



# LOGICAL METHODOLOGY FOR “REFUTING” IN VEDANTA PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITION

## - A study based on the “*Avirodha* chapter” of Brahma Sutra

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### Abstract

Brahma Sutra is the first ever treatise to have determined the trend of the history of Vedantic philosophy. This treatise, supposed to have been created by Padanarayana during the second century B.C., contains four chapters viz: Samanvayam, Avirodham, Sadhana and Phala. An unwritten rule followed in the world of Vedantic philosophy was that, for a person to be acknowledged as a philosopher, one has to possess the qualification of having written a commentary on Brahmasutra. This testifies the importance of Brahmasutra. Philosophy evolves on the basis of intelligent researches, and the ideologies are reached through them. It is infact an ardent search for truth. The ideologies which one philosopher tries to establish as true, may appear unacceptable to another. Thus, (1) The intelligent refutation of ideas that may appear wrong and (2) Logically establishing what has been realized as truth- are two approaches notable among all Indian philosophies. Several names such as *Nigrasthana*, *Paroksha*, and *Avirodhassthana* are in vogue to indicate the intelligent denial of other philosophical concepts that are contrary to one’s own. The key to such methodology in Vedantic philosophical tradition is the Brahma Sutra chapter on ‘Avirodha’. The fame of any philosophical concept is largely established not only by achieving one’s own ideologies, but also by logically refuting those of their opponents. In this regard it could be seen that the Avirodha chapter of Brahmasutra denies the Samkhya and Vaisheika philosophical thoughts which try to establish the reality and existence of the universe through Parinamavada and atomism. The *Jeeva-Deha* theory of Jainism is also similarly denied. Thereby the advaita philosophical concepts such as *Kanavulaka—vada and Ekanmavada*.... are upheld. Even ‘*Ganabhangavada*’ which forms the basic arguments of Buddhist philosophical sects is denied through the Avirodha chapter. Besides, the ideologies of the Yogacara and Sunyavada schools of thought are refuted by the Avirodha chapter in a subtle way. Apart from these, there are also some other philosophical sectors that are rejected by the Avirodha chapter. However this article doesn’t take such schools into account.

**Key words:** Avirodha, Brahma Sutra, Vedanta

## **Introduction:**

Brahma Sutra is one of the three most important treatises regarded as 'Prastanatraya' in Indian philosophical tradition. It is also known as 'Saririka sutra' because it encompasses concepts on 'Brahmam' while dealing with the nature of the soul that resides within the body. As it discusses the various researches into the Upanishads about a Supreme God, it is also referred to as 'UttaramimamsakaSutra'. While at the same time it is also called, "Bhiksa sutra" because it concludes that one's final aim should be towards asceticism. This text was composed by Padarayana. (Radhakrishnan,S.,1991:430)

Brahma Sutra contains five hundred and fifty five sutras which are included into four chapters, viz: Samavayam Avirodham, Sadhanam and Phalan. Each of these forms four parts and the sutras in each part are made up of 192 adhikaranas. Samanvaya means harmony. The vision of this chapter is to harmonize some discrepancies in upanishadic thoughts and establish some basic philosophical commonalities in the traditional meanings of upanishads.

Identifying the beneficial thoughts, which are contradictory to the concepts structured under samavaya, refuting them logically and establishing their own ideas are the efforts made in the second chapter i.e 'Avirodha'

The third chapter "Sadhanam" is devoted to the discussion of the nature of life, temporal shortcomings and the ways to be freed from such shortcomings and attain supreme knowledge. The last chapter "Phalan" deals with such matters like the state attained after one's death and Eschatology. This chapter contains notes also regarding the benefits accruing to one who is blessed with supreme knowledge.

"Brahma Sutra is composed of sutras, which are brief and substantial. For anyone aspiring to establish himself as a Hindu philosopher, it becomes indispensable to comment on Brahmasutra. The list of such philosophers including AdiSankara, Yadhavaprakasa, Ramanuja, Kesava, Neelakanda, Madhvacharya, Baladeva, Vallabha and Vijñanabhikṣa keeps on lengthening.

## **The period of Brahma Sutra:**

There is no clear evidence with regard to the period during which Brahma Sutra was composed. The names of epical heroes like Rama and Krishna do not appear in Brahma Sutra. This has led to the opinion among scholars, that Brahma Sutra is anterior to the composition of the epics. It is worth noticing that, even Maxmuller claims Brahma Sutra to be definitely anterior to the period of the Bhagavadgita. (Radhakrishnan,S.,1991:433)

Pointing out to the references to Brahma Sutra in such treatises like Manusmṛti and Padmapurana, Hopkins says that Brahma Sutra precedes 200 A.D.

However, Frazer opines that the period of Brahma Sutra was prior to 400 B.C. Professor S, Dasgupta also feels that Brahma Sutra could have appeared during the second century B.C. Hence it would be apt to take the period of Brahma Sutra as falling somewhere between the second century B.C and the second century A..D.(Dasgupta,S.,1992:418)

### **The purpose of this research:**

The essential dimensions of a research study include the logical establishment of the ideas upheld by the researcher, while refuting controversial facts on justifiable grounds.

How these trends flourished, can very well be observed in the history of Hindu philosophy, beginning with the Bhasyas produced by Adisankara and extending up to the *Parpakkam* and *Sankatpanirakaranam* of Sivagnana Siddhiyar. The Avirodha chapter of Brahma Sutra may be regarded as the first ever step in this trend. Thus, the purpose of this article is to minutely study how the *Avirodha chapter* logically refutes those beneficial thoughts, which are however contrary to the philosophical policies that Brahma Sutra wanted to establish?

In any case, since Brahma Sutra has to be studied with the help of commentaries, the positions taken by the commentators may lead to some advancement in the evaluation of the true situation of the Brahma Sutra.

### **Avirodha chapter:**

Avirodha is the second chapter of Brahma Sutra. The basic aim of this chapter is to logically refute those philosophical views in the first chapter of Brahma Sutra, conclusively declaring that Brahma is the fundamental cause for the existence of the Universe.

Likewise, the chapter on *Avirodha* refutes even those other concepts such as Samkya, Yoga, Vaishesika, Jain, the Buddhist philosophical branches of Sunyavada and Vijnnavada as well as the Pasupada Saiva and Pancharatra concept, all of which conceptually differ from the basic philosophical trend of Avirodha. In Hindu philosophical traditions, right from the discussions of Adi Samkara up to *Parapakka* of *Meikanda Santana* tradition, it is the Avirodha chapter of Brahma Sutra that forms the basic element of philosophical disputes on the bases of refuting refusals and establishing what is refuted.(Sivananda:2008),

### Refutation on Samkhya:

According to the policy of Samkhyas, Prakrti is basic to the evolution and the dimensions of universal phenomena. The Universe appears from out of Prakrti and later its dissolution also takes place within Prakrti. The stand taken by the Samkya School is that prakrti formed out of the three gunas viz: tamas, rajas, and sattva, evolves as a result of the disturbances in their equal distribution. Here the supreme power is not the cause for prakrti to evolve as the universal phenomenon. Such a theory of Prakrti evolution as proposed by Samkhya is rejected by Brahma Sutra.

“Rachananupapattescha na numanam”(Brahma Sutra:II.2.1)

In the above sutra, the Brahma Sutra indicates that just as a piece of wooden plank cannot by itself make a chair without a carpenter, even so without the act of a supreme power a universe cannot evolve.

Further, the Brahma Sutra also refutes the argument that the evolution of the universe is analogous to the natural event of grass becoming milk in a cow. Brahma Sutra rejects this on the ground that the same grass is not converted to milk in a bull!

In addition, Brahma Sutra also quotes the following Brhadaranya Upanishadic saying, in support of its rejection. “Milk becoming curd and rain water becoming young coconut are not changes that occur by themselves. Such changes are caused by a great internal knowledge. It further stresses that, remaining unseen in such matters like water; it is the supreme power that acts towards their dimensional variations (Brahma Sutra:II.2.2).

Here it is worth noticing that Padarayana who rejected *Prakrtiparinamavada* with the help of hypothetical evolution in sutra 2.2.1, has made use of *aptavakyapramana* and refuted it.

Besides, Brahma Sutra has criticized the stand taken by Samkhyas on the role of of the universe, through the analogy of the relationship between purusa and prakrti, with that of the lame and the blind persons.

This sutra needs a little deeper attention

“Purushasmavaditi chet tathapi” (Brahma Sutra: II.2.7)

The Purusa referred to by Samkhyas is a permanent entity like prakrti. It is in its very presence that prakrti evolves (purusaSannidhi). In this connection samkhyas place forward two illustrations. The first of these is where the blind man (prakrti) walks with the assistance of the lame man (purusa) who has the ability to see

things around. The second illustration is that of iron molecules (prakrti) moving before a magnet (purusa). In both instances the communication of knowledge (i.e orally between the lame and the blind persons) and the gravitational pull via inducement, functions as the cause for the activity to take place. But according to the view of Samkyas, purusa is an inactive, senseless and non-changing entity. Hence, Padarayana argues that it is not befitting to explain the role of purusa in Prakrti evolution through such illustrations..

Besides, from where did the inanimate Prakrti gain the knowledge and ability to disturb the equilibrium of the three gunas, change their percentages and create the evolution of the universe?

“Anyatrabhavaccha na trinadivat” (Brahmasutra:II.2.5)

Padarayana, who raises the above question, further asks in the next sutra “ Even if such an evolution were to take place, of what use is it?”

“Abhyupagame’pyarthabhavat (Brahma Sutra:II.2.6)

Pointing out that Purusa has no change in it, and that it has no need for any direct or interim relation with Prakrti, Padarayana raises further queries such as what is the need for the evolution of this universe and for whom is this creation?

Thus, Brahma Sutra refutes the *Parinamavada* of Samkhyas on the grounds of causal relations and by pointing out the inner contradictions as well as by raising questions over the purposes behind the creation of the universe.

### **Refutation on Vaisesika:**

Vaisesika is of the opinion that atoms are the cause for the evolution of the universe. They call the indivisible, minute, single unit as paramanu. The conjunction of two paramanus leads to the formation of dyad (Double atom – dvyanu) . Atoms become visible only when three of them join to form a triad. According to the theory of Vaisesika, the conjunction of atoms occurs by chance and by luck.

In his sutra beginning with “Ubhayathapi na karmatastadabhavah”

(Brahmasutra :II.2.12)

Padarayana disagrees with the notion that Paramanus join in dyads. Vaisesikas handle, the word with the meaning ‘unseen’ or ‘invisible’. Padarayana refutes this with the question “where did this by chance entity remain?”

Further, the Vaisesika maintains that the relation between atom and matter is eternal and it is some kind of “Samavaya’ relationship.

The Sutra reading "Samavaya bhyupagamacchasamyadana vasthiteh" (Brahma Sutra: II.2.13), logically illustrates the shortcoming (defect) found in Samavaya relationship. Vaisetikas hold that the relation between thread and cloth; and the relation between clay and pot are inseparable. If it is so, there is no cloth without thread and no pot without clay! Then, the contrary to this also must be true! No thread without cloth, no loom without thread and there cannot be any weaving without weavers! Thus it will only lead to an infinite regression. Besides, if the relation between atom and substance is eternal, paramanus should be indestructible. So, anything formed by the conglomeration of atoms should be eternal! In that case, is the universe an eternal entity? Does it remain forever? Such are the arguments put forward by Padarayana.

"Nityameva cha bhavat (Brahma Sutra:II.2.14 )

Furthermore, the Sutra reading,

"Mahaddirghavadvahasvapariandalabhyam" (Brahma Sutra:II.2.11)" refutes also the Vaisesika notion that universe evolves by the conglomeration of atoms in dyads and triads.

Another argument through which Brahma Sutra refutes Vaisesika is that whereas the Vaisesikas hold that Paramanus are dimensionless; whether they conjoin in dyads or triads, they all have to be dimensionless! Thus while rejecting the claim that the conglomeration of paramanus led to universal phenomena, Brahma Sutra also refutes the atomic theory of Vaisesika logically pointing out to the controversies related to Samavaya.

### **Refutation on Jain:**

According to the Jain philosophical concept the soul is of the same (size) extent as the body.(Hiriyanna,M.,2005:61)

This concept has been heavily criticized by Brahma Sutra.

"Evam chatmakartsnyam"(Brahma Sutra :II.2.34)

To say that soul is of the same extent as the body leads it to the blame of being incomplete. A soul born as an ant in one birth if it were to be reborn as an elephant in the next, it is liable to face the blame of being unwholesome. If the soul were to have the qualities of being small or big, it gets blemished with the characteristics of changeability and destructibility.

"Na cha paryayadapyavirodho vikaradibhyah"

(Brahma Sutra: II.2.35)

After its final liberation the soul doesn't enter another body. As such only the dimension the soul gets at that final stage of liberation can be its natural dimension. Therefore, to consider that a soul has the same dimension as of the body is not agreeable.

“Antyavasthiteschobhayanityatvadavisesah”(Brahma Sutra :II.2.36)

### Refutation on Buddhist Concepts:

The four Buddhist philosophical divisions viz : Soundrantika, Vaipadika, Yogachara and Madhyamika are all accepted by them on the basis of *Ksanabhangavada*, which holds that the substances in this universe keep on changing every other moment. Here change denotes the appearance of one from the destruction of another. These two activities proceed in an infinite regression. ‘Change is the only unchangeable entity in this world. |Hence there is nothing that could be called ‘Permanent’

The simple explanation to this is that the world and events happening in it, keep on changing every moment like a new current of water even before one could place the other leg forward. A fruit keeps on ripening every moment. A fruit seen at one moment is not the same as seen at the next moment

This type of *Ksanabhangavada* upheld by Buddhists is totally rejected by Brahma Sutra.

“Asati pratijnoparodho yaugapadyamanyatha”

(Brahma Sutra: II.2.21)

If matters appear without cause, they will be contrary to their (Buddhist) policies or both may emerge simultaneously.

The deep logic buried in the Brahma Sutra has to be necessarily understood. Assuming that a certain thing perishes at a particular moment through which mechanism it reappears at the same moment isn't the appearance of two (activities) things warranted at the same moment. For example the case of a pot may be taken up. The pot perishes according to *Ganabhangavada*. For that very reason another pot appears. The destruction and appearance must take place at the same time! In that case, shouldn't there be two pots at site including the one perishing and the one appearing? This is the subtlety embodied in Padarayana's question.

“Uttarotpade cha purvanirodhat” (Brahma Sutra: II.2.20)

If according to the *Ksanabhangavada* things are so transitory, then there exists the possibility even for total idlers to gain some benefit! “Udasinanamapi chaivam siddhih” (Brahma Sutra: II.2.27)

This can be understood through several illustrations such as the case of the contestor in an election, perishing away at the spur of the moment, while his victory is enjoyed by some other person. A person working hard for an examination dying whilst answering his papers while some other person enjoys its benefits.

The Yogacaras and Sunyavadins (known as madhyamikas) indicated as idealist in Buddhist philosophical schools, argue that the outer world and matters therein are unreal. Only thoughts realize substances. To put it the other way, thoughts are not different from substances. Thus, the general stand taken by both groups is that, there is no substantial universe as such.

#### **a)Yogacaras:**

From among them, Yogacaras are those who after minute analysis, maintain that only knowledge is truth. Knowledge is, but a continuation of thoughts, and that is all. There is nothing such as the knower or the known, when knowledge takes place, it is a result of past inner (mental) stimulations. Such stimulation is not related to any external entities. It is mind – born. Thus it leads to a beginning-less series of impressions stirred by successful experiences. Thus, since Yogacaras do not believe in anything beyond truth they are also known as Vijnanavadins. Yogacaras use the illustration of a 'dream state' to prove this concept. In other words, experience takes place in the dream even without the gross objects. The reason for this being the invariable association between thoughts and substances.

(Sharma,C.,A:2016:114)

Such concepts related to Yogacaras are totally rejected by Brahma sutra.

“Na bhavo'nupalabdheh”(Brahma Sutra:II.2.30)is a sutra that refutes Vijnanavada pointing out that it is wrong to hold that there is nothing beyond knowledge, because substances manifest through knowledge.

There has to be some communication between our sense organs and a substance, for us to know what that substance is. The substance must be there, before the occurrence of such communication. Thus, it is confirmed that a substance and the knowledge about it are not the same. Following the very trend of Yogacaras if one were to say that a substance and the knowledge about it, are entwined in such a way that they cannot be separately identified, the substance becomes true when the knowledge about it is true, because what is untrue cannot exist, and truth cannot exist in what is untrue. Thus, just in half a sloka, Brahma Sutra in a very subtle way refutes an argument that has been logically deep rooted in Yogacara Buddhism



### **b) The refutation onSunyavada:**

Like Yogacara, the Madhyamika (Sunyavada) sector is basically conceptional. However it slightly varies from it. What is matter? What is the nature of a pot which appears to be known to the knowledge? Is it a collection of parts or is it a whole? Such questions are difficult to answer because if a pot is a collection of parts, it has to be finally a collection of atoms!

A collection of invisible atoms should also be invisible to the eyes. If to the contrary, a pot is taken to be a whole without parts. it becomes a permanent object. Then the question about it becomes inevitable. Even if an object were to first exist and then dissolve, it gives rise to the controversy that being and not being, are found in the same object. As such the Madhyamikas forward their sunyavada to the effect that substances do not have natural (nisubhava) characteristics.

“Sarvathanupapattescha (Brahma Sutra :II.2.32.)

Brahmasutra refutes that Sunyavada is not acceptable in any form. If it is to be construed that not all things are void, it gives the idea that those things did exist in some other form. If there is no pot, it would mean that it is present in the form of clay! Besides if the void is to be felt through knowledge, will not that knowledge be true? Hence it is the stand of Brahma Sutra that Sunyavada cannot be accepted.

### **Conclusion:**

Thus the Avirodha chapter of Brahma Sutra by refuting the Prakrtiparinamavada of the Samkhyas and the Paramanukaranavada of Vaisheikas, denies the stand taken in such concepts about the existence of the universe, and tries to strengthen the view that the universe is just an appearance. Likewise, the “Jivadeha” concept of the Jains is also rejected, whereby the “Ekanmavada” of the Advaita School is established. upheld

*Kshanabhangavada* is the concept that is fundamental to all Buddhist philosophical sects. The Avirodha chapter which easily refutes this concept has also very minutely refuted the theories put forward by Buddhist philosophical sectors on the origin of the universe, such as Yogacara and Sunyavada. Both these Buddhist philosophical thoughts are ideological concepts like Vedanta.

Though Advaita Vedanta is by all means an ideological concept it has never approved Buddhist ideological thoughts. The stand taken by Avirodha chapter also provides suitable explanation to the criticism leveled against advaita and Adisamkara during later times. One must never forget that the victories (success) of Adisamkara during his visits to all directions, and the Vedantic roaring of Swami Vivekananda, were all achievements gained through the foundation laid in the Avirodha chapter.

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