CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

A philosopher or a prophet is a product of his times. It is the conditions of the times that create men of outstanding potentialities to arise, advocate and point towards the meaningfulness of life to his suffering and helpless generation. The tragic and catastrophic life of the modern man baffles one and all calling for an integration in their synthetic outlook towards life and the world. He looks at the past and recreates a view of his own that is reflective of the age in which he lives, in accordance with the needs of the men of his generation. This is the responsibility and task of any philosopher.

Living in a meaningful period of history, Radhakrishnan realises his responsibilities and tasks as a philosopher, not of any community or nation but of the world. He considers it as his task to prepare for the truth of the world's yet unborn soul by a free interchange of ideas which can lead to a philosophy that can "combine the best of European Humanism and Asiatic religion, with emphasis on spiritual and ethical force to conquer the hearts of men. Such a view of the function of philosophy in modern life is born out of a necessity of thought and an Indian student, may perhaps, make a little contribution to the development of a world perspective in philosophy".¹
1.1 CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY

Radhakrishnan defines Philosophy as a "logical enquiry into the nature of reality". He offers a number of definitions describing his conception of Philosophy at various periods of his life time. A very comprehensive and wide definition for Philosophy in his view should include a systematic study of almost every aspect of life in the Universe. It has to aim at the discovery of an all comprehensive and Universal concept which could stand by itself requiring no explanation but explains everything else. The ultimate reality should be such that everything could be resolved in it without itself being resolved into anything else.

Philosophy should attempt to offer, through rational methods, an explanation concerning the world, God and man. It should suggest a theory which could co-ordinate the wealth of apparently disconnected phenomena into an ordered whole, in order to comprehend and synthesize all aspects.

The definition of Philosophy has gained a wider connotation as it began to confront different challenges in various periods of time. Wider conceptions of Philosophy are gaining momentum with changes in historical perspectives. Today our philosophical conceptions should take special cognisance of the new discoveries in Sciences. Our thought should be recast to remake our social, economic and political institutions which are themselves changing with times. "Our age", says Radhakrishnan, "is committed to Science. Philosophy should base itself on positive knowledge of actuality, not speculative idealism, on facts of outward nature, facts of the individual mind,
and facts of spiritual life, of what is without us, of what is within us and what is above us".  

Philosophy for Radhakrishnan is an experience that comes to an understanding with itself. This experience relates (1) to a large body of objects in the world studied by natural and physical sciences and (2) to the individual subjects whose feelings, thoughts, passions and decisions are studied deeply in social sciences like Psychology, Education, Economics, Anthropology, Politics and History and (3) to human values studied in Literature, Ethics, Aesthetics and Religion. Taking into consideration these different types of experience, Philosophy should weave them into a coherent system of general ideas for interpretation. While doing so they should be viewed from three angles of the subject, the object and the spirit in order to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of reality.

In the present age, in the view of Radhakrishnan, Philosophy should be made more dynamic, creative, practical and humanistic.

Philosophy as logical reflection is different from Philosophy as the love of wisdom. Sophia or wisdom is not mere knowledge. It is knowledge lived. It is a way of life where valid knowledge is the condition of just action.

Philosophy should make itself adaptable and accommodate the recent challenges of modern scientific and rationalistic approaches to problems of humanity, re-evaluating its tasks and methods from time to time.
It is the task of philosophy not merely to reflect the spirit of the age in which we live, but also to lead it forward. Its function is creative, to state the values, to set the goals, to point the direction and to lead to new paths. It must inspire us with the faith to sustain the new world, to produce men who subordinate national, racial and religious divisions to the ideal of humanity. Philosophy is nothing, if not universal in its scope and spirit.5

Philosophy should also be made more synthetic and Universal in outlook, ready to adopt and accommodate the beliefs and the convictions of people belonging to different lands and cultures which can bring about better understanding, a unity and oneness of spirit in fellowship.

1.2 RADHAKRISHNAN’S CONCEPTION OF PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION

From ancient times, in India there was no conflict between Religion and Philosophy for the two went together unlike in the West. Though Christian theology and Philosophy were combined during the medieval period by the Christian theologians like St.Augustine and St.Thomas Aquinas, Philosophy became independent of Christian religion during the modern period beginning with Descartes and Francis Bacon. Inspite of its independence in the subsequent history of European Philosophy, Christian religion had its influence on the thought of many philosophers. After Hegelianism reached the shores of Britain, his Absolute Idealism has to face the onslaught of personal Idealists and pluralists who were influenced by Christian religion.
Though Philosophy and Religion have the common aim at grasping the Ultimate Reality, the method they adopt for achieving their goals are different. Salvation of the soul, is the goal of religion and discovery of truth is the object and end of Philosophy. Questions concerning the Ultimate Reality are answered by logical method in Philosophy while the same is answered in religion through its beliefs (faith) based on the authority of Scripture. Philosophy attempts to satisfy the mind, while religion warms the heart. One cannot come to the conclusion that they are opposed to each other or one is superior to the other because of their differences in approach and method. Radhakrishnan finds unity and harmony between them inspite of their distinct characteristics. "Reality", says Radhakrishnan, "reveals itself in two different forms to the mystic and to the thinker and ultimately the two should harmonise with each other. Unity and harmony ought to mark the relation of true religion to genuine reason".  

According to him true Philosophy results in true religion without any ultimate conflict between faith and reason. "Philosophy itself, will be religious and Religion in its deepest aspects will be philosophical".  

He asserts that Religion can be true only when it is philosophical. It means that the mystic, who is the specialist in religion with his experience, wisdom and insight will agree with the rational thinker. In support, he quotes the view of Josiah Royce who said that mystics are the only "thorough-going empiricists".
Radhakrishnan recognises the importance and high value, the mystic attaches to religious experience. He points out the warmth of the heart and the spiritual satisfaction evoked in the life of man in search of peace and harmony in this world. He writes:

Religion is necessary to educate and enable man and help him to rise above his baseness and work upwards. It serves as a balm or an opiate to the troubled soul, securing for it, peace of mind and solace of heart.⁸

Therefore he suggests that we should make religion philosophical as far as possible, instead of attempting to make philosophy, religious. In other words, it is better if the religious beliefs are drawn closer in agreement with the (reasoned) metaphysical thinking.

The whole Philosophy of Radhakrishnan is based on the view that true philosophy is in full agreement with true Religion. In maintaining such a view, he is following to the core, the footsteps of the Vedāntins in particular and the Indian philosophers in general.

In reply to a remark made by Swami Agehananda that Vedāntā is theology but not philosophy and that Prof. Radhakrishnan is a theologian of Hinduism, Radhakrishnan defended, saying:

My endeavour has been to expound a philosophy not to state a dogmatic theology, a philosophy which offers an interpretation of the Universe, which is at once rational and spiritual, which depends on logical reflection and not on acts of faith.⁹
Radhakrishnan attempted, through his writings and speeches, to demonstrate to the West that Indian Philosophy is philosophy but not theology or religion. He gave the title "Indian Philosophy" to his two-volume work on the schools and systems of Indian thought and religion when he expounded them in the modern philosophical idiom of the West and made it clear to the western world, that they (Indian schools of thought) have an indisputable right to the title to be called Philosophy even in the Western sense of the term.

1.3 ABSOLUTE IDEALISM AS TRUE PHILOSOPHY

Idealism has been the philosophy of Radhakrishnan's choice and best suited to his mind and temperament. His careful study of various systems of Philosophy in the West (Absolute Idealism) and in the East (Indian Idealism) has led him to believe Idealism to be worthy of Universal acceptance.

Radhakrishnan defines Idealism as the System of Philosophy which is concerned with the nature of Ultimate Reality irrespective of its relation to the knowing mind. An Idealist view finds the Universe with meaning and value. He also finds the significance and purpose of man's life in the Universe endowed with destiny which is not limited to this world.

Idealism contrasts between appearance and reality, existence and essence and hence it is led to admit an Ideal world beyond the existing, concrete one. An Idealist's view of the Universe results when we interpret our ideas that are essential parts of the real as ideals or values.
1.4 INTUITIONAL ABSOLUTE IDEALISM - A SYNTHESIS OF EAST AND WEST

Radhakrishnan's Absolute Idealism comprehends his two fold loyalty to the Indian tradition and to the great Idealistic tradition of the West, though the Idealism of the Absolutistic vedantic type emerges as the final precipitate. Raghavachar said: "The affinity of the Western Idealistic tradition to \textit{Vedāntā}, in its larger sense, was marvelously mobilised by Radhakrishnan."\textsuperscript{10} In the opinion of Mahadevan, "he sought to expound Sankara's \textit{Advaita} in the light of the Idealistic tradition of the West".\textsuperscript{11} "Emphasizing on the basic unity between the Idealistic tradition of India and the West, Radhakrishnan conceived a reconciliation between the two."\textsuperscript{12}

According to Radhakrishnan, Idealism had a long and continuous history both in the East and in the West. Though it has been multi-coloured and had many forms there were certain common, fundamental assumptions behind the variations and opposition. He said:

The foundation heads of Vedas, including the \textit{Upanisads} in the East, Socrates and Plato in the West set forth this creed in broad and flexible terms. The Realistic systems of the Hindu Thought, the Nyaya and the Vaiseshika, The Samkya and the Yoga and the Mimamsa are not in serious disagreement with the fundamental intention of the Idealist Tradition of the \textit{Upanisads}, viz - the inseparability of the Highest value from the truly real. In the West, from Socrates and Plato to Bradley and Alexander, the Idealist outlook of an ultimate connection of value and reality is maintained.\textsuperscript{13}
In the words of C.A. Moore "Absolute Idealism is the rock foundation on which Radhakrishnan has built the structure of his philosophy which was closely oriented to traditional Vedāntā that was spiritualistic".14 "His Idealism shows that Idealism in the East and the West are speaking the same language and seeking the same ideals".15 Referring to his idealistic philosophy Conger said: "Several familiar Idealistic arguments were found in their Indian dress".16

Conger calls his Idealism as Institutional Absolute Idealism17 since Radhakrishnan's Idealistic arguments are based on the intuitions of the mystics. His Idealism could not be described either as subjective Idealism or as objective Idealism, the only two trends, current in Western Idealistic Tradition. Conger aptly describes his Idealism, comparing with Western Idealists thus:

Less ponderous than Royce, less meticulous than Bradley, less involved than Hegel, he has made Idealism flow from a deep spring. By comparison, Eucken is provincial, Keyserling is trivial. Not since, Fichte and Schilling has there been such a precipitate stream of inspiration. He has surpassed the personalists in his philosophy of the spirit and rivalled the pragmatists in promulgating a Philosophy of Life.18

"The Idealism of Radhakrishnan finds marks of resemblance to different western Idealistic systems. Some scholars contend that his Idealism has closer resemblance to Anglo-Hegelian tradition",19 "Particularly of the Bradleyen type".20 "While others find it bearing general resemblance to Hegelianism".21
1.5 AN AVOWED ABSOLUTE IDEALIST

Radhakrishnan is an avowed monistic Idealist and a firm believer in the strength and truth of Absolute Idealism as the true Philosophy to meet the challenges and essential needs of the modern man of the present century. He found it more reasonable, affording to the spiritual being of man with full satisfaction - both moral and intellectual.

Such a strong faith in Absolute Idealism as the true philosophy was perhaps born of a burning conviction. In all his earlier writings we find him interpreting and expounding every system of philosophy in the light of Absolute Idealism. It was the standard yard with which he measured every philosophical system in the East or the West to test and find its worth.

A deep knowledge in European philosophy and a close study of Indian systems of philosophy particularly the Monistic and Idealistic trends in Upanisads, in Nagarjuna, Sankara and Ramanuja seems to have led, him to believe that both the Idealistic traditions in the East and the West are committed to the same Ideals and speaking the same language in different tongues. He found that Absolute Idealism was the nearest approximation to Vedāntic Ideals. Thus, having found many parallels between the Idealistic traditions of East and West, he attempted to cast many concepts of Indian Idealism particularly that of the Upanisads and the Vedāntā into the modern western Idealistic mould and offered it as a viewpoint for display to the west both for defence and appreciation. In his words: "I do believe that the great
Idealist tradition has in it the possibility of bringing east and west together in a closer union on the plane of mind and spirit".22

Just as there is one science for the world and there is the common brotherhood which transcends racial differences, Radhakrishnan hoped for the development of a world philosophy or atleast for a world outlook, in all his attempts to bring about a cross fertilization of ideas from East and West. The subsequent chapters explain how Radhakrishnan has brought about this cross fertilization of several ideas that stemmed from the East and West (under the various significant philosophical notions of the West, carried into his philosophy).
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