CHAPTER IV

SPIRIT AS ULTIMATE REALITY

4.1 NOTION OF SPIRIT IN THE WEST AND THE EAST

Philosophy has to discover an all comprehensive and universal concept which itself requires no explanation while it explains everything else. It must be the Ultimate Reality into which all else can be resolved and which cannot itself be resolved into anything.

4.1.1. Spirit as the essence of idealism and all philosophy

Spirit is the essence of all Idealism and of all Philosophy, according to Hegel. In working out his all-embracing Philosophy of Spirit, Hegel believed that he has discovered the right kind of Philosophy to end all philosophies. The German word ‘Geist’, which stands for the basic idea in all the mature writings of Hegel, is translated into English sometimes as Mind (emphasizing the rational aspect), sometimes as Spirit (emphasizing the immaterial or super material and religious aspects of reality). The word "Spirit" as the essence of God Almighty finds its reference in the old and New Testaments of the Bible and extensively in the Gospels and the writings of St. Paul.
Hegel defines Spirit as follows:

Spirit is alone Reality. It is the inner being of the world, that which essentially is and is per se it assumes objective, determinate form and enters into relations with itself: it is externality (otherness) and exists for itself, yet in this determination and in its otherness it is still one with itself: it is self-contained and self-complete, in itself and for itself at once. It's substance is spiritual.¹

This means - All Reality is the working of spirit. The sum total of human knowledge is none other than the Absolute Spirit thinking out its thoughts through human minds. In other words, history, Nature and human thought are really aspects of the Absolute Spirit coming to self-consciousness.

4.1.2 **Upinisads also explain spirit as the central principle**

According to Radhakrishnan The *Upinisads* believe that the principle of Spirit is at work at all levels of existence, moulding the lower forms into expressions of the higher. He identifies this principle of Spirit with the Greek notion of transcendental world of Ideas, and the Upanishadic concept of Ananda, (Spiritual freedom) the highest product of cosmic evolution, as the hidden principle at work slowly disclosing itself. Spirit is working in matter that matter may serve that Spirit.²

4.2 **RADHAKRISHNAN'S NOTION OF SPIRIT**

The spirit is the root concept of Hegelianism. The central philosophical category in Radhakrishnan's Idealism also is the primacy of the Spirit with its manifestations in matter, life, mind and self. He said: "The
ultimate principles of Reality is the very essence of Spirit, self-active motion". He also observed, "The Spirit is the Absolute. It has many possibilities present to it. The one actual manifestation of it is the world. Other aspects of the absolute are God and souls".

The Absolute, God, world and self are the various aspects of the one Divine Spirit, in all its different manifestations. The world is the spirit conceived as the one actual manifestation or expression of the Absolute, out of infinite possibilities of such absolute is the spirit, viewed as the Reality manifested in the world. The self is the Spirit conceived as the very core of man. According to P.Nagaraja Rao: "The central Philosophical category in his (Radhakrishnan) idealism is the Primacy of the Spirit and its manifestations in matter, life, mind and self." Radhakrishnan defines Spirit, not as substance but as life. He said: "Spirit is life not thing; energy not immobility, something real in itself and by itself and cannot be compared to any substance, subjective or objective". Radhakrishnan describes the spirit as one which is felt everywhere, but cannot be seen anywhere. One which can be known but cannot be explained. It is not body, mind or will but it sustains all of them.

The world process is the accomplishment of the evolution of the Spirit. It is the Spirit as the Ultimate Reality which serves as the initial cause for the whole process of the evolution. Such a conception of Reality as Spirit rejects the materialistic conception of evolution. The Spirit is responsible for the development of the creative process of evolution from matter to life, from life to mind and from mind to self-consciousness and so on. It is not a mere blind mechanical cosmic force but an eternal, spiritual energy which is
purposeful and intelligent. Almost all the basic categories of thought, employed by Radhakrishnan in the depiction of the life of the Spirit have been extensive and exhaustive, psychology, epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, education, politics, economics, religion converges and culminates in Spirit”.

4.2.1 Spirit, neither substance nor homogenous entity

Radhakrishnan does not consider Spirit as a substance as conceived by Hegel or as homogeneous, non-composite entity like the Brahman of Sankara, and some Indian Idealists. Radhakrishnan rejects the old notion of Reality as substance in the light of the criticisms against it from the physicists and some Philosophers like Whitehead. For him spirit is life, not thing, energy not immobility. He says that, "The Vedantic Absolute is not the abstraction of an etre-supreme which deletes all differences, but is a Spirit that transcends and at the same time embraces all living beings". According to D.M.Datta, the idea of Spirit is the root concept of Hegelianism as well as Radhakrishnan’s philosophy, but the latter differs both from Hegelians and Indian Idealists in conceiving the Spirit as life. In Radhakrishnan’s view, says P.Nagaraja Rao "The Spirit is not a homogenous, non-composite entity like the Brahman of Sankara. It is not the substance of Hegel. It is dynamic energy not immobility".

4.2.2 Spirit - a synthesis of east and west

The origins of his conception of Spirit as Ultimate Reality is a synthesis of such notions existing in Eastern and Western traditions. In his
book *The Philosophy of Rabindranath Tagore*, Radhakrishnan mentioned that: "God for Tagore is a concrete Spirit immanent in the whole Universe of persons and things".\textsuperscript{12}

Tagore maintains that the world is a manifestation of a benevolent spirit. For him, Supreme Spirit is not an abstract entity, transcendent to the world but is the concrete dynamic life at the center of things. A.N. Marlow observed, in making Spirit a creative principle, Radhakrishnan shows how deeply he has been influenced by Tagore on the one hand and by the West on the other.\textsuperscript{13}

The notion of "Spirit in man" as found in the themes of the *Upanisads* and *Vedāntā* and the fundamental concepts of Spirit in Western Idealistic tradition, have been synthesized by Radhakrishnan. He interpreted that Reality is one and is spiritual in response to the demands of the modern world. The views of Tagore and *Vedāntā* that God is a concrete Spirit dwelling in the entire universe and the abstract and concrete notions of the Spirit in Western tradition must have influenced Radhakrishnan in developing his central concept of Spirit as the creative principle of life and energy. C.E.M. Joad has expressed Radhakrishnan's notion of Spirit in clear terms thus: "...the ultimate Reality, not only of man but of the Universe is Spirit, which as it manifests itself in and in relation to human beings, is a free, a changing a developing Spirit".\textsuperscript{14}
4.2.3 The spirit as ontological reality

During the later part of the 19th Century there was wide-spread criticism in the West that Brahman of the Upanisads is more an abstract concept accepted on the authority of the Scripture and on the basis of the visions of Reality experienced by the sages, than on rational grounds. Therefore, Radhakrishnan wanted to prove to the Western world that the concepts of Indian thought particularly Brahman and Isvara, or Karma and rebirth are more concepts by postulation than concepts accepted on the authority of the Scripture or merely on the experience of the sages. Hence, he developed systematic arguments to prove the existence of a comprehensive concept of being on rational grounds. Moreover, Philosophy for Radhakrishnan is fundamentally a search for truth which is embedded in all existence. Unlike sciences which deal with multifarious objects in existence, Philosophy aims at the discovery and analysis of the hidden structures behind all existence and examine critically the guiding concepts of ontological reality. On the lines of Martin Heidegger, Radhakrishnan raises the basic questions concerning the ontological reality such as: ‘Why is there something rather than nothing’? ‘Why is there this world, rather than another’? as an argument in order to arrive at the first fundamental principle of all existence, purely on rational grounds. The very existence of the world, for Radhakrishnan implies the existence of Being from which the world is derived. Though Being does not itself exist like stones or plants. It is the foundation of everything that is existing. When we want to assert that ‘anything Is’, we make use of the concept of Being since it is considered as the most universal and
comprehensive concept in philosophy present in all existence. If anything exists, Being is. As this world exists, Being is. From the plans of visible reality of objects, we rise to the transcendent conception of Being - itself. Thus, Radhakrishnan established the primary of Being or Being-itself arguing in logical grounds. This Being he identifies with Absolute, the infinitely real and the infinitely perfect, the Divine Spirit, the Brahman of the Upanisads and I am that I am of the Christian Scriptures. Reality for Radhakrishnan is only One and it is spiritual. There can be only One such Being and that is the Divine Spirit.

4.2.3.1 The four-fold status or character of the Reality: Brahman, Īsvara and Hiranya-garbha and the World

Sometimes Radhakrishnan refers to three simultaneous phases of the Supreme apart from the World and sometimes four phases including the world to unravel its infinite potentialities: "The Supreme has three simultaneous phases of Being, the transcendent Absolute-Brahman, the creative freedom Īsvara and the wisdom, power and love manifest in this world, Hiranyagarbha. These do not succeed each other in time. It is an order of arrangement and logical priority not of temporal succession. The tendency to regard Īsvara or God as phenomenal and Brahman or the Absolute as Real is not correct. This is a distinction of great significance which we should preserve if we were to have balanced view of the Supreme".15

However, Radhakrishnan makes it clear that the Real is not a sum of the three or four phases of Reality: "It is an ineffable unity in which these
conceptual distinctions were made. These are fourfold to our mental view separable only in appearance. If we identify that real with any one definable state of Being however pure and perfect, we violate the unity and divide the indivisible. The different stand points are consistent with each other, complementary of each other and necessary in their totality for an integral view of life and the world".\(^{16}\)

* Brahman and *Iśvara* are both real. The latter is not a human fancy or a concession to the weak in mind. The *Nirākāra* and the *Sankara*, for Formless and the Formed, are different aspects of the same Reality. There is no higher or lower, inferior or superior in their relationships. There is a tendency to regard the Supreme as *Iśvara* or God as subordinate to the Supreme as *Brahman* or God-head. He rightly observes that "A being is different from what it does and these distinctions disclose great depths in supreme being and that we can only distinguish logically, though they are united in the Supreme".\(^{17}\)

4.2.3.2 Absolute and God

Radhakrishnan attempts to explain the potentialities of the Absolute concerning the manifestation of the world and its creation by *Iśvara*. The relation between Absolute and God or *Brahman* and *Iśvara* has been described by him as silence and movement, as formless and with form. Absolute, the one reality, has the abstract possibility and concrete realization. These two aspects represent the Absolute silence of the Spirit and the boundless movement of the spirit. The distinction between these two is only logical. They are
complementary to each other and in separable. According to Radhakrishnan the infinite is both *amūrt* a and *mūrt* a.\(^{18}\)

For Radhakrishnan *Brahman* is not merely featureless Absolute. It is all this world. Supra-cosmic transcendence and cosmic Universality are both real phases of the One Supreme. The Supra-cosmic silence and the cosmic integration are real. The two-*Nīrgūṇa* and *Sāgūṇa Brahman*, Absolute and God are not different.\(^{19}\)

### 4.2.3.3 The Conception of Personal God

Radhakrishnan recognises the significance attached to personal God in various religions. He is aware of the fact that a personal God is sought after by beings through prayer, song, meditation and worship. The theistic sects in Hinduism are no exception. Radhakrishnan attempts to incorporate the concepts of personal God in his view of the Supreme Being to satisfy the compulsions of the human spirit. One of the main defects of the Absolute Idealistic systems, pointed out by the pluralists in the West was that the conception of the personal God became a non-entity and he was subordinated to the Absolute. Radhakrishnan wanted true Absolutistic Philosophy to give an equal status for the personal God with the Absolute. He brings out the significance of the personal God as an aspect of the Supreme in order to retain the values realisable by the human spirit.

The notion of God with a distinct personality and the conception of *Avatars* (God-men) have been human tendencies which look upon the Supreme
in these forms. Hence Radhakrishnan says that the absolute is a living reality with a creative urge. The absolute becomes a personal God, when the aspect of creative urge is stressed. *Brahman* is the transpersonal God and *Isvara* is the personal God. God is the source of all values.\(^{20}\)

### 4.2.3.3.1 Incarnation of God (Avatara)

It has already been pointed out that theism arises out of the compulsions of the human spirit. Many feel the need of human intermediary such as Saviour or Guru, or an incarnation (Avatara) or a prophet. Different human beings seek the help of God in different forms according to their needs, necessities and compulsions, as expressed in their cultural patterns. Some sought after a prophet as a human intermediary to approach the Divine Being. Moses and Mohammed are some examples. Some wanted God to be of human form and they developed Avatars or incarnations of God through whom worship could be offered to God. Krishna, Rama, Buddha and Jesus are examples. Some others found a living teacher, a Guru who could guide them in their approaches to God through meditation and contemplation especially the techniques of yoga to attain highest perfection.

In many religions, we have notion of Avatars (Descent of God in Human form). Rama, the son of Dasaratha of history on whom sages meditate in devotion is considered as an Avatara or an incarnation of God. In the *Bhagavadgita*, Lord Krishna, son of Devaki, is considered as the incarnation of the supreme God. The Hindu tradition believes in incarnation of God who assume human and other forms from time to time. According to
Radhakrishnan, Jesus of history is represented as an incarnation of the Supreme, having assumed human form to save mankind.

In the East as well as in the West the God-man is considered as incarnations of the supreme. Rama, Budha and Jesus have all been treated as incarnations of the supreme. In christianity the historical Jesus was elevated into 'Glorious Christ' and the Budha became more than a human being and he was worshipped as Lord and Saviour.

4.2.3.3.2 Identification of Historical Individual with the Supreme God

Radhakrishnan believes that the so called Avatars or incarnations of God were only ordinary men, historical individuals, who were later glorified and identified with the Supreme being through their spiritual potentials shown to the world in their activities. In his view, an incarnation is a demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity. It is more an exaltation of the human nature to the level of God-head rather than a descent of the divine being through contraction.

God is never born in the ordinary sense. Process of birth and incarnation which imply limitation do not apply to Him. When the Lord is said to manifest Himself at a particular time on a particular occasion, it only means that it takes place with reference to a finite being. When any finite individual develops spiritual and solid upheaval we say that God is born for the protection of the kingdom of righteousness. According to Radhakrishnan the Avatara is the demonstration of man's spiritual resources and latent divinity.
It is not so much the contraction of divine majesty into the limits of the human frame, as the exaltation of human nature to the level of God head by its union with the Divine.\textsuperscript{24} He further observes that the incarnation of Krishna is not so much the conversion of God head into flesh as the taking up of manhood into God. He (Jesus is a man become God rather than God become man.\textsuperscript{25}

4.2.3.4 Divine Personality - A symbol or Reality

In the history of religion we find notions of God with a personality. Most of the religions conceived God as a person, with essential and relative attributes constituting his personality. In the Western Philosophical tradition few Absolute Idealists have identified God with Absolute and others like Bradley drew a distinction between the two. In the Eastern tradition Brahman and Isvara were identified in some of the Upanisads and conceived as separate in the others. While Ramanuja identified Brahman with Isvara, some of the personal idealists in the Western tradition conceived God as a finite personality with limited powers. And some even considered Him as a co-worker of the finite individuals, ascribing him the function to assist finite individuals in their efforts to eradicate evil from the world. Having realized the significance of a personal God in all the religions and in Idealistic and pluralistic Systems, Radhakrishnan attempted to accord due place to God in his system of thought.

According to Radhakrishnan personal God is the source, guide and destiny of the world. The representation of the supreme spirit in the form of a personal God seems to be the highest open to the logical mind. The difference
between the supreme as spirit and supreme as person is not of essence but only of standpoint.²⁶

Radhakrishnan makes his idea more clear when he says that the real is beyond all conceptions of personality and impersonality. We call it the Absolute, to show our sense of 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.²⁷

According to Radhakrishnan, personality of God is a symbol of the Absolute. If we fail to recognize this symbolic character, it is likely to keep us away from truth. Those of us who regard personality as the ultimate category of the universe, recognize the ultimacy, mysterious and mighty character of God.

As human beings, we cannot conceive the Supreme Spirit except in terms of our personality. Radhakrishnan points out that while personality of God arises out of the compulsions of the human heart we should admit that personality of God is only a symbol which is inadequate to represent fully the Reality, it being too large and too complex for us to grasp entirely. When we trace the history of religion, we find that human beings have attempted to worship the Infinite in so many ways for satisfying their spiritual thirst. The primitive men worshipped the river, the snake, the thunder, the tree and the mountains as the representations of the Infinite which they could not see or feel.
He says: "With the dawn of civilizations man developed his idea of God as the representation of the Supreme which happens to be a subtle and refined symbol of the Infinite".28

Even this Highest Idea of God in Radhakrishnan's view, is only a symbol of the Supreme, a suggestion of the Ineffable. There are different types of worship of Gods, Goddesses and there are monotheists and polytheists. There are idol worshippers and those who worship the cosmic forces. There are those who worship mythological representations and those who worship an abstract God which is spirit and truth. Radhakrishnan says that monotheists find fault with polytheists that their Gods and Goddesses are only mythological representations of God and are only symbolic, without admitting that the Supreme being and only God whom they worship is also a symbol at bottom. All religions in his view are symbolic and symbolism can never be excluded from religion till it finally vanishes. To Radhakrishnan, God is a symbol in which religion cognizes the Absolute.29

Philosophers view God as a symbol of the Supreme being which is abstract, but the man of religion finds it extremely difficult to accept the view that the God whom he worships is only a symbol, for him, it is a living revelation of the supreme being but not an imagination, dream or shadow. The Vedic Aryans and the Zoroastrians looked upon 'fire' as the symbol of the Supreme. Radhakrishnan says that, "The truth, embedded in the different religious traditions, have not been created but clothed in language and symbols for they are of those who cannot find it by themselves. In other words, the symbols are pointers to the way of spiritual realization".30
In some places Radhakrishnan refers to the disputes between philosophers and devotees over the distinction between the Absolute and God stating that the former which is the Reality, demonstrated by reason, is different from the latter, the Holy one who is worshipped. According to him the two are felt as one in religious consciousness.\textsuperscript{31}

The devotional idea of personal God who arouses religious emotion in us and the philosophical idea of God as an all embracing one are not fundamentally opposed to each other. To fulfil the human needs, the conception of personal God develops the aspect of spiritual experience.

4.2.3.5 God is Organic to the World

Out of infinite possibilities in the Absolute, the existing world has been actualized at its free will. God the creator is immanent in the world and also transcendent to it. When he emphasises the immanental aspect of God, sometimes Radhakrishnan refers to ‘Hiranyakarbhā’, the world-spirit or soul who is intimately related with creative evolution of the world, in its plan, process, perfection till the end. It is in this immanant aspect God is organically related with the world as life Force. Radhakrishnan remarks: "The personality of God is possible only with reference to a world with its imperfections and capacity for progress. In other words, the being of a personal God is dependent on the existence of a created order. God depends on creation even as creation depends on God".\textsuperscript{32}
Though immanent, God is not identified with the world until God as a person, is deeply concerned in the affairs of the world. He is the friend, judge and the Redeemer of mankind. God is the Absolute Spirit, timeless and unchanging from the cosmic or human end. He is the way through which Absolute works in the cosmic process.
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