

A Study on Philosophy of Religion by S.Radhakrishnan**Mr. Gurjeet Singh ¹**¹University College of Basic Science & Humanities¹Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo**Abstract**

Dr. Radhakrishnan is widely acknowledged as one of the most prominent and influential religious philosopher of the modern world. Contemporary Indian philosophy is greatly indebted to him for his contribution of immense scholarly works in the field of religious philosophy. Radhakrishnan's determination to defend Indian philosophy and the Vednātic system in particular, provided his work with a coherence and forcefulness. He was one of the most intriguing philosophers, who deeply interested in religion in a period of time when there was markedly decline of intrinsic significance of traditional religious belief for the modern society. In this paper I will try to explore certain basic ideas involves in Radhakrishnan's Philosophy of religion

Key words: *Vedantic, Monistic, Religion, Society.*

Introduction:

The twentieth century Indian philosophy takes an all-comprehensive view of life and existence. It takes full account of the empirical and the spiritual existence of man. Dr. Radhakrishnan is widely acknowledged as one of the most prominent and influential religious philosopher of the modern world. Contemporary Indian philosophy is greatly indebted to him for his contribution of immense scholarly works in the field of religious philosophy. Radhakrishnan's determination to defend Indian philosophy and the Vednātic system in particular, provided his work with a coherence and forcefulness. He was one of the most intriguing philosophers, who deeply interested in religion in a period of time when there was markedly decline of intrinsic significance of traditional religious belief for the modern society. In this paper I will try to find out certain basic ideas involves in Radhakrishnan's conception of religion.

Influences that shape Religious Idea of Radhakrishnan:

His basic philosophical position is an outcome of synthesis between the eastern and western traditions. He synthesizes Advaita Vedanta especially of Śaṅkara and Absolute idealism of the west. He brings out monastic character of the Vednātic reality and combines it with some of the important aspects of absolute idealism. The spirit of Radhakrishnan's philosophy consists fundamentally in the attitude of synthesis or the concept of organic unity. As Charles A. Moore observed "His basic approach to philosophy is the recognition of and demand for organic unity of the universe and its many aspects of the many sides of the nature of man, of man and universe, of the finite and the infinite, the human and the Divine"¹(Charles,282). Hence he provides an interpretation of the philosophy which does justice to intuition and reason, philosophy and religion and this world and the other world. So it is clear that he provides inevitably a synthesis of the old and the new and of the east and the west in order to construct a philosophy of religion based on absolute idealism of Indian origin.

. He says " I studied the classics of Hinduism, the Upanishads , *Bhāgavad-Gītā* , and the commentaries on Brahma- *Sūtra* by the chief *Acharyas*, *Śaṅkara*, *Rāmānuja*, *Madhva* and

Nimbārka and others, the dialogues of *Buddha* as well as the scholastic works of Buddhism and Jainism. Among the western thinkers, the writings of Plato, Plotinus and Kant and those of Bradley and Bergson influence me a great deal. My relation with my great Indian contemporaries, Tagore and Gandhi were most friendly for nearly thirty years, and I realize the tremendous significance they had for me.² Thus, Radhakrishnan has two ancestral lines in theology, one in India, the other in the west³ (Urumpackal,2) from which he develops his idea of religion.

Metaphysical basis of Radhakrishnan's conception of religion:

S. Radhakrishnan located his metaphysical basis of religion within the Advaita (non-dual) *Vedānta* tradition. Like other *Vedāntins*, he wrote commentaries on the *Prasthānatrayas* (main text books of Vedānta): the Upanishad (1953) *Brahma Sūtra* (1954) and *Bhāgavad-Gītā* (1948). As an *Advaitin*, Radhakrishnan embraces a metaphysical idealism which recognized the reality and diversity of the world of experience (*prakṛti*), while at the same time preserving the notion of a wholly transcendent absolute Brahman that is identical to the self (*Ātman*). Brahman is the source of the world and its manifestation, but those modes do not affect the integrity of Brahman.

As an idealist, Radhakrishnan believed that the natural outcome of a neutral and unprejudiced philosophy can only be monistic idealism. "The ultimate oneness of things is what the Hindu is required to remember every moment of his life."⁴ This monistic belief of Radhakrishnan can be seen in all his published work. It is from this monistic idealism that Radhakrishnan begins his religious quest to arrived at "Religious idealism"⁵

Basic characteristics of Radhakrishnan's idea of Philosophy of Religion are:

1. Perennial religion
2. Spirituality-essence of religion
3. Societal aspect
4. Evolutionary or Dynamism
5. Science and religion
6. Humanism
7. Religious experience

1. Perennial religion:

The Perennial philosophy is the philosophical concept, which states that each of the world's religious tradition shares a single truth. It asserts that there is a single divine foundation of all religious knowledge referred to as universal truth. Therefore perennial philosophy maintains that each world religion has flourished from the foundation of the same universal reality.

Religious philosophy of S. Radhakrishnan is a landmark in the history of philosophy of religion since he has given a panorama of central core of religion, apart from giving a authoritarian as well as institutional interpretation of religion. According to Radhakrishnan if we survey the historical view of different religions we will be able to obtain a more comprehensive vision and understanding of the spiritual truth. This spiritual unchanging substance of religion is the evolution of man's consciousness. Radhakrishnan regarding the

history of religion he categorically admitted that a true religion is a perennial wisdom, it is eternal behind all religions that is “*Sanatan Dharma*”; a timeless tradition of human race.

2. Essence of religion: spirituality

According to Radhakrishnan it is not easy to find out an exact definition of religion. He basically emphasizes the universal aspect of religion. Influenced by absolutism and theism of Śaṅkara and Rāmānuja respectively and absolute idealism of Bradley and creative Evolution of Bergson, Radhakrishnan asserts that spirituality is the essence of religion. Of course spirituality is also the essence of Indian tradition. According to Radhakrishnan in essence religion is the attempt of man to express his notion about perfect being, a perfect world, and a means by which we can have the experience of God. Radhakrishnan says “Religion is not creed or a code but an insight into reality.”⁶ This insight will reveal that man is always confronted with something greater than himself which is somehow immanent in man himself. This absolute reality which is immanent as well as transcendent universally present in every man, which is the secret ground of human soul, can form the bridge between finite and infinite; insight into this reality as well as truth is the essence of religion.

3. Societal aspect:

Religion has a double dimension, inner and external. The inner is the God and outward is the service to fellow men.. The inner feelings of immediate experience of God are bound to issue in the service humanity. Radhakrishnan says “ we affirm in loud tones that the service of man is the worship of God...no temples should be raised in the country which permit social discrimination. Temple should foster social discipline and solidarity.”⁷

Like many modern thinkers Radhakrishnan’s approach to religion has also a very strong social aspect.. He admits that religious sanction seems to be more effective for keeping man loyal and law abiding than any other technique such as prison and police. Radhakrishnan says “Religion is the device to give an emotional stimulus to the socially beneficent activities.”⁸ He says “our sense of God is due to the pressure of society on us. An unapprehended God is invoked in support of current ethics.”⁹ In other words God is the product of society. As Hick observed “The encompassing human group exercises the attribute of Deity in relation to its members and give rise in their mind to the idea of God , which is thus, in effect, a symbol for society.”¹⁰ Thus Radhakrishnan maintains that religion is an integral element of a society and it represents the whole aspect of human being. According to him religion summons us to discharge the duties and responsibilities of society. He remarks “Religion is social cement, a way in which man express their aspiration and find solace for their frustration.”¹¹

4. Dynamism:

According to Radhakrishnan the aim of religion is identification with the current of life and participation in its creative advance. Religion is a dynamic process, renewed effort of the creative impulse, seeking to uplift mankind to a new level. Every religion according to Radhakrishnan “is passing through self analysis and self criticism and is developing into a form which is sympatric to other religions”.¹²

Radhakrishnan’s exposition of religion brings out dynamism as the very nature of religion. According to him religion has the capacity to adjust with the changes taking place around society. He says “If religion is to continue to have their original appeal, they must

adapt themselves to the needs of the time. For religion there is no such thing as standing still. Stagnation is bound to overtake a religion, unless it is alive to the changes taking places around it".¹³ Regarding the progressive nature of religion Radhakrishnan observes, "if religion is not dynamic and progressive, if it does not penetrate every form of human life and influence every type of human activity, it is only a veneer and not a reality".¹⁴ Thus it is observed, according to Radhakrishnan, true religion should undergo a radical transformation for the needs of the time. Hence, Religion is a progressive concept it grows to meet the challenges of the world. As Radhakrishnan says, "this process of growth is securing for our civilization, a synthesis on the highest level of the forces of religion and culture and enabling their followers to co-operate as members of one great fellowship".¹⁵

5.Science and Religion:

It is generally observed that at the dawn of civilization, religion, science, art, morality was found intermingled together. The conflict between science and religion is due to historical circumstances.¹⁶ According to Radhakrishnan it is untrue to belief that there is an opposition between science and religion. Emile Durkheim in his book "Elementary Forms of Religious Life" promoted the idea that religion and science are similar. In Durkheim's thought religion and science were closely linked. Religion evolved first, and then science split from it. Radhakrishnan admits that there is a common platform regarding the origination of religion and science. As he observed, "Both in India and the west, science and religion had a common origin. The Seers and scientist were the same for the Vedic Asrama and in the Pythagorean brother wood".¹⁷ He holds that science which is known as 'Natural philosophy' and its history is an essential part of the spiritual history of mankind... The spirit of science leads to the refinement of religion. s. Radhakrishnan says, "science will triumph over ignorance and superstition, and religion over selfishness and fear, and nation will come together to build a great future for humanity, the brotherhood of which has been the vision of the prophets since the beginning of time".¹⁸ So it is observed in the light of Radhakrishnan's religious philosophy that science and religion are complementary to each other.

6.Religion and Humanism:

. Radhakrishnan in developing his idea of religion was quite inspired by the traditional as well as contemporary Indian thought on the one hand and on the other by the western rational thinking. According to Radhakrishnan humanism is confessedly rationalistic, and ignores elements in life which cannot be deal within an intellectual term. But the higher will in man becomes identified with the spirit in man. Without the recognition of such a spiritual centre, which helps us to coordinate the variety of unlike elements which help human nature to unite people of the world . So he says, "we cannot apply a mere mechanical rule, we must develop a living adjustment, a sure taste in any concrete case".¹⁹

Thus, Radhakrishnan was not in a position to accept humanism as substitute for religion. In Radhakrishnan's view humanism lacks that indefinable touch, that *élan* of religion which alone can produce that majestic faith, whose creativity is inexhaustible, whose hope is deathless and whose adventures are magnificent.

7. Religious experience:

. Religious traditions of the world admit that we can apprehend the eternal being with directness and immediacy. According to Radhakrishnan religious experience is as old as our smiling and weeping, loving and forgiving;

According to Radhakrishnan religion is essentially an experience of living contact with ultimate reality. It is an apprehension of something that stands over against the individual. Reality of God cannot be proved in the manner as we proved the existence of a table or chair. He holds that God is not like the other object of the world, it is a spirit. He says, "Spirit is life, not things, energy, not immobility, something real in itself and by itself, and cannot be compared to any substance subjective or objective. The Divine is manifested in spiritual life or in experience. It is given to us in life and not established by ratiocination"²⁰

According to Radhakrishnan there is an ancient and widespread tradition that we can apprehend the supreme reality with directness and immediacy. According to Radhakrishnan, religious experience is unique and autonomous; it cannot be identified with other manifestation of spiritual activity such as scientific genius, artistic creation or moral heroism. It satisfies every side of our being. As Radhakrishnan observes, "in it the mind becomes irradiated with the divine light and obstinate questions of reason find an answer. The will loses its irresoluteness as it becomes one with the Divine will. Spiritual genius's possesses the highest that man can possess, constant contact with the creative principle of which life is the manifestation, coincidence with the divine will, serene calm, inward peace which no persecution can dismay".²¹ He admits that religious experience is not mere "consciousness of value" (as Kant has said) nor it is a "form of knowledge" (as Kant has said), Enriched with Indian tradition he maintains that in religious experience there is a mystical element, an apprehension of the real and an enjoyment for its own sake.

Radhakrishnan idea of God:

S. Radhakrishnan's views on religion reflects that he based his idea of God on vedantic tradition of Indian philosophy.. According to him, the supreme reality is apprehended in a two-fold way, as personal and impersonal. The personal aspect is known as God whereas impersonal aspect is known as Absolute. In the early prose of Upanisads, *ātmanis* the principle of the individual consciousness and Brahman the super personal ground of the cosmos. Radhakrishnan explains that the different between the supreme as spirit and the supreme as person is one of the standpoint and not of essences. 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 distinction between Brahman in itself and Brahman in the universe, the transcendent beyond manifestation and transcendent in manifestation, the indeterminate and determinate, *nirgunaguni*, is not exclusive. The two are like two sides of one reality. So according to Radhakrishnan, Absolute and God are two different standpoint of the same reality.

He further says "We call the supreme the Absolute, when we view it apart from the cosmos, God in relation to the cosmos. The Absolute is the pre-cosmic nature of God, and God is the Absolute from the cosmic point of view"²². While the Absolute is the transcendent divine, God is the cosmic divine. Thus, Radhakrishnan clarifies the distinction further by

saying that God is the truth of our intellect and the Absolute for our intuition and does not make God merely a principle of unreal creation as Sankara does.

Conclusion:

On the basis of observation of religious philosophy of S. Radhakrishnan, it may be said that, religion embraces whole aspect of human life and the world. Radhakrishnan based his conception of religion on monistic idealism of Indian vedantic tradition. His approach to religion is synthetic in nature. His thoughts are the harmonizing force in the world of religion. His synthetic approach to religion is meant to achieve harmony between the old and new, between wisdom of the ages and the forces of rationality, science, progress etc. So, Radhakrishnan did a very excellent job by presenting Indian treasure of wisdom in contemporary terms to the cause of inter-religious and intercultural understanding. Thus, the spirit of Radhakrishnan's religious philosophy consists fundamentally in the attitude of synthesis or the concept of organic unity which has intrinsic value in interreligious dialogue of present society. With a profound grasp of the modern situation, especially in religion, Radhakrishnan greatly emphasized the importance of spiritual value in comparative religion, which is the most relevant to the present context of encounter between religions and cultures.

Radhakrishnan talks about the ideals of establishment of a world community based on the universal moral order. True religion will bring people of the world close to one another. Religion, is commitment to a kind or quality of life that purports to recognize a source beyond itself which conserve the value of life and society. A socio-political system based on the philosophy of spirit is an open system in the sense that it derives its force from a reality which is not exhausted by revealing itself in spacio- temporal texture. Such a philosophy has got unbounded relevance today for the contemporary society.

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