CHAPTER - III

DEVELOPMENT OF DR. RADHAKRISHNAN'S INDEPENDENT THOUGHT IN HIS EARLY WRITINGS

Prof. R.C. Zaehner, in his foreword to Dr. G.J. Arapura's book Radhakrishnan and Integral Experience, said:

What he (Arapura) has triumphantly succeeded in doing is that in giving a coherent account of Radhakrishnan's Philosophy he has delved below the rhetorical surface and exhumed the thought underneath, both the creative insights and the frequent EVASIONS.¹

This sums up the practical problems of an interpreter of Radhakrishnan's Philosophy. To bring to the surface, the creative insights of Radhakrishnan, the interpreter, needs to delve below and exhum e the thought underneath. This has been successfully done by Dr. Arapura and any one, who attempts to do so, will have to do the same.

Radhakrishnan's writings contain both creative insights and frequent evasions. An attempt has been made to bring out the thought content of Radhakrishnan's Philosophy from his earlier writings where his seminal Philosophical Ideas could be traced. The first three books of Radhakrishnan, were interpretative, critical as well as creative for they threw light on his seminal ideas. They are:

a. The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore
b. The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy

c. Two volumes of Indian Philosophy.

Some of the Interpreters of Radhakrishnan like D.M.Datta and A.N.Marlow came to the conclusion that Radhakrishnan has attempted to express his own independent views on Vedānta, while he was interpreting and criticizing the various doctrines, in Indian and Western Thought. The views of these two interpreters were based on Dr. Radhakrishnan's own statements, made in the prefaces to his first book, "The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore" and his second book, "Reign of Religion in contemporary Philosophy". Moreover, the interpretations of Radhakrishnan found in these books have some novelty of their own. An attempt is being made to bring out the significant Philosophical and religious notions stated in the interpretations of Radhakrishnan suggesting his independent views.

3.1 THE PHILOSOPHY OF RABINDRANATH TAGORE

In his first book "The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore" Radhakrishnan has attempted to interpret the Indian ideal of Philosophy, Religion and Art. His aim was to present Tagore as a Vedāntin who drew his inspiration for Philosophy of life from the Upanisads and advocated a religious theism resembling Christianity but not Christianity itself. Radhakrishnan was impressed by Tagore's deep spiritual outlook, the theistic and realistic interpretations of Indian life and culture (thought) based on the Upanisads and the Vedānta with wide sympathies for patriotism and Internationalism.
While writing on Tagore's philosophical ideas, found scattered in his Poetical and other works, Radhakrishnan revealed for the first time some of his own Philosophical views basing on the *Upanisads* and the *Vedantas*. These Philosophical insights have been carried into his later works.

In the opinion of D.M. Datta, Radhakrishnan has expressed some of his own views concerning Indian religion and Philosophy in appreciation of Tagore which were later found in his own themes. Datta wrote thus: "In this book the Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore unwittingly rehearsing his future flights in the domain of international literature. Much of what he says there about Indian religion, Philosophy and civilization in general, forms the themes of his later works and much of what he says in appreciation of Tagore is now being said or felt about himself at home and abroad".²

Interestingly the author, (Radhakrishnan) himself writes the fact in the preface to the above mentioned book:

In Interpreting the Philosophy and message of Rabindranath Tagore, we are interpreting Indian Ideal of Philosophy, religion and art of which his work is outcome and expression. We do not know whether it is Rabindranath Tagore's own heart or the heart of India that is bearing here. In his work India finds the lost word she was seeking. It may be said against this book that the author is trying to find a definite meaning where there is none and is confusing his views with those of Sir Rabindranath.³

A brief scheme of his philosophical views, in its early stages can be traced in this first book on Tagore where some of the passages refer to the
philosophical and religious themes of *Vedāntā*. They have been further developed by Radhakrishnan in his subsequent writings as "a Philosophical pilgrim's progress on his voyage of discovery".

Some of these *Vedantic* ideas as found in this work are given below. These ideas have both theistic and absolutistic strands in them with the heavy dose of Humanism and spiritual Realism of the Eastern and Western traditions.

### 3.1.1 Absolute and God

In his book *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Radhakrishnan stated the following ideas regarding the absolute and God. The *Vedāntic* Absolute as much as Rabindranath's God is *Concrete Spirit* and *Is concrete Individual*, *To Rabindranath God is Spirit immanent in the whole Universe, The whole Universe is penetrated and vitalized by the living Spirit*. The absolute of Philosophy becomes the God of religion to all followers of *Bhakti* School. Iswara, the highest manifestation of the Absolute is the personal Lord of the Universe. The distinction between the lover and loved is kept up till the last point, when in perfect love the two become one. The personal god is then dissolved in the Absolute. *The Absolute of Philosophy and God of theism is an aspect of the Absolute, an appearance of deeper Reality*.


3.1.2 Apprehension of the Real

In this book Radhakrishnan also dealt with the apprehension of the Real. According to Radhakrishnan, the vision of the Supreme One, in our own is a direct and immediate intuition not based on any ratios nation or demonstration at all.⁵

3.1.3 The world of Māyā

Another important concept, which was dealt in this book, is the world of māyā. Regarding this Radhakrishnan observes that the world is not the denial of God. It is his living image but not His enemy. The whole Universe is penetrated and vitalized by the living Spirit. To Rabindranath, God is a Spirit immanent in the whole Universe of persons and things. While the whole Universe is regarded by Tagore as expression of God, still different things express God in different ways. Thus he admits the conception of different degrees of reality. The world of intellect with its distinctions of good and evil, truth and error, self and not-self, beauty and ugliness, is only a stage on the path way to reality. Rabindranath gives us a human God and dismisses with contempt the concept of world illusion. Everything has this dualism of māyā and sathyam, appearance and truth. Our self is māyā, where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute: It is sathyam, where it recognizes its essence in the Universal and infinite in the Supreme Self, in Paramatman.⁶
3.1.4 Eternal Life

According to Radhakrishnan, in the matter of future life Tagore is at one with the Rishis of *Upanisads* who also hold to two views of immortality and reincarnation, the life of completeness and perfection and the life which completes endlessly. When the individual completely surrenders to the Universal self and the self becomes one with the Supreme then he gains the bliss of heaven and shares the life eternal .... but when moral life is swallowed up in religion, then the spirit transcends time and attains a timeless immortality. Both these views are valid in their respective spheres.7

3.1.5 Sankara’s Philosophy is inconsistent and Contradictory

Regarding Sankara’s Philosophy Radhakrishnan observes that Sankara without touching the root principles of *Vedānta*, grafted on to it the Buddhistic principles of māyā and monasticism. The Buddhists spoke of the flux of the finite Universe and Sankara admits that the world is māyā. The anxiety to be loyal as far as possible to both Buddhism and *Vedāntism* appears to be the explanation of much of the inconsistency of the Sankara’s Philosophy. But there is no denying that the positive method Sankara intends to pursue as a *Vendantin* and the negative method he does sometimes pursue as an interpreter of Buddhism and in conflict and contradiction.8

The above passages indicate that Radhakrishnan was dissatisfied by the negative approach Sankara adopted as a dialectician to the problem concerning the relation between the Universe and the Absolute. Hence he
sought the positive method in his interpretations of Vedānta which seems to be his own, though some scholars contend that those were found in the writings of Post-Sankara advaitins and that some of them have been discovered from the philosophical writings of Sankara himself. Thus Radhakrishnan's (Philosophic) scheme of thought consisting of several Vedāntic ideas is found combined with the religious and philosophic ideas of Tagore at least in the first stage of its development. Though these Vedāntic ideas are originally found scattered in the Upanisads and the commentaries of Sankara and Ramanujam they seem to appear in the first work of Radhakrishnan as almost new.

3.2 THE REIGN OF RELIGION IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY

In his second book 'The Reign of Religion in Contemporary Philosophy', which is more profound and highly critical of the contemporary European pluralists and personal Idealistic philosophers, Radhakrishnan found their philosophies anti-intellectual and anti-absolutistic having been carried away by theological doctrines of Christianity which in his view were 'plainly dogmatic' but not rational. Instead of religion being rationally justified, it became fashion of the pluralists to adopt religious doctrines in support of philosophy which is highly objectionable to the Absolute Idealists. Radhakrishnan examined the philosophies of James ward, F.C.S. Schiller, William James, A.J. Balfour, Henry Bergson, M.Rashdall and H.Howison and pointed out many a defect in their systems. While criticizing the pluralists
vehemently from the stand-point of Absolute Idealism, Radhakrishnan attempted to incorporate many of their philosophical ideas into his own scheme of philosophical thought which he offered under a separate chapter of this book. The contents of this chapter were to serve as an alternative to satisfy the philosophical needs and impulses as well as religious claims and aspirations, in the form of 'Suggestions of an approach to reality based on the Upanisads'. Radhakrishnan indicates a 'positive idealism' in this chapter, suggesting the main lines of his philosophic thought as "a philosophical pilgrim's progress on his voyage of discovery". This is the second stage of Radhakrishnan's endeavours over his future philosophical flights in the formation of his own scheme of philosophical thought. However, it must be mentioned with caution that Radhakrishnan did not present his views systematically in this book, for he was hoping to do it in his subsequent works.

In his preface to this book Reign of "Religion", he wrote:

There is a definite view running throughout the book conditioning the manner of approach. Indications of "positive idealism" which are found scattered in the course of the book are brought together in the last chapter. There is no establishment of the system as such. This must wait for another place and occasion. The main lines are suggested by the philosophical pilgrim's progress on his voyage to discovery where he passes from crass prejudices to metaphysical conclusions through the natural dialectic of the soul.³

Commenting on this book, A.N. Marlow said: "In the final chapter of the book, Radhakrishnan bases his own view of life on the passages of the Upanisads".⁴
The virtual revolt of the pluralistic theism against Absolute Idealism in the West made Radhakrishnan to review Absolute Idealism as a whole in order to modify some of its defects. He realized that the pluralistic movement through its criticisms 'has succeeded in giving a shake to the supremacy of Absolutism in religion and philosophy but has failed to overthrow it'. False Absolutism has come down, while the true is considerably strengthened (R.R. p.410) Radhakrishnan is a strong advocate of Absolute Idealism in the West and Advaita Vedāntā in India. The opposition of Visistādvaita and Dvaita against advaita Vedāntā at home and pluralism against Absolute Idealism in the West did not deter him from developing a strong conviction in the supremacy of Absolutism and Advaita Vedāntā over other systems as the former in his view is more rational and offers more spiritual satisfaction. For Radhakrishnan the monistic idealism is more reasonable than the pluralistic theism because it gives man full satisfaction. In his opinion this monistic idealism plays the game of philosophy squarely and fairly with freedom from presuppositions.\textsuperscript{11}

Though Radhakrishnan has criticized the pluralists in this book, many of their views have been accepted by him as valid and incorporated into his scheme of thought after due modification. D.M.Datta comments on this and he points out that the philosophers who were criticised by Radhakrishnan have entered into his thought in the latter period.\textsuperscript{12}

Bergson was one who influenced Radhakrishnan sufficiently and it is while expounding his thought, in three chapters of this book that Radhakrishnan mentions the major portion of his philosophical themes which
he developed in his mind by that time. "Of the pluralistic Philosophers, wrote A.N.Marlow, We feel that Bergson has the greatest appeal for Radhakrishnan and it is in the chapters dealing with him that the religion of the spirit is first set forth".\textsuperscript{13}

However, all these views have been summarised and brought into focus in the last chapter of this volume.

The following passages suggest a summarised view of his scheme of thought as found in the last chapter of this book, entitled Suggestions of An Approach to the Reality based on the \textit{Upanisads}. An attempt has been made to bring out the essential philosophic and religious themes selected out of the major sub-topics of the chapter:

3.2.1 \textbf{Philosophy is the theory of reality}

The test of a philosophical theory is its capacity to co-ordinate the wealth of apparently disconnected phenomena into an ordered whole to comprehend and synthesise all aspects of philosophy.\textsuperscript{14}

3.2.2 \textbf{Philosophy is Intuitional}

In order to know reality in its flesh and blood one must become sensuous, intellectual and intuitive. According to \textit{Vedānta} philosophy there is a higher form of experience than the intellect. Because of the insufficiency of the intellect to grasp the whole, the intellect has illusions and
contradictions. According to Radhakrishnan, "Intuition is the crown of reason".

Intuition is the most complete experience one can have in moments of spiritual exaltation. The highest worth of this religious experience was testified by Hegel and Bradley. Everybody can reach this intuitional experience, if they try hard to attain it. According to Radhakrishnan mysticism is the most scientific form of religion. In the words of Dean Inge, "Philosophy is neither purely conceptualist nor merely empiricist but intuitional".

3.2.3 The world process is the evolution of Spirit

The Vedánta philosophy has no place for all the materialistic doctrines of evolution. According to it spirit must be considered as the ultimate reality. Unless we accept this we cannot explain the rise to organic from the inorganic, the mental from the organic the rational from the mental and so on. The central fact of evolution cannot be thought of without a central spirit, which is infinite, eternal and spiritual.

3.2.4 The Absolute in a concrete whole

The Absolute is the whole, the only individual and the sum of all perfection. The differences are reconciled but not obliterated. The deed mechanism of stones, the unconscious life of the plants, and the self-conscious life of men are all parts of the Absolute and its expression at different stages. 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. We seek the unity that links from inert matter to living plants and so on upwards through great travail gathering itself into its own substances until we reach God. It progressively manifests itself in and through these particulars. The Absolute thus is an organized whole, with inter-related parts in it. It embraces time its events and processes. The finite Universe is rooted in the Absolute. In the words of Radhakrishnan. "The Absolute is not an abstract unit but a concrete whole binding together the differences which are subordinates to it. The whole has existence through the parts and the parts are intelligible only through the whole. The values we find and enjoy while on the way to it are preserved and receive their full supplementation to it. They are not annihilated".21

3.2.5 Absolute is not a homogenous one but a Unity

The *Vedānta* texts describe the absolute as an all inclusive and not an exclusive idea. It is the Life of Life, the Reality of the Real and Satcitananda. It is not a homogeneous one, but an unity or a harmony of different constituent elements. According to *Vedānta* the absolute is spirit that transcends and at the same time embraces all living beings.22

3.2.6 Brahman, the Absolute, Iswara the God, and the world as *Māyā*

The root word for the word *Brahman* is ‘Brh’, which means to grow. Therefore the nature of the Absolute is to grow into the world., since the
Brahman stands for the absolute in Vedāntā philosophy God realises himself in the world. The eternal is unity of all things finite and infinite.  

The above mentioned philosophical themes suggest that the author was interested in the formulation of a systematic theory of reality proposed to be built on the flexible ideas found scattered in the Upanisads. Many of the themes loosely woven into the texture of this scheme need to be supported by minute details with logical interconnections. Therefore the author himself stated at the end of this chapter that he did not aim at establishing a system on the basis of these suggestions but hopes to construct one in his subsequent writings.

3.3 INDIAN PHILOSOPHY (TWO VOLUMES)

At the invitation of Prof. J. M. Muirhead, Radhakrishnan wrote his two volumes on Indian Philosophy to the former’s Library of Philosophy for which he was the General Editor.

Though Radhakrishnan covered in these two volumes the various schools of Indian Philosophic thought from the period of the Vedas upto the Medieval and later periods, his treatment of the historical work was distinct from the Historian of Indian Philosophy like Prof. Das Gupta and Jadu Nath Sinha. In his view, historical interpretation of Philosophy should not be mere collection of data or summaries of textual materials, but a creative activity. It should not be an impersonal survey but personal interpretation. He wrote Effective exposition means criticism and evaluation, and I do not think it is
necessary to abstain from criticism in order that I may give a fair and impartial statement. When the commentators differ about their interpretations, one cannot stand silently by, without offering some judgement on the conflict of views.24

Radhakrishnan's two volumes on Indian Philosophy contain exposition, interpretation, constructive criticism, creative insights, independent judgement and lofty imagination. He recalled the ancient historians of Indian Philosophy who sought Philosophic progress and development from one conception to another and from one system to another, finally culminating in one's own Philosophic thought. He gave the example of Madhava's Saravadarshana Sangraha where the author presented the history of Indian Philosophical thought as a continuous progress to culminate in Advaita Vedānta: "Radhakrishnan also referred to Hegel, who wrote the history of European Philosophy as a collection of errors, pointing out at the end that his own Philosophy of idealism as the culminating final truth."25 "Moreover, Radhakrishnan found a similar method adopted by the Christian missionaries in their writings published under Religious Quest of India series, with the explicit aim of presenting Christianity as the final goal of Indian thought and quest".26

Having been influenced by Hegel in the West and Madhava in the East in writing the history of Philosophy, Radhakrishnan wrote his two volumes on Indian Philosophy critically interpreting and evaluating every Philosophical systems from a particular Philosophical standpoint of his own, without giving a label and a flag for all his views. Since he believed that the
history of Philosophy is Philosophy, he developed a viewpoint of his own while evaluating the various system of Philosophy he dealt with in these two volumes. Many Philosophers who consider those volumes as very significant contribution to Indian Philosophy pointed out his interpretations on the *Upanisads*, *Advaita*, *Visistadvaita* etc as deviating from the traditional points of view. This clearly indicates his claim as an independent interpreter of various systems. Radhakrishnan gave a reply to these critics thus: "Many of my critics were puzzled by my discussions of the *Upanisads*, since I did not fly a banner and fix a label to my view".²⁷

In his criticism of Shankara and Ramanuja concerning their interpretations of the *Upanisads*, he wanted to offer an independent third interpretation which could reconcile the view points of the two chief interpreters. Radhakrishnan's interpretation of the *Upanisads* is not an unreasonable one. His main endeavour in interpreting the *Upanisads* is to show how the *Upanisads* lent themselves to divergent developments. If some one can find a single point of view from which the different interpretations can be reconciled and understood then that may be the better understanding of the *Upanisads*.²⁸

3.4 LATER WRITINGS

Radhakrishnan wrote 'An idealist view of Life' and later English translation and commentaries on the three canons of *Vedānta* the *Bhāgavādgīta* the principal *Upanisads* and the *Brāhma Sūtra*. In all these works, one can find his independent Philosophical views.
3.4.1

‘An idealist view of Life’ is considered as the first important constructive work among Radhakrishnan’s writings. In this work, Radhakrishnan presented his Philosophical views from the standpoint of Idealism synthesizing various concepts taken from Eastern and Western idealistic traditions. The significance of this book was recognised by many Western Philosophers like Bernard Phillips, J.M. Muirhead, W.R. Inge, C.E.M. Joad, Lawrence Hyde and others. They considered the book, ‘An idealist view of Life’ as *Philosophia perennis* (Perennial Philosophy), meant for the entire world. Bernard Phillips wrote as follows: The ‘An idealist view of Life’ will be recognized as falling within the tradition which has been called *Philosophia perennis* and its claims to fame is not based on the originality of its underlying ideas but the manner in which they have been presented for our times.  

Describing the features of perennial Philosophy Bernard Phillips said:

> The heart of the perennial Philosophy which beats in all of the great religions of the world and in many of its Philosophical systems, consists of the claim that there is spiritual Absolute beyond the power of words to express which is the ultimate reality underlying the visible reality that, in his inmost essence, man is skin to or an expression of this ultimate reality and that man’s final end lies in the realization of his union with the ultimate."  

3.4.2

In the section ‘Reply to critics’ contained in the book, ‘The Philosophy of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan’ edited by P.A.Schilpp, Radhakrishnan clearly
maintains that he has made out an independent Philosophy which is an
Universal and perennial Philosophy found in all lands and cultures, in the
seers of the *Upanisads* and the Buddha, Plato and Plotinus, Hillel and Philos,
Jesus and Paul and the Medieval mystics of Islam.

3.4.3

Radhakrishnan wrote commentaries on the three canons of *Vedānta*
with English translation. Like the traditional acharyas of *Vedānta* such as
Sankara, Ramanuja, Madhva who wrote elaborate commentaries on
Prāsthānātraya - the *Bhāgavādgītā*, the *Upanisads* and *Brāhma Sūtra*,
Radhakrishnan wrote long introductions on each of these scriptures and won
the title ‘Brahma vidya Bhaskara’ from Bharatiya Viday Bhavan, Bombay.
These commentaries also establish that Radhakrishnan has his own
independent views expressed in the commentaries like the acharyas of the past
who have explained the *Vedāntic* concepts differently. B.K.Chatterjee states:
"The commentary on the *Bhāgavādgītā* by Radhakrishnan with an
introductory essay is independent of and different from the commentaries of
Sankara, Ramanuja and other great commentators. In his view the whole
exposition of the Gita is from Radhakrishnan’s own independent thinking".\(^{31}\)

The summary of the various Philosophical notions discussed in the
books, *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore* and *The Reign of religion in
contemporary Philosophy* under a few wellknown Philosophical themes have
been presented in this chapter. They represent the ‘nuclei’ of the significant
Philosophical notions (Seminal ideas) which Radhakrishnan developed into
fulfilled concepts in his later writings and particularly the introductions to
the three canons of Vedāntā (Prāsthānatrāya) worked out in these two early
writings. This shows that he had tentatively developed in his mind what he
meant by "True Philosophy" on the basis of which he was critical of other
systems of Philosophy both in the East and West. It is impossible to
understand the independent scheme of Radhakrishnan’s thought without the
study of the seminal ideas in these two early books and their development of
the same in his later creative works.
REFERENCE


2. *Philosophy of Serveppalli Radhakrishnan*, Ed. by Paul A. Schilpp. P.360


5. *Ibid.*, P.37


15. *Ibid.*, P.437


17. *Ibid.*, P.439


19. *Ibid.*, P.441

20. *Ibid.*, P.441-442


24. *Preface to Indian Philosophy volume*, I. P.9


26. *Indian Philosophy*, volume 1. P.674


