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Editorial

Expanding Frontiers of Knowledge

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The pursuit of knowledge is a journey from the known to the unknown, that is depicted as a movement from untruth to truth, darkness to light, and death to immortality. This is envisaged by the seers of Vedic knowledge in the form of a hymn to be sung every day for the development of the individual. This was considered to be the way to peaceful human coexistence.

*asato mā sadgamaya
 tamasomā jyotir gamaya
 mrityormā amritam gamaya
 Om śānti śānti śāntiḥ*

The above hymn of peace (*Shānti mantra*) from Brihadāranyaka Upanishad (1.3.28) explains the nature of knowledge in terms of the distinction between truth, light and immortality with untruth, darkness and death. The movement from untruth to truth is metaphysical, reaching out to the light from darkness is epistemology, and the crusade from death to immortality is ontology. Knowledge is a journey towards metaphysical truth through the instrumentality of light in establishing the relation of the being. This signified the nature of knowledge and thus indirectly drew the frontiers of knowledge through the classical Indian tradition of Vedas. Let us explore further the nature of knowledge from different perspectives.

Knowledge, learning and education are highly valued in all traditions and cultures. Cultures with a robust knowledge system tend to have an enriched life span; they reverberate certain universals that find ground frequently in the particulars and *vice versa* as newer generations mature.

It is unquestionably believed today that education is instrumental to social mobility and is one of the critical factors for emancipating individuals from their givenness. As a state, society, culture and people belonging to certain traditions, we all place our faith in being knowledgeable. However, giving a definitive account of knowledge has long been a significant concern in both Western and Eastern philosophical traditions. Epistemology, which theorises knowledge, has been making (un)successful attempts to produce an infallible and comprehensive definition of knowledge. Infallibility and comprehensiveness are difficult adjectives to be attributed together to knowledge. At no point in time, one can claim to have a comprehensive account of knowledge, and unless what is known is understood comprehensively, fallibility can't be determined. This paradoxical relation between infallibility and comprehensiveness with knowledge makes the nature of the knowledge elusive. This elusiveness of the nature of knowledge prompts us to turn to a symbolic representation of knowledge. We speak of

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knowledge as having structures or boundaries that invoke a particular form. Let us imagine a circle. Visualising different branches of knowledge in specific forms, such as circles, and building an imaginative fence around them may positively contribute to the knowledge transmission process. The boundary of our knowledge system mainly serves the critical purposes of distinguishing knowledge from non-knowledge and connecting infinite standpoints of gaining knowledge that conjoins to form a perfect circle. With time, these very boundaries are questioned, and such questioning may be philosophically, politically or sociologically motivated. For instance, many feminist epistemologists have contributed significantly to our reserves of knowledge just by revealing the historically tacit androcentric approach to theorising experience.

From a different perspective, the pursuit of knowledge begins with an epistemological quest to the metaphysical reality that culminates in ontological understanding. The ‘will to know’ leads to ‘what exists’ and further establishes ‘how the Being is related’. The ontology is conceptualised and experienced in two ways; logical or axiological. This ontological conceptualisation of knowledge is in terms of a holistic and harmonious perspective, where a relation is established between two totalities or wholes - the ‘known’ and the ‘unknown’. Individually both are harmonious and interconnected totalities. However, when seen from the perspective of the other, each is incomplete. The known, though harmonious, totality within itself appears to be partial and incomplete when viewed from the perspective of the unknown and vice versa. This is expressed well in the following Vedic hymn from Isha Upanishad:

*Pūrnamadah pūrnamidam pūrnāt pūrna mudatchyate!
Pūrnasya pūrnamādāya pūrnamevāvasishyate!*

This hymn symbolically depicts all metaphysical phenomena to be complete in themselves. It presents that even after being divided, both the remains are complete in themselves. Such a depiction warrants us to understand the world’s phenomena as an interdependent harmonious totality that is complete at any given time yet dynamically expanding and evolving into enhanced comprehensiveness.

Epistemology has had a rigorous task of defining knowledge. But it’s not only the definition or the understanding of knowledge that is complex, but inquiring about its boundaries and thresholds has also been a task many philosophers have delved into. These are the ‘frontiers’, the boundaries that *seemingly* cease knowledge from its extension. Before we delve into three significant forms of frontiers that the hermeneutics of knowledge facilitates, let us briefly clarify the diversity of inner depths of the term frontier.

Philosophical reflection has the power to transform any term into a concept. Philosophical analysis enriches the understanding of a given term by unmasking the monolithic appearance and revealing its enriched depths of inner diversities. The term frontier, commonly, is understood to be a boundary. However, once we probe into the term, we understand that it is much more diverse than what it innocently appears to be. The term frontier represents in different contexts, ‘an uncharted territory’, or ‘a remote piece of land,’ or ‘a new field of study.’

The noun *frontier* has varied meanings. “It can refer to the wilderness at the edge of a settled area (picture covered wagons pushing westward) or it can mean a field of study that has not yet been explored (picture genetically engineering pet dinosaurs). Deriving from “the front line of an army,” a frontier can be thought of as an offensive line in a battle — always pushing forward, trying to conquer new territory.”² Further, it also means ‘the

² Frontier - Definition, Meaning & Synonyms | Vocabulary.com.
<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/frontier>

farthermost limits of knowledge or achievement in a particular subject', as we say, 'frontiers in cognitive psychology'. It may also refer to 'a line of division between different or opposed things.'

These diverse inner depths of the word not only present the frontier as a boundary between two different, if not opposite, spaces (physical or conceptual) but also refer to inner divisions and limitations. Let me articulate this division in terms of frontiers *of* knowledge, frontiers *in* knowledge or frontiers *about* knowledge. They diffuse into one another due to their complex nature. Thus, these frontiers can be threefold:

1. 'The frontiers *of* knowledge' is the domain of the unknown itself.
2. 'The frontiers *in* knowledge' is within the disciplinary extent of knowledge. Be it transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary.
3. 'The frontiers *about* knowledge' is concerned with the questions related to the domain of knowledge itself, interrogating how much we know when we claim to know something.

1. The Frontiers *of* Knowledge

In philosophy, we traverse from the unknown to the known. This requires identifying what we do not know and looking for means, that help us acquire knowledge. Thus, it renders a large space for the unknown. And that becomes the frontier of knowledge. Take, for instance, the previous example of the circle. If we imagine the circle to be the things that we know, then what remains outside of it is the realm of the unknown. However, we expand the circle, and in doing so, new boundaries of the unknown are created. This not only gives us an understanding of what remains unknown but also provides us with the opportunity to grasp it because knowing what one doesn't know is also a piece of knowledge itself.

2. The Frontiers *in* Knowledge

The frontiers *in* knowledge posit themselves through transdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary domains. The interconnectedness of the world challenges the extent to which we can know and how much we can know. Thus, depth and intensity of knowledge surface over different domains and terrains of disciplines where none can function in isolation or afford to be in exclusion. For example, when we talk about gender, we not only approach it within the scope of biology but also its sociological, political, philosophical and cultural significance. This opens a discursive approach to epistemic measures beyond a single domain. It also becomes an impetus for us to challenge knowledge's verification and validity methods. This can be substantiated by the prevalent feminist debates in epistemology that suggest the presence of privilege in epistemic spheres resulting in the gatekeeping of knowledge only to certain people belonging to privileged strata of society, rendering knowledge itself to be exclusive of those experiences that are cardinal of certain groups. At this point, transdisciplinarity, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinarity act as middle grounds to the frontier and kindle the possibility of attaining knowledge.

3. The Frontiers *about* Knowledge

The frontiers *about* knowledge raise critical questions regarding knowledge itself, such as the question of other minds, the power dynamics of knowledge, the propagation of knowledge etc. These questions not only act as frontiers but also help us to examine the givenness of knowledge critically. For instance, phenomenologists are concerned with the question of whether knowledge can be subjective or objective, while post-structuralists, like Foucault, are concerned with the politics of knowledge and the penetration of power into deeming what

knowledge is. Similarly, post-modernists are troubled by the grand narratives of the knowledge enterprise that marginalised the little narratives.

Frontiers are not only the barricades to something but also gateways to find alternatives so as to push further the extent of a domain. When it comes to domains that concern epistemology, one cannot afford to devalue the terrains that challenge itself provide. So, while we discuss how numerous the frontiers are, we are also to consider the numerous possibilities each frontier has to provide. This makes the enterprise of knowledge continuously dynamic and vibrant, moving between untruth and truth, darkness and light, and death and immortality. This is a journey from the known to the unknown and completeness to completeness rather than incompleteness to completeness.

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