

**Philosophy in Art Research**

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**Abstract**

Philosophy is the exploration, quest or search of truth, essence, idea or a thing that has certain value. In art research, there is a question, and we search for the answer. The answer is the essence. Ontology is the study of essence or existence. There is a method to find the truth or essence. Epistemology is the study of method or way of finding truth. What is the use or value of the truth to the researcher and the society? Does it teach or help us in our life? Does it provide us beauty and pleasure? Axiology is the study of the value of the research. There is a problem in a research area. We search for the solution of the problem. We have a method of solving the problem. The solution has certain impact on the society. The research area is explored from certain perspective. This article attempts to clarify the connection of philosophy and research methodology in the research of arts and humanities.

**Keywords:** philosophy, ontology, epistemology, axiology, essence, value, methodology.

**Introduction**

A research has a research area, and this area is looked or studied from certain attitude, perspective or world view. This world view is called research philosophy. A research has an essence or truth, and that knowledge is found by certain method (Holm et al. 2015). The finding of the research has certain value – it may be ethical or aesthetic. The truth is related ontology, the way of finding truth is related to epistemology, and the value of research is related to axiology (Everson, 1990). Ontology, epistemology, axiology and some other world views come under philosophy (Killam, 2013). Depending on the area of topic, we make a choice of philosophy and apply it in our research area, mention the method of exploration, and the process of study from the beginning to the end of the research (Goldman, 1986). This is called research methodology. Research philosophy is the integral part of research methodology.

In life, we face a problem. We have a difficult situation. Our life can be uncomfortable and painful. There is a need of solving it. We mention the problem clearly; this is called statement of problem. The statement of problem determines the research area (Robinson, et al. 2016). Research area is the area where there is problem. In other words, when we face some problem, we ask question related to the problem. This is called research question. The answer of research question is the solution of the problem (Suppes, 1999). This is also the thesis statement, the essence or the main point of the thesis or dissertation. Ontology studies the existence, essence or the truth. Ontology attempts to answer the questions like: What is truth? Who am I? What is existence? What is the essence? What is the main point of the research? What is the finding? What did you find in your research? What is the meaning of this work of art? What is the reality?

We are interested to find the answers of these questions. There is the method of finding the answers of these questions. What is the method of finding the answer, truth, essence or existence? How do you find the meaning or main point of your research? How do you gain the knowledge? Epistemology attempts to answer these questions (Everson, 1990).

The research finding should be valuable. What is the use of our research? Does it teach moral lesson? Can we use it in our life? Does it give comfort, satisfaction and pleasure? Axiology attempts to answer these questions. Axiology has two branches: ethics and aesthetics. Ethics is the study of morality

and ethical values in the society (Hart, 1971). Is it good or bad for the society? How can it help to enhance the society? These are the concerns of ethics. Aesthetics studies the beauty and pleasure of artworks (Benneworth, 2015). What is beauty? How does the thing give pleasure? What is the aesthetic value of your research? Aesthetics seeks answer to these questions.

A dissertation has an essence or main point. This is related to the ontology of the research. It has method to find the thesis statement. It is related to the epistemology of the research (Goldman, 1986). The result of the research also has the value or significance. This is related to the axiology of the research.

### **Research Methodology**

This research article attempts to link research philosophy and research methodology. It defines the terms related to these areas, summarizes the theories and world views, and clarifies the concept. Then, the concepts and theories have been applied to the research area. The article also presents how the terms of research philosophy can be used in the exploration of a particular topic. The research is based on the secondary sources like journal articles, books on research methodology, philosophy, art history and aesthetics. This is the qualitative research since the exploration of the area by different researcher can give slightly different result.

### **Defining the terms of reference**

Ontology explores the nature of reality, essence, truth or existence (Jacquette, 2014). There are many ontological perspectives. *Upanishada* states that *brahma* (absolute spirit, universal spirit) is the truth. Brahma is the essence and the source of everything. Everything is within *brahma*, thus, everyone is *brahmaswarupa* (enlightened or godlike). The aim of life is to realize it. This is the solution of everything. Many philosophers talk about truth, essence and existence. For Plato (1992), idea is the essence of reality. Prototype is the truth. The external nature is the imitation of the idea or the prototype. For Aristotle (1992), the truth is what we perceive through our senses. During middle age, for Christians, trinity (father, son and Holy Ghost) is the essence of the world.

Like Aristotle, empiricists argued that sense perception is the source of knowledge as the statement, 'I am, therefore, I think'. 'I am' means I have my body, and my body has sense organs for seeing, hearing, touching, tasting and smelling. I can hear, touch, smell, taste, touch and see. This is the source of knowledge. This is how I know the world, reality and truth. On the other hand, rationalists state that we gain knowledge through logic, reasoning and thinking as the Rene Descartes statement, "I think, therefore, I am". I have mind, I can think, so I know that I exist, I know that this is my body. A lunatic or animal may not be conscious of its body.

For Freud (1992), unconscious mind is the essence of all human activities including art, literature and politics. We have wishes and desires. All the desires cannot be fulfilled. Unfulfilled desires are suppressed within ourselves. They remain in our unconscious mind. Our life is driven by the unconscious mind.

Marx (1992) says that class struggle is the essence of our history and society. There are two classes in society- the class that works, and the class that lives on the other's work, master and slave, bourgeoisie and proletariat. All the activities are guided by class consciousness.

According to Croce (1992), the essence of creation and art is intuition. Intuition is the spark that flashes forth in our mind. The intuition is expressed in art. Emanuel Kant states that beauty is the essence of art. Hegel argues that absolute spirit is the essence of the world, life and art. Formalists argue that form is the essence of art. Structuralists state that underlined structure, code or system is the essence of language, literature and art.

The quest of essence, existence, reality or truth is the subject matter of ontology. There are various philosophies within ontology as briefly mentioned above. To find the essence, one or more of the

philosophies can be used as tools in the research (Benneworth, 2015). Artworks can be studied using these philosophical perspectives.

Ontology is the study of essence, existence or truth whereas epistemology is the study of the methods or ways how the knowledge or truth can be found or realized (Everson, 1990). According to empiricists, we can gain knowledge through sense perception (Paul & Elder, 1990). To know about reality, we have to see the thing, and we can know the color, shape and size of the thing. We can know the person or thing by hearing the sound. We know whether it is song, quarrel or conversation. We can get the knowledge of smoothness or roughness by touching the thing. We know about sweetness, sourness or bitterness by tasting the thing. We know fragrance of flower or perfume by smelling it. This is the method of knowledge. This is empiricist epistemology (Lemons, 2007).

On the other hand, according to rationalist epistemology, knowledge can be gained through logic, reasoning and thinking (Everson, 1990). The statement should be supported by proof, evidence or example (Lankford, 1984). There are two types of reasoning – inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning. In inductive reasoning, the statement is derived from a series of examples (Hayes, Heit & Swendsen, 2010). When we find similar conditions, in many examples, we can formulate a statement (Heit, 2000). There is the movement from general to specific, from examples to theory. When more examples are used, the statement is more probable (Fumerton, 2009). For example, this plant is green; that plant is green; next plant is green; other plant is green. These are examples. Thus, on the basis of examples, we can say plants are green. However, when we look more plants, we may find the plant of other colors. Thus, the statement is only probable, not 100% true.

In deductive reasoning, there is the movement from general to specific, from theory to examples. We have a theory, and we test or apply the theory on the examples. Deductive reasoning can be valid or invalid, sound or unsound.

The essence of Freudian psychoanalysis is unconscious mind. How can we know this essence? Through the analysis of dream, suppressed desires, wishes, tongue slip, literature and visual arts. Suppressed desires are stored in the unconscious mind. The desires are revealed in artworks. By knowing the artworks, we know about the contents of the unconscious mind of the artist. This is the method of gaining knowledge. Thus, this is epistemology.

According Hegel (1992), the essence or the truth of human life is the absolute spirit or universal spirit. How can we realize the absolute spirit? We can do so by reducing matter from the idea or consciousness, through the process of formulating thesis, antithesis and synthesis. We make a thesis statement. Other statement comes forth against the thesis. This is called antithesis. On the process, the matter is reduced from the idea. The process goes on and on until the idea or the absolute spirit is free from matter. This is Hegelian epistemology. For Hegel, painting is better than sculpture because painting has more idea and less matter than sculpture. And music is the best art form, for it exists without matter.

For formalists, form or technique is the essence. How can we find the form? We can find it by knowing the elements that deautomatize the automatized experience, by knowing the elements that renew our perception, and lengthen our perception. We know about the form by tracing and analyzing rhythm, metaphor, simile, symbol, paradox and irony.

Structuralists argue that structure is the essence of a work of art. How do we know about the structure? We know about structure by finding the underlined conditions, system, rules, codes, binary oppositions and hierarchy. Language has been possible due to the rules of the grammar. Epistemology studies the method of knowing essence, existence or truth (Fumerton, 2009).

Ontology is the study of essence, truth or existence. Epistemology is the study of methods of finding truth or knowledge. Axiology is the study of value of the truth or knowledge. By knowing about the structure, we can understand the things more deeply. We can apply the similar model to study other things. We know how things work from inside. By knowing about the Hegel's concept of "absolute spirit", we ourselves know the method of realizing absolute spirit. This is the value of our study. Axiology

has two branches – ethics and aesthetic. Ethics studies the morality whereas aesthetics studies the beauty. According to Plato, we should search for prototype or idea not the things in nature. This theory teaches the moral lesson that we should not focus to the material things in nature but the idea. Emmanuel Kant argues that art should have purposiveness without purpose. It does not matter whether the art has moral lesson or not but it should have beauty and should provide pleasure. This is Kantian aesthetics.

Positivism argues that the reality, truth or essence is only one. How can you know this? We know this by measurement of length, weight, speed and/ or time. The truth is same when it is measured by different people in different interval of time. The study of essence is ontology whereas the method of knowing is epistemology. A work of art has fixed meaning, and the meaning can be measured. Different people find same meaning.

Constructivism states that the truth is not fixed but it is constructed, made or created. There is no single meaning of a work of art. There are multiple meanings depending on the viewers, readers, time and place.

Research philosophy is a component of research methodology. Within research philosophy, there are many world views. In a particular research, we can use one or more philosophies as a method of exploration (Mukherji, 2000). We can use Hegelian or Freudian ontology, and empiricist, rationalist or structuralist epistemology. We can make a choice in positivism and constructivism. The study can be inductive or deductive, qualitative or quantitative. The information can be derived from literature review, interview, field study and interpretation of artworks.

### **Application of Philosophy in Methodology of Art Research**

Methodology is a way of finding a thesis statement of our research and supporting with evidence, argument and examples; it includes the steps from the beginning of the research to the end. This is the systematic process of exploration and study of particular research topic or research area. Philosophy is a component of research methodology. It is a point of view of looking at the subject matter (Hamersley, 1993). It is a perspective for analysis and interpretation of artworks. A research has particular ontology and epistemology; it has an essence and the method of finding that essence. A research has application in life; it can be ethical and aesthetic. In this section, the method of using philosophy in art research is clarified with examples.

For example, "Contemporary Nepali Arts: A Psychoanalytic Perspective" is a research topic. "Contemporary Nepali Arts" is the research area which is studied from the perspective of Freudian psychoanalysis. In a sense, Freudian psychoanalysis is a philosophy which has been used for the research as a tool for exploration, analysis and interpretation. Psychoanalytic theory states that a work of art expresses the unconscious mind, dream and suppressed and hidden desires. The hypothesis of this topic can be "contemporary Nepali arts express the hidden desires and wishes of the artist." When this hypothesis is proved, it can be the thesis statement of the research. This thesis statement is the answer to the questions: what is the truth? What is the essence? What is the existence? What is the meaning? Suppressed desire is the essence of the artworks. Suppressed desire is the meaning of the artworks. Suppressed desire is the truth. The research uses psychoanalysis as the theory or philosophy. In other words, the research uses psychoanalytic ontology. The essence of the artworks is suppressed desire but it is difficult to measure exactly what the suppressed desire is. The essence can be multiple. We may reach to the essence or near or around it.

What is the epistemology of the research entitled "Contemporary Nepali Arts: A Psychoanalytic Perspective"? The truth, essence or meaning of the artworks is suppressed desire. Now, how can we find this essence? We find this essence through psychoanalysis. This is the method of finding knowledge. We study the biography of the artist. We study the personal life, dreams, desires and wishes of the artist. We study the activities of the artist. We study the artworks created by the artist. We find the desires of the artist. We try to find what desires he fulfilled and what desires he could not fulfill. We try to find out how

unconscious mind, hidden desires and wishes have been presented in the artwork. He may be presenting what he has not done in his real life. This is the method how we find suppressed desire in the artwork. This is the epistemology of the research. This is the way how we find the truth. Thus, this research uses psychoanalytic epistemology for exploration. The meaning is not found but constructed. Thus, we can also use constructivism as the epistemology of this research. Different viewers construct the meaning in different way. Thus, the meaning of the artwork can be multiple.

What is the axiology of this research? What is the value of this research? Through the artworks, we can study the biography of the artist. We can know his hidden desires and wishes. We can get access to his unconscious mind. The viewers can get substitute gratification of their desires. They can fulfill their own desires by seeing the artworks. Through the artworks, we can understand the viewers' personality. What kind of works they like? Depending on their choice, we find their personality. This is the use of art. This is the value of contemporary artworks. This research uses psychoanalytic axiology.

This research uses qualitative method for exploration, for the artworks are viewed, observed, analyzed and interpreted based on subjective experience of the aesthetic object. The beauty and the effect of the artworks are not measured in number and calculated as in mathematics by applying quantitative method. The connection of the artwork and the suppressed desires is not direct but it is interpreted and explained.

The ontology of this research is the study of suppressed desire of the artists through the artworks. The epistemology of this research is the interpretation of the paintings, study of artists' dream, personal life, daily activities, wishes, desires and tracing of the unconscious mind. We can use this research to study the personality of the artist through artworks. This is the axiology of the exploration.

Let me present one more research topic and connect it to research philosophy. In the research topic "Formalisms in Nepali Abstract Painting", 'form' is the essence, truth or the object of our quest. The ontology of this study is related to the form. What is form? Form is the way of presentation, technique or style that makes a work of art different from the other, that renews our perception, that de-automatizes our experience, that makes us feel new and strange in the work of art. How do we find the form (the essence)? We do it by tracing the techniques and troupes of art. The techniques that create the form can be rhythm, harmony, coherence, contrast, image, symbol, paradox, metaphor, distortion, free association, perspective, balance and composition. This method of finding form is related to epistemology of this research. The aesthetic effect or experience that a form in a work of art creates is related to the axiology of this topic.

## Conclusion

Research philosophy is an important component of research methodology. Research methodology determines how we begin our exploration, how we formulate hypothesis, how we collect data, how we analyze data, how we support our thesis statement and conclude the research. A research topic has a research area, and this area is viewed, studied and explored through certain perspective, attitude, point of view or world view. This perspective or world view is the research philosophy. A research has certain essence or truth; the study of this essence is ontology. The truth, essence or meaning is found by using certain method. The method of finding knowledge or truth is epistemology. The finding or result of our research has certain use to the researcher and the world? Axiology studies the use of our research. The use of philosophy in research makes our study easier, comprehensive and clear.

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