SUPERIMPOSITION :
An Ontological Perspective

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The notion of contradication is well-known. To arrive at a contradiction we should have an explicit negation of a proposition alongwith it's i.e., the proposition's assertion. Negating a proposition need not be a simple affair at all. For there may be infinitely complex propositions whose negation might be equally immensely difficult. This is because of various 'relations', 'predicates', 'quantifiers' etc. that can occur in such propositions. Strictly speaking, a contradiction simply means that both the assertion and the negation of a proposition cannot be true simultaneously and either one has to be true and the other false simultaneously. Here then the formal structure alone matters.

But what is extremely important to note is that the assumed structure or even the basic notions (from which the structure is built)[1] could have no application at all to the real world. (All that we mean by the term 'real world' is the non-formal or material world as one conceives in his/her mind). The simplest thing to say would be 'No! There is an application of the formalism to the world, where, although the formalism rose on the real-world basis, yet its validity does not depand on the world, consequently, if the basic notions and/or structure is or are true then the derived consequence should also be true and should be applicable to the real world. But this kind of an understanding has two important drawbacks: First, the formal structure does not seem to grow. Or even if it grows the growth is pre-determined in a special sense. That is, it is dependent on the already existing idea of the-world. (This pre-determination would remain, even when the idea of real-world undergoes transformation, because the basic notions are viewed as permanent building blocks). And the

second drawback which is connected with the above is that although a pre-determination is grudgingly granted, yet in the name of validity a separation is caused between the two, that is the formal structure etc. on the one hand and the real world on the other. This results in a wholesale fixation of the 'world', without allowing for any change nor even allowing a possibilty of a change either, when in fact the world and its concept change constantly. We become prisoners of our own making.

When we view Indian Philosophy against this backdrop it strikes at once that Indian Philosophy has looked at the world without separating the logical formalism and ontology (and of course, the language and its ontology included). This however does not mean that formalisation within Indian Philosophy is impossible or that there has been no attempt at it by the classical authors. What is meant is that there could be a different set of basic notions and consequently a different structure may emerge out of a thorough study. Such a set of basic notions may be able to point out the direct relevance to, and consequence of, ontological entities when processed.

> " _____ Indian logic which is notably antiverbalist _____ studies the naturalistic syllogism in itself, as internal thought distinguishing it from the syllogism of others, that is to say from the more of less usual, but always extrinsic and accidental forms of communication and dispute, (Indian Logic) has not even a suspicion of the extravagant idea .... of a truth, (a truth) which is merely syllogistic and formalist and which may be false in fact .... (Indian Ligic) does not admit classes of categorical and hypothetical; affirmative and negative judgements. All these are extraneous to logic, whose object is the constant, 'knowledge considered in itself'[2].

Intuitively speaking, then, the formalism as applied to concerte situations makes us feel a little too unconfortable because of the absence of the reality-element in it.

In an attempt to incoroprate all the possible and desired ontological situations Czeslaw Legewski labours hard to give a logical language which is ontologically neutral. This need is felt by him as he anticipates a serious lacuna in the form of absence of a common platform i.e., an ontologically neutral language for the warring platonists of two different types.

Lejewski says -

"An ontologically neutral system of logic contains no existential theses. An ontologically neutral language is the language of an ontologically neutral logic..... Such a language makes it possible meaningfully to negate any existential proposition........" [3]

One may even succeed in devising a fine-tuned ontologically neutral language. But again such a language can at best be termed as a product of a fertile imagination and never reflecting the reality. It is said that the ontologist speaks of *what there is*. Logicians' theories do not imply existence of anything. But Lejewski seems to be perplexed at the end. This is clear from the following:

"(Further) .... The vocabulary of the theory of quantification with identity and classes .... (it would not be sufficient) for the purpose of the ontology as the theory of what there is, (because an) ontology will wish to make certain existential assumption concerning part of objects and totalities of objects,........ temporal and spatial characteristics......... work on theories of time is in progress while a theory of spatial characteristics of objects is likely to attract the attention of the logicians in the years to come. But is it correct to include all these theories within the scope of logic?........ (Lejewski says) there does not seem to be simple answer to this question". [4]

It is not only the case that the logicians cannot work in a vacuum but that they are inherently bound to the ontological entites, because the logician is ultimately answerable about his basic notions or categories. The ultimate acceptability and therefore validity of what he says is dependent on his basic notions.

In what follows we wish to state a position which holds that not only there are propositions which are false due to an inborn ontological commitment to existence which cannot be avoided at all; and what is purported to be said in such propositions cannot be said truthfully no matter what is the degree of ontological neutrality of the logic. Further we hint at a device attempted at by classical Indian Philosopher to show that each and every proposition is a contradiction due to its basic ontological commitment which is logically necessary, and which is minimal in nature.

II

Even if it is true that the object and the subject are opposed to each other, it can not be claimed that bringing the concept of them together in a propositiion results in a formal contradicition. If the bringing together of the concepts of the object and subject in a proposition is to be construed as a contradiction the minimal requirement is that the assumed logical opposition between them should be shown as entailing a contradiction by themselves or in conjunction with some other elements. Where the propositions of the form 'I am This', 'This is mine', or 'I have this' etc. are said to contain both the object and the subject (or their attributes etc. as the case may be), merely trying to look for some elements of logically simultaneous assertion and the denial of a thing, would not help us to locate the 'contradiction' that Śaṁkara wants to illustrate with the help of nacre-silver illusion, because the object and the subject are two different concepts having two different entities as their denotation-and entities cannot contradict each other; also because these are not logical entities, and the notion of contradiction belongs to the world of logic. Or we can simply say that the two concepts have some elements in them or the absence, which are logically repulsive to each other. Or yet there may be a totally hither to unknown item(s)-logical or ontological or semantic etc. in conjunction with the proposition containing the purported object and subject becomes contradictory. Thus whether or not the entities are the denotation of these two concepts, the concepts *per se* must be sufficiently elaborated.

Even if the concepts are elaborated in a discourse concerning ontological matter every contradiction can be explained off in terms of different levels or frames of interpretation, if the author of the discourse so wishes. This is made possible due to the very possibility of nonfixity of the referents on the one hand and/or the flux of physical time on other. To that extent, then, pressing for a contradiction as being committed, where none is or can be shown, can certainly be considered as dubious.

Therfore, to nail down a 'contradiction' it is not sufficient to work out problems in formal logic; the contradiction in order to be impossible to be interpreted differently, should be shown to reside in an ontological fact. This can be illustrated with the help of an interesting class of propositions dealing in some sense directly with the ontological matters. These propositions may be

called as self-refuting propositions or simply, self-refutations.

These propsitions, - for e.g., 'I am dumb'- when put in the mode of speech become self-refuting ones and are much stronger candidates to be termed as contradiction, because there is a sort of logical simultaneity which makes it impossible to interpret the proposition in the way a contradiction can be said to be interpreted off. In other words these propositions in some sense go beyond the meaning contained in them. That is, what makes them to be viewed as a self-refuting one is the contradiction derived from a conjuction between the meaning contained in the proposition *per se* and an actual occurrence of an event which is construed as being pitted against the literal meaning of the proposition. There is a logical simultaneity here, of an explicit asseration and implicit denial, (no psychological connotation is intended for the phrases an 'explicit assertion' and an 'implicit denial'). Simultaneity, here may be considered semantically as an occurence of an assertion at every point (of the duration of time in which the act/event of assertion occurs) and a corresponding denial at every point (of the dertion of time in which the act/event of assertion occurs) - or simply the literal meaning and the falsification of it taking place through an event of assertion, being understood as having occured simultaneously consequent upon the event of assertion. Since the denial is not a part of the proposition *per se*, and that the denial comes forth as an ontogical occurrence (or through it), this sort of contradiction partakes ontological elements.

However the self-refuting propositions also are not absolutely free from weaknesses. For e.g., they too have the weakness of interpretability in terms of levels/frames. For e.g., I use 'I am dumb' in a drama -- this has a symbolic significance. Nobody would seriously hold that since I used the proposition in speech I have committed a contradiction. Thus the weakness of interpretability in a symbolic context does not constitute a logically significant fact for our concern. The other weakness is that they (or at least some) can be stated in different modes of assertions without contraction at all. For e.g., I can write 'I am dumb' without the fear of a contradiction. However, these very weaknesses prevent the propositions from wholesale branding as absolutely self-refuting. Because they are self-refuting only under some conditions and not so under some other conditions.

If now, for e.g., presuming that a person is really dumb and also that

there is no other way or mode of assertion (in which the proposition 'I am dumb' is self-refuting), excepting the mode of assertion of speech being available, can we hold the truth of proposition of the form 'I am dumb'? The answer seems to be a 'Yes'; because a dumb person perhaps can conceive 'I am dumb' unto himself.[5] Here, then the mode of assertion is not an inter-subjective-communicative mode. Thus the very fact that 'I am dumb' can be subjectively conceived eliminates it from being qualified for an absolutely self-refuting proposition. Therefore where a proposition is self-refuted in every conceivable mode of assertion and also being false when one tries to conceive it subjectively, whether or not it is self-refuting in a metaphorical sense, the propostion may be said to be absolutely self-refuting.

What makes a proposition absolutely self-refuting? The simplest explanation seems to be that: the making of a proposition (i.e., asserting a proposition in any mode such as writing, speech etc.) gives rise to a conflict between the meaning sought to be conveyed and at least one ontological fact, both of which occur simultaneously. One of these may not necessarily be understood immediately. But as and when understood, they would be understood to have occurred simultaneously. Take for example; 'All our assertions are false' itself is considered as an assertion -- and so a fact -- this assertion itself should be false by virtue of the purported meaning. But the ontological fact *cannot* be denied. Therefore a 'proposition' of the form 'All our assertions are false' cannot exist; hence it belongs to the class of absolutely self-refuting propositions, provided the meaning of the term 'all' is not restricted in any way.

III

A very few propositions can be classified as absolutely self-refuting. That means a vast body of propositions in our language is left untouched by the contradiction; in other words, these propositions should more or less accurately, reflect the reality. However, with the non-fixity of the objects spatio-temporally on the one hand, and the wholesale fixation of the linguistic principles on the other, to expect a perfect reflection of the reality by the language is certainly unrealistic. Either the world should be stilled in to hybernation or the language is to be activated. Here one may think that we are speaking of a literal reflection of a stilled world by a language like a mirror does of a man who is standing still before it. This, however, need not be the conception at all. Rather, the

language may be equated with a movie camera and later a projector. Since the world cannot be stilled by a mere wishful thinking it is the language which is sought to be activated. It is in this context the categories of object and subject (referred to at the beginning of the Section II) come to play. The principles of language being fixed all that can be done is to introduce a few concepts here and a few there. Ontological facts being given the prime consideration it is the language/logic which is always at the receiving end. But -- what precisely is an ontological fact? - depends on each one's understanding of the world. To judge this or that view as correct is to state that this or that view strikes a fine balance between ontology and logic/language such that a true reflection is obtained.

Let us now take an example : Śaṁkara may be said to begin with an absolutely self-refuting proposition 'I do not exist'[6]. If the 'I' designates a fixed particular ontological entity, having an identity of its own, then no other e, entity can be identified with that 'I'. Nor any other entity can be brought near 'I' conceptually to cloud its identity (i.e.,the identity of 'I'). Such identification, or proximation of other entities with the 'I' as to eclipse the real identity of 'I' and separateness of the 'I' from other entities would simply be a conceptual error to the extent that 'I' is not known as what it is.

The proposition 'I do not exist' has to be false no matter what is the designatum - be it body or mind or a mixture of both. Insofar as 'I' refers to an asserter - and an asserter asserts only when *he is* existing - 'I do not exist' has to be necessarily false. Now at a higher degree of relativization by saying 'VK does not exist' we have lost the original meaning of 'I do not exist' both logically and grammatically[7]. Therefore 'VK does not exist' can not be a proper substitution case for 'I do not exist'.

Thus 'I' being a necessary entity i.e., the asserter himself, all cases of conceptual errors - be it identity or proximation - leading to the blurring of 'I' are sought to be exposed by Śaṁkara with the help of his concept of *adhyāsa*. *Adhyāsa* in the first instance is defined as :

> ".... an awareness, similar in nature to memory, that arises on ·a different (foreign) basis as a result of some past experience...(or) the appearance of one thing as something else. And in accord with this we find in common experience that the nacre appears as silver, and a single moon appears as two."[8]

It does not matter what exactly is the nature of such an entity in the final analysis - one thing is certain, the 'I' the subject, and the rest which are objects, are attributed with different spatio-temporal frames at, mainly, three levels, viz. physical, psychological and transcendental. No doubt Śaṁkara lacks a higher level metaphor to illustrate the idea of *adhyāsa*. Had there been a higher level metaphor to illustrate how the 'I' appears differently then 'I' could not have been a candidate for the higher reality. Nevertheless nacre-silver illusion, which is a lower level metaphor, is being very effectively used by Śaṁkara to illustrate the different spatio-temporal frames. Surely this spatio-temporal device helps him in explicating almost all propositions as contradiction. In the waking state as things are seen, each object may be attributed with different spatio-temporal frame. Also the dream objects may be attributed with a different dimension to this spatio-temporality. We believe that the '*smṛti*' used by Śaṁkara hints at the non-direct objects, and direct objects are those which are sensorily perceived. Since the different spatio-temporalities are to be demonstrated conclusively Śaṁkara argues with the help of experiential stand. Therefore if the spatio-temporalities are understood, it would be clear that no two objects belonging to two different orders of space and time can be brought together in a single proposition. And if it is brought in defiance of the space-time frames, it has to be understood as a case of *adhyāsa*. since the ontological fact gets off-set.

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3.   Samkara (1977) *Brahma-Sūtra Bhāsya of 'Saṁkarācharya (BSBS)* Translated by Swāmī Gambīrānanda, 3rd Edition, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama.

4.   Śaṁkara (1980) *Brahmasūtraśaṅkara bhāsyam* with the commentaries. (BSSB) Edited by J.L.Shastri, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass.

NOTES

1. The formal structure is made up of the basic notions, and/or derivative notions, like for e.g. 'all', 'some', 'and' etc. The notion of 'contradiction', 'tautology' etc.are derivative in that they are derived from certain relations in which the basic notions stand.

2. Croce, Beneditio,*Logic on the Science of Pure Concept* vide ref. 'Logic,' Śaṁkara and Subrahmanya Iyer, by Raja Ramanna in "Freedom, Progress and Society", (1986).

3. Lejewski, Czeslaw, *Ontology and Logic*, in Stephan Körner (1976) : 26.

4. *Ibid* :(1976) : 27-28.

5. The subjective conceivability allowed for 'I am dumb' supports itself on the non-opposition of the proposition to the ontological fact, and the liguistic acceptability.

6. *BSBS* (1977), 1.i.1: 12, BSSB (1980),1.i.1.1: 42-43 ‖ Sarvāsyātmatvācca brahmāsthitvaprasiddhih ǀ Sarvo hyātmāsthitvam pratyeti, na nāhamasmīti ǀ yadi hi nātmāsthitva prasiddih syāt sarvolokī nāhamasm ti pratīyat / Ātmā ca brahmaǁ

7. *'Nāhamasmi'* is first person singular present tense (lat), hence logically implies the existence of the asserter. 'V.K.Mahābhāgah nāsti' is third person singular present tense (lat), hence logically implies either of the possibilities of existence or non existence of the subject of the sentence. However, even if the sentence is true the sentence does not speak anything about the *asserter's* existence overtly.

8. *BSBS* (1977): 2

    BSSB (1980): 10, 13, 16

    Smrtirūpah paratrapūrva drṣṭāvabhāsahtvanyasyānya dhārmāvabhāsatām na vyabhicarati ǀ tathā ca loke anubhavah śuktika hiṁ rajatavadavabhāsate, ekascandrah sadvītiyavaditi.