Introduction

The teaching methodology of Vedānta comprises two sequential steps - adhyāropa and apavāda. A very well known traditional statement declares, 'adhyāropa-apavādābhyāmi niśprapañcam prapañcyate—by adhyāropa and apavāda is shown the pure Brahman'. Adhyāropa, which is deliberate superimposition (by the śāstras and guru) is the first of the two steps and this has been covered in detail in our earlier issues. The purpose of adhyāropa is only to facilitate its subsequent negation (apavāda). It is only in the fitness and order of things that we proceed after adhyāropa to the next sequential step i.e., apavāda.

Apavāda – A Technical Term

The word ‘apavāda’ is derived from the verbal root ‘vad’, which means ‘to speak’. To this the prefix ‘apa’ is added. The word then comes to have the following meanings — ‘to revile’, ‘to contradict’ and ‘to deny’. The word apavāda is a technical term (pāribhāṣikā śabda) having a specified connotation and meaning in different knowledge fields.

In sāhitya (literature) it means ‘to revile’ or ‘speak ill of someone’. In pūrvamānūnsā (the ritualistic section of the Vedas) the word is used in the sense of ‘an exception to a general rule’. For example, the general rule is that in tīrthas (holy places) one should

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1 Adhyāropa has been discussed in detail from June 2003 to May 2004 issues of Tapovan Prasad.

2 For a bird’s eye view of how both Adhyāropa and Apavāda work hand in hand, please refer to ‘Adhyāropa and Apavāda – A Brief Outline’, June 2003 issue of Tapovan Prasad.
not perform tonsure of one’s head (mûndan). But in Prayag one is recommended to do it. This is an aparavāda or exception to the general rule that one should not perform tonsure in tīrthas.

In Vedānta, aparavāda is used to denote ‘negation’ or ‘refutation of a wrong imputation or attribution’.

**Apavāda – Definition**

Sri Swami Sadananda in *Vedānta Sāra* uses the famous example of rope-snake to define *apavāda* –

अपवादो नाम रघुविवर्तस्य सर्पश्च रघुमात्रतत्वाद ।

वस्तुविवर्तस्य अवस्तुनः अहार्देव प्रपिन्नस्य वस्तुमात्रत्वम् ।

_Apavādo nāma rājjuvivartasya sarpasya rajjumātratva vad vastuvivartasya avastunanāh ajñādeh prapañcasya vastumātratvam_ |

Just as the illusory serpent which is not real and which is the appearance of a rope, is nothing but a rope, so too the universe, beginning with ‘ajñāna’, which is not real and which is an appearance of Reality, is nothing but that Reality — this (instruction) is described as *apavāda*.

Hence *apavāda* is an instruction that negates the false and asserts the truth. Thus *apavāda* has two aspects to it — refuting as well as revealing. In the example of the rope-snake quoted above the fake appearance of the snake is refuted and the reality of the rope is revealed.

Let us see one more definition of *apavāda*. This famous definition is offered by Sri Sankaracharya in his commentary on the Chandogya Upaniṣad:

अपवादो नाम यत्र कर्मश्चित्वं वस्तुनि पूर्वनिविष्टयां मिथ्याबुढ़ीः निधित्याः पश्चाद्

उपजायमाना यथायथा बुद्धः पूर्वनिविष्टयां मिथ्याबुढ़ीः निवर्नितकः भवति ।

_Apavādo nāma yatra karmiścit vastuni pūrvaniṣṭāyāṁ mithyābuddhau niścitāyāṁ paścad upajāymana yathartho buddhiḥ pūrvaniṣṭāyāṁ mithyābuddhau niḥvartikā bhavati_ |

In the case of the false attribution of one thing on the other, the right understanding which arises later, removes the earlier wrong notion. This is defined as *apavāda*.
Thus Sri Sankaracharya makes it amply clear that *apavāda* is the negation of the false understanding of a thing by the right understanding of the same.

**Vivarta makes Apavāda possible**

What makes *apavāda* possible? If something is false it can be negated. What is true can never be negated. In the example of the rope-snake, the false snake which is superimposed on the rope alone can be negated and not the rope. Therefore it is verily the falsity of the thing that enables *apavāda*. In Vedanta, the whole creation – the *kārāṇa* (causal), *sūkṣma* (subtle) as well as the *sthūla* (gross) *prapañca* (creation) – is superimposed on *Brahman* due to ignorance. The world is not a true creation or modification of *Brahman* but it is just a *vivarta* or appearance of *Brahman*. If the world was a true modification of *Brahman*, like milk changing itself into curd, this *apavāda* (negation) of the world is impossible.

We have a verse in the Vedantic tradition defining and differentiating true modification (*vikāra* or *parināma*) from appearance (*vivarta*):

sattvatō ’nitya-prāptam vikaḥ ityudāhortah
ātattvato ’nityathāprathā vividhītah

Satattvato’nyathāprathā vikāra ityudāhṛtaḥ
Atattvato’nyathāprathā vivarta ityudāhṛtaḥ

*Vikāra* (also called *parināma*) is the actual modification of a thing, altering into another substance; while *vivarta* is only an appearance.

The example commonly given in Vedantic texts for *vikāra* or *parināma* (actual modification) is the curdling of milk. Here milk is transformed and is modified irreversibly into curd. Curd is as much real and true as milk. Both milk and curd have the same level of existence (*sama-sattā*) and hence there can be no *apavāda* or denial of either milk or curd.

But take the example of rope-snake. Here, the rope has not transformed or modified itself actually into the snake. In ignorance the snake is falsely superimposed on the rope and therefore it is a
mere appearance on the rope. Unlike the case of milk-curd, the levels of existence of the rope and snake are entirely different (asama-sattā). The rope has a valid transactional reality while the snake is just an illusion. In the milk-curd example we can deny neither the existence of the milk nor the curd, but in the rope-snake example we can deny the snake for it is just an appearance.

Vedānta points out that the whole prapañca (creation) right from ajñāna (kāraṇa prapāñca) to the gross world of names or forms (sthūla prapāñca) is only an appearance on Brahman and hence can be negated. Brahman and the world cannot be compared to milk becoming curd but there is a valid similarity with the case of a snake superimposed on the rope. Advaita Vedānta asserts that no real creation is possible as creation would entail the destruction of Brahman, just as the formation of curd entails the destruction of milk. The only creation possible is the mere appearance of creation and not actual creation.

Apavāda of the Kārya

The understanding that the kārya (effect) is nothing but the kāraṇa (cause) negates the kārya (effect). When the gold ornaments, which are the kārya are smelted back to gold, the kāraṇa, there is apavāda (negation) of the gold ornaments, which is the kārya. But this physical smelting is not sine qua non for apavāda. One need not wait for all the waves in the ocean to quieten to know that the waves are water alone! Even the comprehension or clarity of perception that the gold ornaments are in fact gold and gold alone, and that the appearances of ornaments like rings, bangles and so on are merely names and forms is also apavāda. This is apavāda attained through wisdom. Gold (kāraṇa) alone is real, the ornament (kārya) is not real, though it appears real. If the ornament is as true as gold then even if the gold was removed from the ornament, the ornament should continue to exist. But that does not happen.

3 Transactional reality is technically called vyāvahārika-sattā and illusory existence is called prātibhāṣika-sattā.
The reality of a thing can be defined only on the basis of its independent existence. Since the forms of bangles, rings etc., (which are the kārya) have no independent existence whatsoever from the gold (the kāraṇa), they are deemed as vivarta (appearance). In his commentary Vidvanmanoranjani on Vedānta Sāra, Sri Ramatirtha defines apavāda in this fashion:

कार्यस्य कारणमात्रसत्तावशेषम् अपवादः।
कारणस्वपन्वतिरुक्तं कार्यस्य असत्तावधारणं वा अपवादः॥

Kāryasya kāraṇamātrasattavaśeṣaṁ apavādaḥ kāraṇasya
rupavyatirekena kāryasya saśattavaādhaṁ vā apavādaḥ॥

Apavāda is the dissolution of the effect into the cause or the understanding that the effect has no existence apart from the cause.

Please note that there can be levels of apavāda. To perceive the shirt as cloth is one level of apavāda; and then to understand the cloth as thread is a deeper level of apavāda; and to see the thread as cotton and cotton alone is a still deeper level of apavāda. Thus to understand clearly that the kārya (effect) is nothing but the kāraṇa (cause) is to deny existence to the kārya and give a valid existence only to the kāraṇa.

With this background let us now see how Vedānta achieves the apavāda of the world.

Sequential Adhyātropa of the Prapañca

At this juncture it is better to recapitulate briefly the sequential adhyātropa which has been presented in Vedānta⁴. This is important, because apavāda is done in the reverse sequence.

Vedānta, as we have seen, divides the prapañca (world) into three broad categories: kāraṇaprapañca (causal world), sūkṣmaprapañca (subtle world) and sthīlaprapañca (gross world).

Kāraṇaprapañca: Constituted of māya which has Brahman as its adhīshṭhāna (substratum) (kāraṇaprapañca = Brahman + māya).

Sūkṣmaprapañca: From māya are born the ungrossified subtle

⁴ Refer to May 2004 issue of Tapovan Prasad.
elements — the tanmātras. From the tanmātras are created the jñānendriyas, antahkarana, karmendriyas and prāṇa which together constitute the sūksmaprapaṇa (sūksmaprapaṇa = tanmātras → jñānendriyas, antahkarana, karmendriyas and prāṇa).

**Sthūlaprapaṇa:** These tanmātras undergo the process of pañcikaraṇa to become the pañcamahābhūtas – ākāśa, vāyu agni, āpah, prithivi. These pañcamahābhūtas create the fourteen lokas, four types of sthūlaśarīras and food and drink for the beings of the various lokas. These together form the sthūlaprapaṇa (sthūlaprapaṇa = pañcamahābhūtas → fourteen lokas, four types of sthūlaśarīras and food and drink for beings).

Kāraṇaprapaṇa evolves into the sūksmaprapaṇa and the sūksmaprapaṇa later evolves into sthūlaprapaṇa. This is the Vedantic adhyātropa in a nutshell (kāraṇaprapaṇa → sūksmaprapaṇa → sthūlaprapaṇa).

**Reverse-sequence of apavāda**

We have seen that apavāda is the resolution or perception of the effect as the cause. Please note that this apavāda is understanding and not a physical action like destruction or actual dissolution of the effect. Just as the gold ornaments can be seen as gold and the shirt can be perceived to be cotton without any destruction of the ornaments or shirt, so too the effects are seen as nothing but their cause. This right perception (sāmyag-darśana) of the effect as the cause is the secret of apavāda. Apavāda leads to the understanding that 'All is Brahman'. This can be achieved in five sequential steps.

**Step 1:** Fourteen lokas – (bhūḥ, bhuvaḥ, svāḥ, mahaḥ, janah, tapah, satyam, atala, vitala, sutala, rasātala, talātala, mahātala, pātāla), four types of sthūlaśarīras of the four types of beings (jarāyujā, aṇḍaja, svedaja, udbhijja) and food and drink for the beings are resolved into their cause i.e., the pañcamahābhūtas.

**Step 2:** The pañcamahābhūtas are resolved into their cause i.e. the pañcatanmātras of ākāśa, vāyu, agni, āpah, prithivi.

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*You may have a look at the adhāropa illustration provided in the May 2004 issue of Tapovan Prasad. This will help in the easy understanding of how apavāda is done.*
Step 3: The jñānendriyas (śrotas, tvak, caksuḥ, jihvā and ghṛāṇa), antaḥkarana (manas, buddhi, citta and ahaṅkāra), karmendriyas (vāk, pāṇi, pāda, pāyu and upastha) and prāna (prāṇa, apāna, vyāna, udāna and samāna) are all resolved into their respective pañcatanmātras.

Step 4: The pañcatanmātras are resolved into their cause which is māyā constituted of sattva, rajas and tamas.

We can say that shirt is cloth and cloth is thread and thread is only cotton and hence cloth is cotton. In the same way the whole cosmos, both sthūla (gross) and sūkṣma (subtle) - fourteen lokas, four types of sthūlaśarīras and food and drink for beings, pañcamahābhūtas, jñānendriyas, antaḥkarana, karmendriyas, prāṇa, pañcatanmātras — all of them, without any exception, are māyā alone.

But into what is māyā, the kāraṇaprapāṇca resolved?

Step 5: Māyā is resolved into Brahman, which is its adhisthāna. Just as the false snake is the rope alone, so too, māyā which is constituted of sattva, rajas and tamas is Brahman alone.

Thus the sthūlaprapāṇca has its apavāda in sūkṣmaprapāṇca and the sūkṣmaprapāṇca has its apavāda in the kāraṇaprapāṇca and finally the kāraṇaprapāṇca also is resolved into its substratum or cause, which is Brahman.

This is the final apavāda — where the whole cosmos made of sthūlaprapāṇca (gross world), sūkṣmaprapāṇca (subtle world) and kāraṇaprapāṇca (causal world) are all resolved into Brahman and what remains after apavāda is Brahman and Brahman alone, echoing emphatically the Vedic dictum — sarvam khalidam brahma — everything is in truth, Brahman.

Apavāda (negation) is the reversal of the sequence of adhyāropa (superimposition).\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Vide Brahmastra 2.3.14, the pramāṇa for reverse sequence of apavāda as compared to adhyāropa: 'viparyayena tu kramo'ta upapadyate ca - but as compared with this order of creation, the order of dissolution proceeds in a reverse way. This is logical too'.

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Adhyāropa = Brahman → kāraṇaprapaṇa → sūkṣmaprapaṇa → sthūlaprapaṇa.

Apavāda = sthūlaprapaṇa → sūkṣmaprapaṇa → kāraṇaprapaṇa → Brahman.

**Conclusion**

At the end of apavāda all that remains is Brahman. But can there be apavāda of Brahman also? Nay, only the false can be negated. Never the Truth. The Upaniṣads emphatically declare this when they say - sā kaśṭhā sā parā gatiḥ — That is the final limit and the supreme goal. Mere apavāda of the world as Brahman is not the final goal of Vedānta. Brahman has to be known as the very Self of the enquirer. The mahāvākyas such as 'Tat Tvam Asi' point to this Truth. From the next essay onwards we shall enter into the analysis of the mahāvākya 'Tat Tvam Asi' and let us see how the identity of the individual consciousness and Brahman (jīva-brham-aikya) is established. May the Lord’s grace and Pujya Gurudev’s blessings be with us in actualising this most wonderful Ātma Vidyā.

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**SHRADDHANJALI**

The Chinmaya Family of Ranchi expresses grief over the sudden passing away of Sri Sita Ram Maroo who very efficiently played the role of the President, Chinmaya Mission, Ranchi, from 1992 to 2001. Under his able guidance the Mission activities spread all over the city. He was instrumental in the construction of a beautiful ashram at Ranchi. His commitment and enthusiasm in every activity were an inspiration to everyone. He had the credit of publishing the first Hindi newspaper in Ranchi named Ranchi Express. Chinmaya Mission, Ranchi, has lost a fatherly personality and the void left behind by him will be very difficult to fill.