case, “God lapses into the Absolute”. Radhakrishnan pointed out that the Absolute is timeless. Time begins with creation. God in one sense operates within time. The Supreme values are potentially contained in the Absolute and God attempts to actualize these Supreme values.

Radhakrishnan reconciles Absolute with God. He does not want to transform the Absolute and God into one reality. Many thinkers in the East as well as in the West have dispensed with either the Absolute or God. God is not an appearance of the Absolute. It is a creative power of the Absolute. We cannot identity the Absolute with God, without creating confusion. It is necessary to conceive of both the Absolute and God and find out a tenable relation between them. Radhakrishnan wrote, “A personal God can only be an aspect of the Absolute perhaps the executive authority of the Absolute.” The same Absolute whose individuation is God, an embodiment of creativity, dynamism and actuality; express itself progressively is matter, life, mind consciousness and self-consciousness. The world has Absolute significance and an ontological status of its own being a real manifestation of the Absolute itself.
Radhakrishnan is not in favour of using symbols or idols to apprehend the reality of the Absolute. Human beings usually prefer to use symbols to communicate with the eternal Reality. But Radhakrishnan feels that to use concrete symbols for unseen reality is to reduce the very essence of the Absolute, because Absolute is much more than man’s idea or picture of it and more than what man knows. It cannot be fully comprehended by man. Man can achieve only the glimpse of the Absolute which is possible only in mystical experience. Radhakrishnan believes that mystics experience the reality of God. And this fact is quite comparable with scientific truth. Hence Radhakrishnan holds that God is a perceived or experienced reality present in us. God cannot be assumed only as an ethical principle or as an intellectual concept or a logical idea. God is a concrete presence in each man. God is a finite power of the Absolute. He is not an eternal reality for He exists only so long as the universe is not dissolved. God’s reality is derived from the Absolute and He is again dissolved in the latter. From the ultimate point of view God is a contingent being, but from the cosmic point of view He is creator and redeemer. God is not an eternal reality though He is not within time. He creates time, space and cosmos. Therefore, He is beyond time. But He is not timeless, because His being is absorbed in the Absolute.

According to Radhakrishnan, God and Absolute are names of the one universal spirit in different aspects. “God is the Spirit conceived as the reality manifested in the world at large, Absolute is the spirit conceived as the infinite possibility of which the present world is only one actual manifestation.” According to Radhakrishnan any exclusive position will be wrong. So he seeks to
reconcile the philosophies of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. This reconciliation is possible because “Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja are the two great thinkers of the Vedānta and the best qualities of each one are the defects of the other.”

Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara is the basis of the religious thought which Radhakrishnan expounds and defends, although Radhakrishnan’s reinterpretation of Advaita is not altogether identical with that of Śaṅkara. Radhakrishnan himself is conscious of his reconstruction of idealistic thought and of his fresh interpretation of the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara. He stated clearly that his Advaita is not the Advaita of Śaṅkara, nor his idealism is that of Bradley. The problem of Ultimate Reality can be looked at from two alternative points of view of philosophy and religion. The Upanishads show the dualism of God and the Absolute. This is a distinction which was later introduced into Vedānta by Śaṅkara. According to Śaṅkara, Ultimate Reality, the Brahman is an undifferentiated unity. Brahman is not an organized whole and therefore excludes all internal relations. Radhakrishnan is not of the same view with Śaṅkara and in this connection he criticizes Śaṅkara. According to Radhakrishnan Śaṅkara by denying all relations reduces the ultimate being to bare existence which is absolute vacuity. Again Radhakrishnan point out that the Ultimate Reality should be cognized as a whole where differences are reconciled and not obliterated. He holds that the Supreme in its non-relational aspect is the Absolute. According to Radhakrishnan, Absolute is perfect and dispassionate that transcends the unsteady tumult of cosmic life. Radhakrishnan also points out that with regard to the specific possibility of the Absolute which has become actualized, the Absolute appears as God. There is an organical relation between the world and the Absolute as God. But the non-relational aspect cannot be asserted if at least one specific possibility is accounted in respect to the relational aspect of the Absolute.
Reality is One and the same, although there may be different points of view of looking at the same Reality, Radhakrishnan holds that the Absolute of Philosophy and God of religion are distinctions of value and those who contemplate on the abstract impersonal Absolute are spiritually more advanced than those, who worship God. In the Advaita Vedānta of Śaṅkara the emphasis is more on the Absolute, whereas in the attenuated Advaitism of Radhakrishnan there is more stress on the concrete character of God. For Śaṅkara, Īśvara or God is a phenomenal appearance of the Absolute. Radhakrishnan expressly denies that God can be a mere appearance of the Absolute. Śaṅkara neither identifies God with the Ultimate Reality nor says it is different from it. Śaṅkara ascribes the term Māyā to associate the term Absolute with the term God. According to him God appears to be real as long as one is under the influence of Māyā; but God disappears when the lid of ignorance is uncovered. But Radhakrishnan is not in favour of reducing God to nothingness by making it a product of Māyā or nescience. To quote Radhakrishnan, “Both the Absolute and personal God are real, only the former is the logical prius of the latter.”

The entire philosophy of Śaṅkara is so much dominated by the idea of Brahman that God appears and disappears in his philosophy. Eradicating Māyā means eradicating the existence of God in Śaṅkara’s philosophy. But Radhakrishnan gives equal emphasis to both God and the Absolute. He wrote, “While the Absolute is the transcendental divine, God is the cosmic divine.” God in Radhakrishnan’s philosophy continues to exist till the very end of the cosmic process. As the cosmic process does not cease to exist, ultimately God does not disappear but unites with the Absolute. To Radhakrishnan, the difference between God and the Absolute is logical and not chronological. Radhakrishnan says that the difference between Absolute and God does not mean that there is a particular point at which the Absolute moves out. The stages are only logical but not chronologically successive.
Both Śaṅkara and Radhakrishnan hold that the Absolute never kindle in the soul adoration and intense love. Radhakrishnan holds, “We cannot worship the Absolute whom no one hath seen or can see who dwelleth in the light that no man can approach unto. The formless Absolute is conceived as formed for the purposes of worship.”86 God is the form in which alone the Absolute can be pictured by the finite minds. Śaṅkara declares that Brahman is both determinate (Saguna) and indeterminate (Nirguna). He asserts that when the methods of logic are employed, the highest reality is not the indeterminate Brahman – but determinate Īśvara. For Radhakrishnan, the Absolute assumes the form of God. God is not the figment of our minds. God himself is the highest reality as well as Supreme value. Such a God regarded as the highest Reality is an object of genuine worship. So, it seems that 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. Radhakrishnan’s Absolute and God are like two sides of the same coin. They refer to the same truth that is the Supreme Reality. The Supreme as Absolute is inconceivable and is ineffable, whereas the Supreme as God is conceivable and apprehensible.

Rāmānuja conceives Brahman as the Absolute. The attributes that we generally ascribe to the God of religion has been ascribed to the Absolute of Rāmānuja. Rāmānuja discards the distinction that is usually drawn between the philosophical Absolute and religious God. Rāmānuja regards both God and the Absolute as identical and he uses the words Brahman and Īśvara or God as interchangeable. Like Rāmānuja, Radhakrishnan also speaks of Reality as one whole. But Radhakrishnan does not identify Absolute with God. He asserts, “When we emphasise the ineffable character of Reality, its transcendence of subject-object relation we call it the Absolute. When we look at it as the creative principle of all existence we conceive it as God. The Absolute and God are two levels of the same Reality.”87 For Rāmānuja, the Absolute is all perfect. Radhakrishnan is also of the same
view, but he holds that the world of change does not disturb the perfection of the Absolute. Radhakrishnan does not say in clear terms like Rāmānuja that the auspicious qualities belong to Brahman or to the Absolute. Radhakrishnan says, “When we limit down the Absolute to its relation with the actual possibility the Absolute appears as Supreme wisdom, love and Goodness.” That is to say the Absolute as God is the creator, sustainer and judge of the world.

According to Radhakrishnan Absolute is the name of God in its transcendental status and God is the Absolute from human end. Like Rāmānuja, Radhakrishnan does not identify the God of religion with the Absolute. Of course Radhakrishnan asserts that the Absolute is the ground of the world, but only in the sense that the possibility of the Absolute is the logical prior of the world. In another occasion Radhakrishnan says that the Absolute is the Lord of all worlds. Though we find the terms like ‘Lord’, ‘Ground’ etc in Radhakrishnan’s philosophy yet he does not clearly state that the Absolute is the creator and the judge of the world. He also does not clearly state that Absolute as the abode of auspicious qualities. While Rāmānuja interchangeably uses the words ‘Absolute’ and ‘God’ Radhakrishnan does not use it in the same way. Radhakrishnan wrote, “The Supreme in its Absolute self existence is Brahman, the Absolute and as the Lord and creator containing and controlling all, is Īśvara, the God.”

Rāmānuja thinks that God neither appears nor disappears. For him Brahman or God is the Supreme Reality. Rāmānuja firmly attributes reality to God. According to him a real conformity is composed by the unity of God, world and finite being. Like that of Śaṅkara’s God, Rāmānuja in his different explanations does not express God to be unreal. Rāmānuja, unlike Śaṅkara says that there is both the presence and absence of characteristic qualities in the Supreme Reality. By characteristic qualities he means the presence of propitious attributes and absence of inauspicious attributes. Rāmānuja asserts that the Supreme Reality
which he considers as God though not capable of understanding yet is perceptible by intellect. By using interchangeably the term Brahman or God Rāmānuja has made an effort to raise a synoptic idea of Reality. For Rāmānuja Supreme Reality is One. Thus a comparative estimate of Radhakrishnan’s view of the problem of God and Absolute with that of Rāmānuja, it can be said that Rāmānuja doesnot give separate emphasis to the words viz Absolute and God or Brahman and Īśvara. But in the philosophy of Radhakrishnan we find due stress to the words representing reality to express the same truth. Therefore Rāmānuja and Radhakrishnan have compressed the same truth with slight variation.

Śaṅkara is often criticized that he maintains an unbridgeable gulf between Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. Radhakrishnan holds that this criticism is based upon a ‘confusion of standpoints.’ On the level of our thought this gap cannot be bridged; it will be bridged as and when we will reach trans-empirical intuition. The duality of subject and object which infects thought is the cause of such a dual apprehension. As in intuition there is no such duality so there is no such metaphysical duality on the intuitive level. Intuition is the highest experience in which we even surpass God. So, on the intuitive aspect we have Brahman, while on the thought aspect we have God. Thought gives us other truths also. But God is its highest truth. The highest truth we receive in thought is transformed into the highest reality in intuition. Therefore, the same Ultimate Reality has two names corresponding to our two faculties – corresponding to intuition it is Brahman and God corresponding to thought. So Brahman and God are not two separate entities, but the same reality viewed from two standpoints. Radhakrishnan says that the only intelligible reconcilliation between two such apparently discordant notes seems to be through the device of a duality of standpoints. When we rise above the intellectual level and intuit the nature of Reality, we see that there is nothing but the Absolute and the world is only the Absolute and the problem of the relation between the two does not arise since the Absolute and the world
are not two distinct entities which requires to be related. The Absolute is looked upon as a personal God by whose power of self-expression or Māyā the world is sustained. The Absolute as Pure being, Śaṅkara and the Absolute as a person, Rāmānuja are the intuitional and intellectual representations of the one Supreme fact.

Like Rāmānuja, Radhakrishnan sometimes seems to impart greater importance to God. “Radhakrishnan’s God is richer than Brahman from the standpoint of concreteness,”91 says S.S. Raghavachar. He also says that Radhakrishnan has constructed his Absolute as hardly other than the concrete Godhead of the great theistic systems. But since Radhakrishnan himself criticises theism this view is not acceptable. Radhakrishnan holds, “Theism leads to a finite God and thereby to pessimism and despair.”92 Radhakrishnan is an Absolutist and not a theist. He observes, “When we consider the abstract and impersonal aspect of the Supreme, we call it the Absolute; when we consider the Supreme as self aware and self-blissful being, we get God. The real is beyond all conceptions of personality and impersonality. We call it the ‘Absolute’ to show our sense of the inadequacy of all terms and definitions. We call it ‘God’ to show that it is the basis of all that exists and the goal of all.”93 Śaṅkara ascribes phenomenal character to God and Rāmānuja brings the Absolute down to the level of God, whereas Radhakrishnan has uplifted God to the level of the Absolute. Spiritual reality has two aspects – transcendental and creative. In order to emphasize the transcendental aspect Radhakrishnan refers to the spiritual reality as Absolute spirit, timeless and unchanging without any form of attributes. This Absolute is the source of limitless possibilities one of which is actualized in the cosmic process. The cosmic process with its order and progress oblige the finite mind to admit a creator – God. Radhakrishnan asserts. “The being of a personal God is dependent on the existence of the created order – God depends on creation even as creation depends on God.”94 When the distinction between the creator and the created vanishes, God lapses into the Absolute.
Brahman, Īśvara, God are not distinct entities but different aspect of the same Reality.

Brahman is Īśvara when viewed as creative power. So long as the world continues, the total identity between God and Brahman is not possible. But the world is not eternal. One day it will come to an end. Then the activity of God will cease and he will relapse into Brahman. God and Brahman will absolutely identical. Radhakrishnan believes that Śaṅkara while refuting the immanent aspect of the Absolute – God commits a mistake. For Radhakrishnan God and the Absolute both are real, where the Absolute is transcendental and God is immanent. Radhakrishnan’s God is an elevated conception and it is open for both pragmatic and the transcendental world in the different sphere of our thought for one reality. Radhakrishnan’s Absolute is transcendent, eternal, timeless and spaceless. It is not unintelligible as the known world is manifested through the potentialities and powers of it. The Absolute is pre-cosmic, the transcendent reality. It bears the power of transcending the finite and the infinite. It is the totality of being and as such covers both immanence and transcendence in different levels of understanding. Absolute is ever complete and God is self-determining principle which is manifested in a temporal development. In God, the eternal is reduced to the personal and finite reality. The Absolute becomes cosmic from the human or limited view. God and the Absolute are the names of the same reality from the cosmic and precosmic point of view respectively. According to Radhakrishnan, Ultimate Reality is neither Absolute nor God, it is both. For this Radhakrisnan tries to synthesise the monism of both Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja. He says that God is the Absolute considered as the ground of this world. God as a creator is personal while Absolute is impersonal. But the dualism of God and the Absolute is totally rejected by Radhakrishnan. According to him the Absolute is the pre-cosmic nature of God and God from cosmic standpoint is the Absolute - the indeterminate Brahman. But some critics try to find some inconsistency when he says that God is organically bound up with the world because God and the Absolute are identical in his
philosophy. This identity limits the Absolute, because if God is organically bound up with
the world then the Absolute must also be bound up with the world. As Absolute is the
unlimited reality and reality as we know is independent and non-reflective, we cannot limit it
as bewildered by Radhakrishnan. But this criticism cannot be met by saying that God is just
one of the potential powers of the Absolute and God precedes the world. The immanence of
God does not necessarily indicate that God is identical with the world. In this connection
Radhakrishnan wrote, “Without succour of the Divine the whole world will instantly crumble
into nothingness.”

In presenting his concept of the Absolute Radhakrishnan was influenced by Hegel
also. According to Hegel, Ultimate Reality is the Absolute from the philosophical standpoint
while it is God from the religious standpoint. This view is also held by Radhakrishnan.
Hegel thinks that the Absolute when grasped in religion, through representation becomes
God. This means that God is an image of the Absolute. Like Hegel, Radhakrishnan believes
that the Ultimate Reality is a concrete synthetic being. Radhakrishnan asserts, “The real is no
more a pulseless identity excluding all differences, nor is it a chaotic disconnectedness with
no order in it. It is the spiritual life, embracing the facts of nature which are shot through and
through with the forms of mind.” Hegel and Radhakrishnan both hold that the Ultimate
Reality is ‘Spirit’ which is one. It is not an abstract unity, but a concrete whole related to
many. Hegel calls the Ultimate Reality as the Absolute Spirit. His Absolute Spirit is a
concrete universal which is neither differenceless nor relationless. There is a relation of
mutual dependence between the Absolute and the world. It can be said that for Hegel the
Absolute is both ‘itself’ and ‘not-self.’ A systematic analysis shows that its ‘itself is through
the otherself which is the ‘not-self. Hegel is of the view that a ‘not-self’ is a necessary
moment of the self-expression of the Absolute. The ‘itself and not self’ are organically
related to each other.
Radhakrishnan firmly asserts, “Absolute is not an abstract unity, but a concrete whole binding together the differences which are subordinate to it. The whole has existence through the parts and the parts are intelligible only through the whole.” Therefore Radhakrishnan observes that the Absolute is an organised whole with interrelated parts. On the line of Hegel’s doctrine of unity-in-difference, Radhakrishnan opines: “The same Absolute reveals itself in all these but differently in each. The Ultimate Reality sleeps in the stone, breathes in the plants, feels in the animals and awakes to self consciousness in man.” Radhakrishnan holds that the Absolute is in no way dependent on the world. It is non-relational and as such is an abstract unity. In order to concretise the Absolute, Radhakrishnan posits God as a creative principle. God, according to Radhakrishnan is the Absolute in action. God and Absolute are not to be regarded as exclusive of each other. He holds that the Supreme in its non-relational aspect is the Absolute, in its active aspect it is God. “While God is organically bound up with the universe, the Absolute is not.” His Absolute is in no way dependent on the world. Creation of the world makes no difference to it. It cannot add or take away anything from the Absolute. The Absolute is the abode of infinite possibilities.

Radhakrishnan following the Hegelian principle of community, which looks upon Reality as an organic unity, holds that the Ultimate Reality is not merely the pre-supposition of the cosmic process, but is immanent in it. But a question arises here—how can the logical prius be immanent in the world? In order to concretise the Ultimate Reality Radhakrishnan conceives it as the unity of the subject and the object. But such a whole is an objective whole and demands to be transcended. The notion of the Absolute is of the pure subject which has no necessary reference to anything whatsoever. Radhakrishnan by concretising the Absolute has however failed to depict, the Absolute as pure subject.

For Hegel what is Absolute from the philosophical standpoint is God from the religious standpoint. Therefore in Hegel’s philosophy we find the identification of the
Absolute of philosophy with the God of religion. But the only difference Hegel maintains between God and the Absolute is that the Absolute is the Ultimate Reality interpreted in terms of pure thought, whereas God is the same reality represented pictorially in terms of imagination and emotion. But regarding the concept of God of religion Radhakrishnan’s view differs from that of Hegel. Radhakrishnan holds that God revealed in religious experience can be conceived of as the highest being. For the religious person, “God is the real living one who inspires trust and love, reverence and self-surrender.”¹⁰² So unlike Hegel’s Radhakrishnan’s God can satisfy a religious man. For Radhakrishnan God and the Absolute are poised of the same Reality. The Absolute is a living Reality with a creative urge. When this aspect is stressed, the Absolute becomes a personal God. God and the Absolute, according to Radhakrishnan are not two different concepts but two distinct aspects of the same Reality.

But Radhakrishnan criticizes Hegel’s over emphasis on logic. As Arapura puts it, “In fact he is anxious to do away with the pre-eminence assigned to logic by the leading absolutists, particularly Hegel.”¹⁰³ Radhakrishnan criticizes Hegel, when he says that we can arrive at the unity of Ultimate Reality through dialectical thought. Dialectic is a process in which we compound together concepts. This process cannot give us the sense of oneness. Radhakrishnan observes, “This sense of the one which is the central feature of Hegel’s system is an announcement of an intuition and not the result of a demonstration. When intuition gives us the idea of something real behind and beyond all that we know and seem to be, our dialectic strives to express the sense of the unity by the concepts of God, eternity, immortality, heaven and the like.”¹⁰⁴

Bradley is essentially a Hegelian philosopher. Radhakrishnan, who made valuable contribution to the construction of a metaphysical edifice on Hegelian line, has similarity with Bradley; though in some vital points Radhakrishnan differs from Bradley. For Bradley
also the Ultimate Reality is Spirit. This Spirit is an organic whole where the whole is immanent in each of its parts. Radhakrishnan agrees with Bradley when the latter says that Reality “belongs to nothing but the single Real.”

But Bradley also holds that plurality is appearance which Radhakrishnan cannot subscribe wholly. According to Radhakrishnan plurality is real for God; though unreal for Brahman yet plurality is there in Brahman potentially. Bradley’s Absolute Spirit cannot be conceived in a relational form though it embraces all differences in an inclusive harmony. Absolute of Bradley is above relational form and it has absorbed the bewildering mass of phenomenal diversity in a higher unity. Bradley holds that Reality is supra relational whole. According to him Ultimate Reality does not contradict itself. Bradley takes for consideration the immediate experience as a starting point of knowing the Absolute Reality. All distinctions and relations rest on an immediate background which we are aware of. Distinctions and relations are felt in a sense to belong to an immediate totality.

For Bradley, the Absolute is the only reality. Even God is unreal as He is related to the finite selves and the world and whatever is relational belongs to the world of appearance. Bradley says that God is not the whole but only an aspect and therefore mere appearance, so that he must suffer the transforming plunge into the metaphysical one. Bradley refuses to admit God as the all inclusive Reality but makes him as an aspect of that Reality. God, according to Bradley cannot be identified with the Absolute. Bradley holds that if we try to identify the Absolute with God it is not the God of religion. Again if we try to separate them God becomes a finite factor in the whole. So, Bradley’s Gods stands on the same footing as other finite objects. Bradley refuses to admit God as the all inclusive Reality, but makes Him as an aspect of that Reality. In Radhakrishnan’s philosophy also we find that God is an aspect of the Supreme Reality. Radhakrishnan uses the particular term ‘an aspect’ to mean that God is the very absolute in the world context and not the mere appearance of the Absolute. Thus
God with whom the worshippers stand in personal relation is the very Absolute. But Bradley reduces God to mere appearance and says that God is merely an appearance of the Absolute. Bradley opines that each appearance is preserved in the Absolute though it undergoes transmutation. The very nature of appearance undergoes changes. In that case we cannot speak of persistence of appearance in the Absolute. God in Bradley’s philosophy, being short of the Absolute and having marks of finitude cannot be the highest reality. And God which is not the highest Reality cannot be the God of religion. Thus Bradley’s God which cannot be identified with Reality is reduced to finite entity. As such for Bradley God cannot be identified with the Absolute. But in Radhakrishnan’s philosophy God is reconciled with the Absolute reality without being treated as a separate entity. According to Radhakrishnan God can remain as God even if we identify Him with the Absolute. It is true that after the redemption when the world relapses into God, the latter also relapses into Brahman. God and the Absolute are united by the very relation (being aspects) which makes them constitutive of the Supreme Reality.

The analysis of the philosophical system of Radhakrishnan reveals that his system provides a synthesis of East and the West. Radhakrishnan was greatly influenced by the views of Hegel and Bradley regarding the concept of the Absolute as a concrete whole. But Radhakrishnan is not agreed with the conception of God as provided by Hegel and Bradley in their systems. In the philosophy of Hegel and Bradley God is given either a second place or placed on the same footing with other finite objects. But in Radhakrishnan’s philosophy God is given emphasis as a distinct individuality. Radhakrishnan’s God has some similarities with that of Rāmānuja, although Rāmānuja commits the mistake of ascribing to the Absolute the same attributes that has been ascribed to God. In Radhakrishnan’s system God retains its distinct individuality as an aspect of the Supreme Reality. Following Śaṅkara Radhakrishnan
is fully alive to the supra-cosmic transcendence of the Supreme Reality. He also highlights the creative side of the Supreme that is God, which has not been well done by Śaṅkara.

An important question arises here –If the idea of the Absolute is accepted, can the idea of God be dispensed with? Radhakrishnan asserts that Absolute being as formless cannot be worshipped by man. It is difficult to worship a formless entity. The concept of God fulfils this need of the worshipper. So, Radhakrishnan maintains that God is the Sakāra expression of the Nirakāra Absolute. “We cannot worship the Absolute whom no one hath seen or can see; who dwelleth in the light that no one can approach unto.”¹⁰⁶ The man can picture the Absolute only in the form of God. According to Radhakrishnan the worshippers of the Absolute are the highest in rank. Second position occupies by the worshippers of the personal God and then come the worshippers of the incarnation. The Absolute is the Supreme God of the world with the possibility of all worlds and not only this world. God is the actuality of this world. This world is the only one possibility to the infinite number of possibilities to the Absolute. The Absolute has the freedom to accept or not to accept this world for his expression. Radhakrishnan maintains that the Absolute is a concrete whole binding together with the differences which are subordinate to it. Absolute is not an abstract unity. Radhakrishnan wrote. “The highest Reality appears to the individual, who has not felt its oneness with his own nature, as possessing a number of perfections. The conception of a personal God is fusion of the highest logical truth with the deepest religious conviction. This personal God is an object of genuine worship and reverence and not a non-ethical duty indifferent to man’s needs and fears.”¹⁰⁷ There are two aspects of Reality and corresponding to these two aspects there are two directions from which reality may be viewed.

The Supreme Reality is apprehended in a two - fold way as personal and impersonal. The personal aspect is known as God whereas the impersonal aspect is known as Absolute. Radhakrishnan asserts that God is not an ethical principle, nor an intellectual concept, or a
logical idea but a perceived reality present in each man. Man expresses his very intuition of
Reality through concrete forms. Symbolism plays a very great role in the life of the ordinary
human being. Radhakrishnan thinks that to use concrete symbols for unseen reality is to
impoverish the Absolute. For Absolute Reality is much larger than man’s concept or picture
of it. There is much in the Absolute than man knows. The Absolute Reality is ascertained by
a number of intellectual co-ordinates. But intellectual co-ordinates cannot fully focus the
Absolute. It is only in the mystical experience that we can have the glimpse of the Absolute.
According to Radhakrishnan when we work from the cosmic end we are led to the hypothesis
of a Supreme whose nature is Being, Consciousness, freedom, power and God ness. When
we stress the creative side, the Supreme God-head or the Absolute Brahman is called God.
Brahman and Īśvara, Godhead and God are one. Brahman refers to infinite being and
possibility and Īśvara to creative freedom. This world is presided over by the cosmic lord and
a creation of God. The Absolute creative God and the cosmic lord are not to be regarded as
separate entities.

Radhakrishnan holds that Īśvara is Brahman with creative power. Īśvara or God is not
a mere symbol adopted for Upāsana or worship. He has two sides one is transcendent, when
he is one is Brahman and the other is immanent when He produces the world. The world is
totally different from the Absolute. Radhakrishnan holds, “The world is different kind of
existence, a degraded from when compared to the Supreme Being. The objective universe is
not the subject but is yet derived from it.”108 By its very meaning the Absolute is different
from the relative. Both the world and the Absolute, multiplicity and unity cannot belong to
the same order of existence. For Radhakrishnan the problems of the relation between God
and the Absolute or the world and the Absolute are of the same nature. The relation between
the Absolute and God is a special application of the general problem of the relation between
the Absolute and the world.109 According to Radhakrishnan, the Absolute is the above of
infinite possibilities and in its creative aspect one of these possibilities is freely chosen for accomplishment. The creation of the world makes no difference to the Absolute. The world of change does not disturb the perfection of the Absolute. The world does not follow from the nature of the Absolute. Only in one sense the Absolute can be regarded as the ground world and it is that a possibility of the Absolute is the logical prius of the world. In this way Radhakrishman proves the reality of the world along with proving the ultimacy of the Absolute. God and the world are organically related. Whereas God is linked essentially with the life in time, Absolute is not concerned with the temporal process. Radhakrishnan maintains that the evolutionary process of the world is directed by God. According to him God must precede the world; otherwise the values that emerge from it cannot have the reality. Immanence of God, in the world process, therefore does not mean that God is identical with the world. Radhakrishnan asserts that creation neither adds nor takes away anything from the Absolute. “Evolution may be a part of our cosmic process, but the Absolute is not subject to it.”

The Absolute is the Supreme Reality, whereas evolution is appearance. The Absolute is infinite possibility, pure, consciousness and freedom while God is specific possibility. When one stresses the creative side the Absolute Brahman, it is called God. Brahman and Īśvara are one.

We have already mentioned that the impersonal aspect of the Ultimate Reality is signified by the concept of Brahman and the personal aspect of the same is signified by that of God. Radhakrishnan asserts, “When we consider the abstract and impersonal aspect of the Supreme, we call it the Absolute; when we consider the Supreme as self-aware and self blissful being, we get God.” But in the next moment Radhakrishnan also says that the real is beyond all conceptions of personality and impersonality. Like Bradley Radhakrishnan wants to ascribe not impersonality to Ultimate Reality but super-personality. Bradley says, “…… The Absolute is not merely personal. It is not personal, because it is personal and
more. It is in a word, superpersonal.” When Brahman is said to be superpersonal, it is meant that it is personal and something more than that. Again when it is said that Brahman is personal, the aspect of God is included in it. So when it is said that Brahman is superpersonal, it is along with God. Thus in this concept of super personality naturally the concept of God is involved. But when we regard the Absolute as impersonal, then the concept of God does not arise; the concept of Brahman does not include that of God within its scope. So there is danger that the impersonality concept may lead to abstractness of Ultimate Reality. Therefore Radhakrishnan and Bradley prefer the concept of super personality to that impersonality on the part of Ultimate Reality.

According to Radhakrishnan personality is a symbol. He wrote, “Personality is a symbol and if we ignore its symbolic character it is likely to shut us from the truth.” When we say that God is personal we should understand that He is symbolically personal. But to call Him symbolically personal is not to deprive Him of His Reality because a symbol is continuous with what it symbolizes. So God being personal means that He is continuous with Brahman which he symbolizes through His personality. For a devotee an impersonal God is as good as non-existent, in the sense that to be impersonal means to be formless and undifferentiated. Such an impersonal God is difficult to be worshipped or prayed. Personification is necessary for our thinking. We think only of a personal God, not an impersonal Absolute. A personal God is not only an object of devotion but also of thinking. An unthinkable Absolute cannot be personal. So when the Ultimate Reality is brought down to the purview of human thought it becomes God.

According to Radhakrishnan a personal God is not ultimately real. He says, “A ‘personal God’ has meaning only for the practical religious consciousness and not for the highest insight.” The personality of God is required only to point to the super personality of the Absolute. While emphasising the personality of God it will be wrong to ascribe less
importance to the Absolute which is the cause, ground, and goal of the world. To the finite individual blinded by veils, the Absolute seems to be determinate and exclusive of himself. If a personal God exclusive of the individual were the highest then mystic experience would become unintelligible and we should have to remain content with a finite God. The Absolute is in this world in the sense that the world is only an actualisation of one possibility of the Absolute. God is the Absolute with reference to the possibility of which He is the source and creator. Yet at any moment God transcends the cosmic process with its whole contents of space and time.

Radhakrishnan does not make distinction between God and the Absolute. For him God and the Absolute are identical. The Hindu never doubted the reality of the one Supreme universal spirit, however much the descriptions of it may fall short of its nature. It is a sound religious agnosticism which bids us hold our peace regarding the nature of the Supreme Spirit. Radhakrishnan again admits, “Hinduism affirms that some of the highest and richest manifestations which religion has produced require a personal God. There is a rational compulsion to postulate the personality of the divine. While Hindu thought does justice to the personal aspect of the Supreme, it does not allow us to forget the Superpersonal character of the central Reality. Even those who admit the personal conception of God urge that there are heights and depths in the being of God which are beyond our comprehension.”

The Suprapersonal and the personal representations of the real are the Absolute and the relative ways of expressing the one reality. When we emphasise the nature of Reality in itself we get the Absolute Brahman, when we emphasise its relation to us we get personal God.

In Radhakrishnan’s conception of an Absolute - God, Brahman-Īśvara, the first term indicates infinite being and possibility and the second suggests creative freedom. We have the Absolute and God as creative power and also God as immanent in the world. “These are not to be regarded as separate entities. They are arranged in this order because there is a
logical priority. The Absolute must be there with all its possibilities before the Divine creativity can choose one. The divine choice must be there before there can be Divine immanent in this world. This is a logical succession and not a temporal one. Radhakrishnan following the fundamental doctrine of the Upanishads stated that the Brahman or the Absolute is the Supreme spiritual Reality, both manifest and unmanifest, actual and potential. Radhakrishnan’s dual vision of Reality as Absolute and God points out that Brahman is not merely a featureless being but is the vital abode of infinite possibilities. An idea of a formless and attributeless Absolute is barren, incapable of evolving love and respect and also incapable of explaining creativity, order and progress. The concept of God satisfactorily explains the reality of the world from the finite point of view. He is the Absolute from the human end. The Absolute and God are the intuitional and the intellectual representations of the one Supreme Reality.
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