



## Axiological Foundations of Contemporary Research Embedded in Indian Knowledge Systems

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### **Abstract**

*Since the early twentieth century, the philosophical bases of scholarly investigations in the west have been distinctly divided into three – metaphysical/ontological, epistemological and axiological. It is not to say that those concerns did not exist earlier, they did exist since the ancient times, but their distinct recognition as forming the three major pillars of philosophy did not. Whereas, looking eastwards towards India we not only come across distinct explication of each of the three mentioned above but also vindications related to their relevance for any type of scholarly activity undertaken.*

*This paper attempts to show that axiological considerations had always occupied a core part of any Indian philosophical system right from the beginning – Sankhya, Vaisesika, Nyaya, Mimamsa, and of course Yoga and Vedanta. Axiological matters of scholarly importance including today's relevant and upcoming issues had already been debated upon and discussed with great zeal by the past great scholars of India as a distinct but not-so-distinct (read organically related) branch of philosophical investigations. Whether in spiritual or material-technological or logico-epistemological activities, matters of ethics and aesthetics were never relegated as of secondary importance. The same is truer of the heterodox philosophies of Buddhism and Jainism where axiology itself is of principal interest.*

*Such an engagement with western and Indian axiological recognition and deliberations led to the author's realization that most of the ancient Indian theories of value can easily be assimilated and adapted to contemporary research activity in any discipline. Infact, we get vivid account of peer review and its importance to knowledge creation from Samkhyatattvakaumudi – essentially the same as it is logically considered today. The implication of this is that in areas we have our own we must put them to our uses, and only in areas we lack we may look to borrow from outside – which, axiologically speaking, should have been the common practice but is currently not but should be revitalized in the coming days.*

**Keywords:** *Axiology, Enquiry Paradigm, Nihisreyasam, Nyayavaasa, Project Research, Suhritpraapti*

### **Introduction**

The term “metaphysics” as we understand it today in all its broadness had been applied to western philosophical deliberations since the seventeenth century. Aristotle's treatise *Metaphysics* was edited and renamed later by a scholar of 1st century BC as “*Ta meta ta physika*” rather in order to convey the sense that that treatise needed to be studied only after Aristotle's *Physics* had been studied (Online Britannica Encyclopedia). Even as late as in the 13th century, the philosopher and priest Thomas Aquinas in his considerations of metaphysics generally followed a modified but broadly an Aristotelian view (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). As late as in the late nineteenth century do we get a distinct explication of what metaphysics is from the American philosopher William James in his book *The Principles of Psychology: Volume 1*: “Metaphysics means nothing but an unusually obstinate method to think clearly”. It is in this sense we can say that we understand the term today –

what principles do lie behind those principles that we can observe? Our empirical observations do not come from nothingness – to say it simply, we cannot stand in the air without something beneath our feet. So we may say that an obstinate attempt to uncover the nature of what is present ‘beneath our feet’ that makes us stand is today generally appreciated at the study of metaphysics.

A similar thing may be said about epistemology. Francis Bacon’s humorous and famous essay regarding a two-week quarrel among clergymen about how to measure the number of teeth inside the mouth of a horse instead of opening the mouth of a horse and observing for themselves how many teeth it does have – evinces the relative recency of the western attempts to combine the inductive with the deductive in order to form a statement that is coherent with what can be seen and felt (Best and Kahn, 2018). Before Bacon’s attack on mindless deductivism in the seventeenth century, Aristotelian syllogism had resulted in the practice of abstract mental exercises and no sound epistemology. And the term ‘epistemology’ was introduced into English philosophical literature by James Frederick Ferrier, the Scottish philosopher in the 19th century.

However, what interests us here is axiology. Although ethical thinking is generally said to have started right from Thales, one of the most ancient Greek philosophers, “But it is not until Democritus that we find any sign of a philosopher with a moral system” (Kenny, 2010). We may consider Democritus as the founder of a ‘moral system’ precisely due to his saying, ‘the cause of sin is ignorance of what is better’ and also that it is better not to do wrong despite being wronged. This latter saying would deeply influence Socrates who proved with his own life that he would rather suffer wrong than inflict so. Democritus’ concept of happiness, cheerfulness in life being the highest good were later given differing interpretations by Plato who mixed Socrates’ wisdom and Protarchus’ pleasure to achieve the highest good. And Aristotle elaborated on happiness (eudaimonia) to include wisdom, virtue and pleasure in its fold to be the highest good.

## **Objectives of the Study**

- To explore how axiological principles rooted in Indian philosophical traditions can inform and strengthen the value foundations of contemporary research practices.

## **Result and Discussion**

### ***Axiological foundations of contemporary research***

The foregoing discussion on some of the earliest western views of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology was mainly demonstrative in its purpose – to show that axiological considerations had its room in the western mind even then. But the term “Axiology which stems from two Greek words – axios or worth, and logos or reason, theory – is a relatively new discipline” (Hart, 1971). S.L. Hart in his essay goes on to state the first researchers to use the term in the first decade of the twentieth century. Along with our foregoing Introduction, we can now apprehend the fact that the western categorization of forms of philosophical propositions into metaphysics, epistemology and axiology is of very recent origin, between the seventeenth and the early twentieth century. The reason for this three-fold categorisation being that a statement/proposition of any one among the three cannot be reduced to the other two – that is they are qualitatively different.

Now, we can say that any philosophical proposition along with the addition of any particular field of enquiry hypostatizes that proposition as an aspect of enquiry in that particular subject. Taking for example an axiological proposition basing on one of those that S.L. Hart considered modern axiological studies to confine themselves to-

- ✚ Philosophical – What is the distinctive nature of value propositions?

Now we add different disciplines to it-

- ✚ Psychology – What is the distinctive nature of value propositions in psychological counselling? We may answer that value propositions in psychological counselling might be of the nature of – should the client

be considered to have more value vis-a-vis the counsellor or vice-versa or should both be considered to have the same value? In response, the humanist will impute more value to the client, the behaviourist to the counsellor and the participatory psychologist to both of them.

✚ Economics – What is the distinctive nature of value propositions in political economy? We may answer that the value propositions in political economy might be of the nature of – Should the people derive maximum economic value if the government controls the instrumentalities of production or the private people or both do so? As we may see, a socialist will say the government should, the capitalist will say the private citizens should and centrist will say that both in cooperation should.

We may go on for many different subjects but for the word limitation of the paper. These imputations of values are a part and parcel of all research and of course, contemporary. Without a value position, a researcher cannot carry on with his/her research. A psychologist at the same time cannot assign greater value to both the client and the counsellor and both client & counsellor together. An economist cannot support both socialism and capitalism and both socialism and capitalism together in a single economy. An industrialist cannot support excessive carbon emission and /or groundwater depletion along with concerns for the environment. We cannot just pursue any type of psychological counselling, or economic policy or industrial processes without figuring out the good, the bad and the average ways of doing so. How a 'good' policy 'should' inform the practice? – is the central value laden question there.

In the social sciences discipline of project research, Gauthier and Ika (2012) create the term 'hypermodern perspectives' of values: "The project is a network of actors embedded in a social context and in constant transformation. The project is a work in progress. Project management is a reflexive practice and the project manager is a reflexive agent". Biedenbach and Jacobsson (2016) assesses Gauthier and Ika's hypermodern perspective's conceptualization and derives that "it mainly corresponds to values being understood as logical, systemic and formative in their character. The major paradigmatic influences would thus also be critical theory and participatory approaches ...building on the notion of society as a network of reflexive individuals(Gauthier and Ika (2012))".

In the discipline of sociology, Michael R. Hill (1984) presents the axiological arguments in sociology. Let us note them pointwise:

- "Values are foundational for both knowledge producing systems and social projects... values are embedded in the meta-scientific world-views of sociological perspectives...values are superordinate to both purpose and perspective"
- "Not all knowledge-producing systems are equally well-suited for every social project...not all social projects embody the highest axiological principles of human rights and dignity."
- "Identification of the highest axiological principles is not easy but this does not mean that this task can be responsibly avoided."
- "We are responsible for the axiological shape of the future"
- "Caws (1967: 54) astutely defined values as future facts: 'they go from us to the world; they refer not to what is or what was the case, but to what will or may be the case'".

Heron and Reason (1997) advocating for a participatory enquiry paradigm (strictly upholding democratic values) state that this particular paradigm "answers the axiological questions in terms of human flourishing as an end in itself where such flourishing is construed as an enabling balance within and between people of hierarchy, cooperation and autonomy". They identify practical knowledge as an "end in itself" and intellectual knowledge as important in providing support to such practical knowledge and experience. Both these researchers decry the philosophically extremist ideas of positivism and poststructuralism and form a centrist subjective-objective ontology and by shaping a critically subjective and critically inter-subjective epistemology that "involves a self-

reflexive attention to the ground on which one is standing” and which had been echoed by Torbert as ‘re-framing mind’ which “continually overcomes itself, divesting itself of its own presuppositions.”

Finally, we would conclude this section by throwing some light on Duhem-Quine thesis. Pierre Duhem, a French theoretical physicist of the 1890s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century propounded the ontology of holism which Willard Quine, an American logician and philosopher attempted to generalize, but nonetheless, became controversial. Donald Gillies (1993), attempts to remove this controversy using Duhem’s unique axiological position. Gillies remarkably offers the Duhem-Quine thesis by pointing out that any higher-level hypotheses in any discipline including mathematics and social science is always partial in nature. It is never possible to exhaust every relation from the nearest to the farthest in order to gain complete knowledge of one thing which is in Duhem’s term never “isolated” but is always in relation to a whole group of other things – a set of hypotheses within a set of hypotheses and so on in a holist structure.

And secondly, Gillies modifies Quine’s claim that “Any statement can be held to be true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments in the the system” (Quine, 1951) by saying that such a truth is “purely logical” and Duhem’s axiology of ‘the scientific good sense’ (le bon sens) should inform the reasonableness of holding on to certain statements irrespective of discipline. The implication being that not only in the social sciences where subjectivity is seen to matter a lot, but also in the natural sciences and applied logic (pure logic being abstract and of no practical utility) where objectivity is seen to matter a lot, the axiological dimension cannot be eschewed by limiting the considerations to ontological, epistemological and methodological only. Gillies proposes the Duhem-Quine thesis with a holist ontology, a necessarily limited epistemology, grouped methodology and what is most important for Gillies, a good sensical axiology.

### ***Indian Knowledge Systems and embedded axiology for contemporary research***

It may appear to us that the juxtaposition of the terms ‘Indian Knowledge Systems’ and ‘contemporary research’ is oxymoronic but nothing else will be farther from the truth if we say so. And also the term ‘Indian Knowledge System’ will here be used to refer to the particular philosophical schools of India – Samkhya, Yoga, Nyaya, Vaisesika, Mimamsa and Vedanta on the aastika side (those who recognize the Vedas as authoritative) and Buddhist and Jainist philosophy on the nastika side (those who reject the authoritative idea of the Vedas). It may be proper to begin with the axiological underpinnings of the aastika(pro-Veda) philosophical tradition.

The *Mundaka Upanishad* – one of the principal Upanishads takes a distinct axiological position between two types of studies – ‘paraa’ and ‘aparaa’ in the words – “dvey vidye veditavye” (there are two types of knowledge) – one that is the more valuable is the ‘paraa vidya’ (literally, study of that which is beyond) and the one that is less valuable is the ‘aparaa vidya’ (literally, study of that which is not beyond). Aparaa vidya (study) includes the six vedangas – siksha (phonetics and pronunciation), chhanda (metre and prosody), vyakarana (grammar and linguistics), nirukta (etymology), kalpa (ritual instructions) and jyotisha (astronomy). And what is paraa vidya then – “yayaa tadaksharamadhighamyate” – by which that akshara or the non-diminishing one is known or the highest wisdom – of Brahman (Bhattacharya, 1950). Thus, we see that the study of worldly matters is given a lesser valuation than the study of the highest philosophy (of the non-diminishing one or the supreme – Brahman). Now, all of the aastika (even nastika) philosophies emphasize that knowledge of the substances will lead to liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Connecting these two with S.L. Hart’s “what is the distinctive nature of value propositions?”, we may revisit the following questions –

- Psychology – What is the distinctive nature of value propositions in psychological counselling? We may answer that the distinctive propositions are – which type(s) of psychological counselling will enable the patient to walk towards the path of the real knowledge of the substances of his/her psychological obfuscations so that thence he/she can walk towards the path of liberation from the cycles of mental sufferings and thence may gain the knowledge to be free from the cycle of birth and death by attaining the

most valuable paraa vidya? Each of the six astika schools (even nastika schools are more or less the similar in this aspect) will prescribe a path that aligns with their siddhantas (conclusive decisions).

- Economics – What is the distinctive nature of value propositions in political economy? We may answer that the distinctive propositions are – which type(s) of economic policy taken by the government will be favourable for the citizens to value themselves not only as state instruments but also as persons in search for the liberation from the cycles of sufferings and birth and death through the practice of knowledge upgradation through paths like jnana yoga, bhakti yoga, karma yoga and/or raja yoga (Vivekananda, 1993)? Each aastika school (not naastika in this case) will come forward with their own conclusive decisions in this regard.

Thus, we see that value imputations have been mainstay of Indian philosophical traditions rights from the times of the Vedas. The more valuable paths have been vividly mentioned and differentiated from the less valuable paths. Here lies the axiological importance both in the Indian and the western philosophical tradition – that by precluding the axiological, value-based questions, we cannot determine which path ‘should’ be followed. In an absence of the axiological answer, all what we can do is to gerrymander our arguments without being able to construct a path that positively leads to our or others’ progress.

Next, we get Gauthier and Ika’s (2012) ‘hypermodern perspectives’ of values. According to them, “The project is a network of actors embedded in a social context and in constant transformation”. Here we might make some reference to the nastika position – the *Salistamba Sutra* of Mahayana Buddhism. This sutra may be suitably interpreted to accommodate Gauthier and Ika’s position and beyond. Maitreya Buddha while advising the venerable Sariputra says : “Whoever sees this conditioned arising (which is)[read project], always and ever devoid of soul [read modern western physicalism – G&I do refer to any constancy in the progress of the project]...and by nature never stilled [read constant transformation], (he sees Dharma)[read results of the project] (Ross Reat, 1993)” – 7<sup>th</sup> sutra.. In the 10<sup>th</sup> sutra Maitreya Buddha completes G&I’s position – “Furthermore, this conditioned arising arises from (two principles). From what two (principles does it arise)? From a causal relation and a conditional relation. Moreover, it should be seen as two-fold: objective and subjective[read social context]” – third brackets are author’s first brackets are translator’s. Lord Buddha then goes on to advice the logical and systematic character of conditioned arising in twelve steps and how a reflexive pattern of removing the previous of the steps will step-by-step remove the ignorance from a person and lead him to be free from ignorance – exactly what had been uttered by G&I (2012) and basing on which Biedenbach and Jacobsson (2016) assess the roles of values of axiology in project research. And the Dharma-body in Mahayana Buddhism is the ultimate axiological position of “truth and nature of enlightenment transcending the physical realm and embodying” the Buddha’s presence. It is the non-destructible spiritual reality beyond transcending all agony and worldly limitations. Thus, we uncover the fact that the so-called ‘hypermodern perspectives’ of G&I are after all, not that hypermodern!

We may now turn towards Michael R. Hill’s (1984) axiological foundational arguments in sociology which we had mentioned in the previous section. Let us take Hill’s first point that has been quoted here and compare it with Vaisesika sutras and its commentary by the eminent philosopher Panchanan Tarkaratna in Bengali published in the year 1907. Hill says that “Values are foundational for both knowledge producing systems and social projects”. Introducing the very first part (aanhika) of the very chapter (adhyaaha), Tarkaratna puts, according to what Maharsi Kanaad had shown, an explanation of dharma, characteristics of dharma, justification of the Vedas as foundational to knowledge and how dharma shall lead to the true knowledge of the material substances – as the first four introductory sections of his commentary. There he explains what is dharma, why are the Vedas considered as dharma and also that why the result of the knowledge of the material world is dharma. It is knowledge because fends off desire, and leads to the highest – “nihsreyasam”. Elsewhere in the same chapter he writes – “shubha adrista” itself is knowledge – ‘shubha’ meaning good and ‘adrista’ meaning cumulation of past intentional actions (Tarkaratna, 1907). Can this be called a social project too? Yes. Precisely because the aim of

Vaisesika and in general all Indian philosophies is to bring about behavioural modification through knowledge to reach the highest aim – “mukti” or “nihsreyasam” rather than only love of or creation of knowledge. Thus we see that values are being considered to be foundational for both knowledge producing systems as well as social projects by probably the earliest of Indian systematic philosophies – Vaisesika. This paragraph has also indirectly has shown that the rest of the points of Michael R. Hill quoted here have also been properly addressed by Vaisesika darsana which is being avoided due to word limitations.

Heron and Reason’s (1997) participatory enquiry paradigm and its axiological orientation of human flourishing as an aim where that flourishing is understood as catalyzing “balance” between “people of hierarchy cooperation and autonomy”. Both H&R are strongly opposed to ontological absolutism in the forms of positivism and poststructuralism. The Jain philosophical doctrine of ‘anekantavada’ said the same thing over twenty centuries ago. “Anekantavaad is a theory of manifoldness of theory and truth... According to Jainism, both the views viz., one advocating permanence and the other advocating change, if accepted exclusively, do not represent the reality authentically because reality is manifold” (Katarnikar, Philosophy Course Module – INFLIBNET, 7.37). This recognition of manifold realities leads to an inclusive axiological position, of imputing value in the others’ points of view, of reflexively evaluating one’s own opinions after listening to others and essentially forming a participatory inquiry paradigm. The content writer of the module too points to the same thing by saying that, anekantavada is correctly described by modern scholars as a “philosophical methodology”. Now we can add axiological methodology to the same and draw the parallel and say that anekantavada is a participatory philosophical methodo-axiological enquiry and also point to its ancient origin!

The Duhem-Quine thesis in philosophy is referred to as holism. A remarkably similar holist articulation may be threaded out from the “anti-aagama nyayavaasa” meaning anti-scriptural or anti-Vedic fallacy. Kapalikas used to say that though the Vedas consider a person’s skull to be unholy/impure, and a conch to be pure, but because the Vedas considered conch to be pure as it was a part of an animal’s body – they used the same logic of the Vedas to try to establish that dead person’s skull was also pure as it belonged to an animal’s body namely, a human being. Phanibhusan Tarkavagish in his Bengali commentary on the Nyaya Sutras falsifies the Kapalikas by reasoning that all traditional observances are scripturally limited and also limited by verbal testimony and one cannot argue against the same scripture by using that very scripture. Kapalikas used the Vedas to uphold the holiness of the conch and by that same scriptural reasoning also held the skull to be holy but which the scriptures itself declared to be unholy. The point here is that Tarkavagish explicates – that the Kapalikas needed to refer to their own scripture and tradition to justify their usage of the skull as pure, not overturn Vedic declarations to suit their purpose (Tarkavagish, 1981). The axiology of the ‘good sense’ is present though remains understated here. One definitely should use his ‘sense’ to choose which scripture or verbal testimony in the form of customs to follow and in that case that person cannot use his ‘bad sense’. He obviously has to use his ‘good sense’ to follow and defend his scripture and/or custom. This axiological positioning is present in the very first chapter of the Nyaya Sutras.

## **Conclusion**

We may go on like this. Creswell (2012) in his introductory chapter in the book Educational Research writes some ethical issues of data reporting. Among them are non-plagiarism, giving credit to the author, research being understandable and should not sit unpublished (so that others may read, gain knowledge and even argue against) – bracket author’s addition. Purnachandra Vedantachunchu in his explanatory book of the *Samkhyakarika* of Isvarakrishna shows how Vachaspati Misra in his commentary *Sankhyatattvakaumudi* gives proper credits to Isvarakrishna and also rearranges Isvarakrishna’s commentaries for coherence’s sake. Vedantachunchu and Vacaspati Misra both distinctly describe after studying/listening (sravana), comes manana (intellectual pondering) and finally nidhidhyasana (tranquil meditation). However, intellectual pondering is never complete without

‘suhritapraapti’ - which literally translates as agreement of one’s intellectual activity as an intellectual activity by one’s peers – which is today’s peer review procedure and is contained within research ethics as Creswell (2012) shows. If credits are not given to sources, the research is not understandable by one’s peers and the intellectual activity is not published suhritapraati or peer review procedure will not take place and the research will not be considered as a research. Isvarakrishna in his karika makes it crystal clear as early as the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE!

After overshooting the word limitation by one-sixth, we should come to the clear conclusion that axiological foundations of research under recent scholarly discussions have already been pondered upon, discussed and conclusions drawn in ancient India. We have not even looked to the great medieval Indian philosophers in this paper – the ancients themselves have provided so much to us. The task for researchers in Indian knowledge systems should be to uncover more of these and use these for our axiological foundations in contemporary research as we see that these ideas are still relevant. The only difficult thing might be to re-interpret some of the understated ideas but the vast majority of axiological foundations will be directly found in Indian philosophical texts. It should be our axiological duty to take on this axiological challenge. Only in areas that we really lack, we should look towards other nations and civilizations, including the west, for our work and our inspiration.

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