Indic Epistemology for AI: Designing Reasoning Systems Beyond Monolithic Truth

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Dr. Narendra Gore

Atmakosh LLC

naren@atmakosh.com

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Abstract

Most contemporary AI systems inherit their epistemic assumptions implicitly from Western analytic traditions: truth is binary, justification is often reduced to empirical verification, and semantic meaning is primarily referential. Classical Indic philosophies offer a complementary set of tools. They treat cognition as layered, context-dependent, and value-laden; they recognise multiple means of knowledge; and they encode systematic ways of dealing with ambiguity and perspective. This whitepaper synthesises six strands—Vedantic cognition, Buddhist Abhidharma sequencing, Nyāya inference chains, Mīmāṃsa hermeneutics, Jain multi-valued truth, and Sanskrit semantic networks—into an epistemic design kit for AI reasoning. We argue that incorporating these ideas into architectures like Council Intelligence can yield systems that are more robust, transparent, and culturally grounded.

Keywords: Indic epistemology, Vedanta, Abhidharma, Nyāya, Mīmāṃsa, Jain logic, semantic networks, AI reasoning

1. Introduction

Current AI discourse focuses heavily on data, models, and compute. Much less attention is paid to the *epistemology* implicit in system design: what counts as a valid reason, how uncertainty is represented, and which perspectives are legitimised or ignored. These choices are not neutral; they encode philosophical commitments that shape system behaviour in subtle ways.

Classical Indic traditions developed sophisticated theories of knowledge over two millennia. Rather than centering a single method (such as empirical observation), they enumerated multiple *pramāṇas*, or valid means of knowledge, and debated how each should be weighed in different contexts. They also grappled with ambiguity, polysemy, and value conflict long before modern logic.

This paper surveys key concepts from six major strands and sketches how they can inform AI system design. Our goal is not to spiritualise AI but to extract concrete, formalizable insights that complement existing frameworks (Ganeri, 2001).

2. Vedantic Cognition

Vedantic schools distinguish between levels of reality and cognition. At a coarse level we can extract three ideas relevant to AI: layers of appearance and sublation, the role of prior conditioning, and the notion of a meta-observer.

The rope-snake example illustrates sublation: an initial mistaken cognition (snake) is later negated when higher-order knowledge (rope) arises. For AI, this encourages representing beliefs with explicit sublation structure, where new evidence can override old conclusions in a traceable way.

Vedanta also emphasises how prior dispositions (*vāsanas*) shape perception. Training data and objectives play a similar role for models; systems should surface these dependencies rather than treat them as invisible constants.

Finally, the "witness consciousness" metaphor inspires the idea of a monitoring agent that observes reasoning processes without directly optimising for task performance, offering an internal check on anomalies.

3. Buddhist Abhidharma Sequencing

Abhidharma decomposes mental events into streams of momentary factors. For AI, this suggests breaking reasoning into phases: perception, intention, evaluation, and meta-cognition (Frauwallner, 1995). Logging these phases yields richer interpretability and enables constraints like "no final recommendation without passing through an explicit risk-evaluation moment."

Abhidharma's view that wholes are patterns over moments, not substances, aligns with representing constructs like "user preference" as evolving time series rather than static labels.

4. Nyāya Inference Chains

Nyāya's five-member inference pattern—thesis, reason, example, application, conclusion—can be turned into a template for model explanations. Instead of free-form answers, systems can populate this schema, making reasoning more auditable and allowing validators to check for missing or invalid steps (Matilal, 1968).

Nyāya's catalogue of fallacies seeds critic agents that specialise in detecting overgeneralisation, irrelevance, circularity, and other errors.

5. Mīmāṃsa Hermeneutics

Mīmāṃsa offers algorithmic-looking rules for resolving textual conflicts, prioritising context-specific passages, and distinguishing primary injunctions from supporting narratives. Legal and policy AI can borrow these ideas for safely merging clauses or statutes, rather than relying purely on surface semantic similarity.

6. Jain Multi-Valued Truth

Jainism's *anekāntavāda* and *syādvāda* frame truth as conditional and many-sided. AI systems adopting this stance can represent beliefs as vectors of perspective-indexed truth values instead

of single scalars. Responses can be explicitly tagged as "true under regulatory perspective A, uncertain under ethical framework B," revealing value disagreements rather than hiding them.

7. Sanskrit Semantic Networks

Sanskrit grammatical and lexical traditions hint at rich semantic networks: Pāṇini's roles resemble dependency graphs; lexicons group words by semantic fields and polysemy patterns. Multilingual AI can leverage concept families and role labels to reduce brittleness and better respect Indic languages and concepts.

8. Application to AI Reasoning

Indic epistemology feeds directly into design:

- agents with explicit epistemic profiles (Nyāya, Jain, Mīmāṃsa, etc.);
- belief graphs with Nyāya-style reason labels and Jain-style multi-valued truth tags;
- user-facing explanations that expose inference templates, perspectives considered, and textual conflict resolution rules.

Coupled with Council Intelligence, these ideas yield reasoning systems that are structurally pluralist and transparent about their own limits.

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