It is far from being a fact of no contention that the modern dialectical method was founded by Kant. Most ascribe this honour to Hegel. True, Kant just found the method of dialectics, no more. He simply indicated the importance of dialectical logic and presented it as a form of intellectual activity which becomes specific for philosophical thinking when it undertakes the task of synthesis. He certainly did not demonstrate how the problems of synthesis can be solved. He also failed to point out the principles of dialectical logic, to say nothing about deducing the synthetic categories on the basis of that logic. Kant merely signalled the inadequacy of the analytical method in philosophy — and despite that fact he is still considered by many as the protagonist of all modern analysts!

By calling Kant the founder of the modern dialectical method I do not mean that the Second Section of Part Two of The Transcendental Doctrine of the Principles in The Critique of Pure Reason bears the title, 'Transcendental Dialectic'. On the contrary, I think that this title is confusing and should be more properly changed to 'Transcendental Analytic'. Expounding the antinomies of pure reason does not amount to demonstrating how the reason actually works and why sustaining contradictions within its organization is essential for its systemic performance. Here ‘systemic’ means ‘theoretical’, in the concrete sense of Kant’s system of philosophy.

Locating antinomies in the content and representations of thinking in the form of categories does not prove as yet the legitimacy, even less the desirability, of contradictions as implements in the work of thinking, as the only way for thinking to work. But such is the basic claim of the dialectical method. Kant actually used that method in construction of the doctrinal part of his Critique, though he never mentioned it in the open — and this exactly gives some of his followers a chance to call his method ‘analytical’. But Kant virtually disproved that himself in the right place, namely, in ‘The Transcendental Doctrine of the Method’, the concluding part of his Critique. There he practically answered the question (asked again much later by Russell), “What makes The
Critique of Pure Reason possible?" — in other words, how, by using what method did Kant himself work when he constructed his system of philosophy and organized it in the textual form of the Critique. The answer is: dialectics. Kant was the first among Western philosophers who applied the dialectical method to construction of a system of philosophy, rather than merely to treatment of particular subjects or elements of cognition. In Hegel it lays on the surface. In Kant it is hidden but it is there, in the organization of the body of his Transcendental Philosophy. This will be demonstrated below.

In a similar way, nobody suspects Nyāya, the system of Indian formal logic and epistemology, of using the dialectical method for self-construction. This method is hidden in its organization, but it can be rediscovered, brought to the surface as the main principle by which that logic was generated and put in operation. And for certain reasons of the historical and cultural kind, this can be done in Nyāya more easily and more convincingly than in Kant. We shall take advantage of that and try to prove our point by discussing mainly the richly detailed Nyāya material, though always keeping Kant in mind.

Indian dialectics is usually associated with the purely transcendental systems of metaphysics like the Buddhist Śūnyavāda or Śaṅkara’s Advaita-Vedānta. Such systems are dialectical both in content and form, because their authors utilised dialectics both in doctrine and in the method of organizing the corresponding systems in texts. By contrast, Nyāya is usually described as a formal logic with a realist metaphysics. Its commitment to metaphysical realism seems to be so prominent that it probably is the only argument against calling Nyāya simply analytic and pure logistic. It will be shown below that the description of Nyāya as ‘logical realism’ is at least imprecise and at best can be applied to the final logical scheme of its formal part rather than to the whole system of Nyāya in the process of its formation. And yet, this suspension of the label of ‘logical realism’ does not give place to call Nyāya analytical in its method. Nyāya’s method is dialectical, in almost the same sense as that of Kant — and this makes it sensible to consider them together, and to compare them.

Being like other typical sūtras, a ‘genetic cell’ of the corresponding system of philosophy, the ‘root text’ of the Nyāya-Sūtra contains not only a ‘toolbox’ of the finished means of formal logic and epistemology (let it even have the realist metaphysic as a foundation), but actually the whole body of materials used in its formation. Here we have exhibited