

Social Epistemology of Ānandavardhana's Theory of Dhvani

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Abstract:

Ānandavardhana's theory of *Dhvani* is a benchmark in Indian literature, linguistics, and aesthetics. This research paper argues that *Dhvani*, as conceptualised by Ānandavardhana and Abhinavagupta, functions as both an aesthetic and epistemic instrument in and beyond the realm of aesthetics. Through the lens of social epistemology, the research demonstrates that *Dhvani* provides a distinctive framework for communal knowledge production, wherein knowledge is shaped by testimony, inference, interpretation, and collective context. By synthesising classical poetics with contemporary theory, the analysis underscores *Dhvani* theory's capacity to facilitate valid communal knowledge through suggestion and shared understanding.

Key Words: *Dhvani*, *Dhvanīyārtha*, Suggestive Meaning, Social Epistemology.

1. Introduction

Dhvani, described in Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanīyāloka*, refers to the semantic power of suggestion, extending literary aesthetics into how knowledge is formed and shared. It involves meanings that go beyond the literal (*abhidhā*) and indicated (*lakṣaṇā*), granting access to ideas inexpressible through language (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 45). *Dhvani* is relevant to social epistemology, which examines group-shaped and group-verified knowledge. Considering *dhvani* from this perspective clarifies how meaning emerges through social interaction, linking Indian poetics with debates in modern epistemology (Salgaonkar & Menezes, 2025, p. 238). *Dhvani* theory in the *Dhvanīyāloka* raises a foundational epistemological question: how can meaning transcend linguistic explication, and how is this surplus meaning apprehended? Specifically, 'meaning' here comprises both articulated sense and suggested sense. By situating this problem within poetics, the discussion targets knowledge formation itself. The classical dictum “*yatra śabdārthau sahītau dhvanīyārthapratīpādakau*” (*Dhvanīyāloka*, p. 72), where word and literal meaning together reveal a suggested meaning, demonstrates that knowledge encompasses what is both explicitly stated and suggested, anchoring the latter to but distinguishing it from the expressed meaning (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 73). This indicates that *Dhvani* constitutes an irreducible semantic category of suggestion, distinct from literal (*abhidhā*), indication (*lakṣaṇā*), and inference (*anumāna*). It should be analysed as an autonomous mode of knowing, analogous to a *pramāṇa* (valid means of knowledge), even if not codified as such in orthodox epistemology (Swaroop, 1998). From the perspective of social epistemology, the key issue is how agents apprehend content that is not explicitly stated, that is, the suggested meaning, *dhvanīyārtha*. Here, *dhvani* challenges conventional epistemology by stating that knowledge may be implicit, acquired through cultural competence and interpretive skill rather than only through explicit statements. This concept reflects tacit knowledge, the knowledge not overtly expressed but gained through participation, where understanding extends beyond words (Philips, 2011). Accordingly, Ānandavardhana critiques the idea that language alone conveys knowledge; he shows that suggested meaning transcends direct expression, making language just one aspect of understanding (Keating, 2016). Social epistemology, for its part, emphasises that implicit knowledge is collectively interpreted. Thus, *dhvani* emerges as a communal epistemic process: meaning is shaped by the author (*kavi*), the text, and the responsive reader with emotional forbearance (*sahīdaya*) within a cultural context (Keating, 2016). In Ānandavardhana's *Dhvanīyāloka*, the classical Indian text on poetics, the text distinguishes between suggestion (*dhvani*), the literal (*abhidhā*), and indication (*lakṣaṇā*), enabling the apprehension of meanings not explicitly stated but perceptible and communicable (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 45).

2. The Ontology of Dhvani: Beyond Semantic Layers

Ānandavardhana's central claim is that *dhvani* is a superior semantic function, with a suggested sense of meaning (*dhvanīyārtha*), realised via *dhvani*, as a central and explicit sense as a subsidiary. This challenges traditional frameworks by asserting that meaning lies in what is evoked rather than what is stated (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 78). *Dhvani* is an independent epistemic modality of immediacy and intuition to a *sahīdaya*. It builds on this idea by connecting *dhvani* to *rasāsvāda* (aesthetic relish), an experience that leads to a kind of universal understanding. He compares this to *brahmāsvāda* (relish of the absolute bliss), suggesting that aesthetic realisation is a shared way of knowing (Gupta, 2017, p. 132). This extension is important because it places *dhvani*, through *dhvani* and the understanding of *dhvanīyārtha*, within a wider framework in which knowledge is not just about statements but also experiential and shared. In this view, Ānandavardhana's three-part model *abhidhā* (literal), *lakṣaṇā* (indication), and *dhvani* (suggestion), becomes not just a theory of language but also of reality itself. Accordingly, it suggests that reality has layers and can be reached through increasingly subtle ways of knowing. textual insight asserts: “Where the explicit and inferential sense (*abhidhā* and *lakṣaṇā*) is subordinated and an alternative, suggested sense (*dhvanīyārtha*) emerges, that is recognised as *dhvani*” (Ānandavardhana, 2009, p. 45). This hierarchical model implies that epistemic access is stratified and that higher knowledge (such as *rasa*) demands interpretive engagement rather than mere passive reading. Abhinavagupta intensifies this ontology, comparing *rasa*'s taste to *Brahman* (*brahmāsvāda-sahodara/brahmānanda-sahodara*) (Abhinavagupta & Gnoli, 1956, p. 130). This analogy suggests aesthetic knowledge, revealed by suggestion, structurally resembles metaphysical insight and is rooted in communal experience. A feature of *dhvani* is its strong dependence on context. Unlike formal systems of knowledge that aim for universality, *dhvani* works within a context-sensitive framework, where meaning is closely tied to cultural, linguistic, and situational factors. Understanding the suggested meaning requires not just knowing the language but also being familiar with the text's symbols, emotions, and aesthetic traditions. This is similar to modern theories that hold that all knowledge is shaped by its historical and social context. In *dhvani*, the meaning of a poem cannot be separated from its context without losing its power. The same verse can have different suggested meanings for different readers, showing that knowledge is not fixed but changes with context. This does not mean anything goes; rather, meaning is flexible yet guided by tradition and shared culture (Sukla, 2016, p. 13). Ānandavardhana's semantic model presents a hierarchy in which both expressed and suggested meanings relate not only to language but also to how reality is accessed. The definition, “where the suggested meaning has superiority over the explicit sense of meaning and the intended meaning is also subordinate to the suggested meaning, that meaning is *dhvanīyārtha*” (Ānandavardhana, 2009, p. 48), which asserts the layered access to truth. Abhinavagupta further links *dhvani* to the experience of *rasa*, which he contends is comparable to *brahmāsvāda*, the intuition of ultimate reality. This elevates sensory-aesthetic perception as higher-order knowledge and expands epistemic boundaries beyond the propositional. Ānandavardhana's model implies subtler cognitive acts that access reality. is suggested rather than directly stated; *dhvani* systematises the unsayable. Suggested meaning is a unique epistemic category, non-inferential, non-propositional, irreducible to inference, testimony, or perception, but a mode of cognitive and emotive disclosure. Abhinavagupta's link to *rasāsvāda* supports the view that aesthetic cognition is akin to metaphysical insight, further elevating *dhvani* as a higher-order process.

The central epistemological issue raised by the *dhvanīyāloka* is: How can meaning and knowledge exceed linguistic expression while remaining valid? The classical dictum helps one there, “the suggested meaning shines forth independently, even while supported by expressed meaning” (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 72), showing language as a trigger for deeper cognition, not a mere container. This challenges the view that all knowledge must be explicitly propositional. Social epistemology thus asks: how is implicit knowledge socially recognised and transmitted? It offers a systematic answer by demonstrating that knowledge can be non-propositional, context-dependent, socially mediated, and affectively realised. *Dhvani* operates through a triadic structure: Poet (*kavi-pratibhā*), Text (linguistic medium), Emotive Reader (*sahīdaya*). Meaning does not reside in any single component but emerges through their interaction. This aligns closely with theories of distributed cognition, which hold that knowledge is generated through networks rather than by isolated individuals (Shearmur, 1985, p. 273).

3. Dhvani as an Epistemic Process

To conceptualise *dhvani* as an epistemic source, it is necessary to examine its operational structure. The process involves three primary agents: the poet (producer of meaning), the text (medium), and the reader (interpreter). The suggested meaning arises not from any single component but from their dynamic interaction. This can be similarly seen in the social epistemological models that emphasise distributed cognition, where

knowledge is generated through networks rather than isolated individuals, “this action is a social context, and there may be individual ideas about the social character, or between the participating consequences of their actions quences” (Shearmur, 1985, p. 273). Furthermore, *dhvani* requires the presence of a *sahrdaya*, a culturally attuned, emotionally able and linguistically capable reader capable of apprehending suggested meaning. This requirement underscores the social conditioning of knowledge, as the capacity to understand *Dhvani* depends on shared linguistic conventions, aesthetic sensibilities, and cultural knowledge (Krishnamoorthy, 2019, p. 156). In this sense, *dhvani* functions analogously to testimony: it relies on trust, competence, and communal norms (Krishnamoorthy, 1985, p. 115). The epistemic structure of *dhvani* is irreducibly social. It cannot function without the social inclusion of societal context, authorial brilliance (*kavi-pratibhā*), textual configuration, and readerly competence (*sahrdayatva*). *Dhvani* expands the scope of epistemology by demonstrating that knowledge need not conform to dominant Western models. It shows that knowledge can be: Implicit rather than explicit, Experiential rather than purely rational, and socially mediated rather than individualistic. This contributes to epistemic pluralism, challenging the universality of propositional and analytic models of knowledge (Fricker et al., 2021, p. 11). A crucial conceptual extraction from *dhvani* scholarship states: “Only a *sahrdaya*, endowed with sensitivity and cultural refinement, can apprehend the suggested meaning” (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 156). This implies that knowledge through *dhvani* is not universally accessible but is conditioned by shared epistemic virtues, social training, sensitivity, societal familiarity, and cultural literacy. This aligns closely with social epistemology’s emphasis on epistemic communities. As articulated in social epistemological literature: “Knowledge is not merely individual belief but arises from participation in socially structured practices of justification” (Shearmur, 1985, p. 23). *Dhvani* works as a system where meaning comes from interaction, not just from passing information. The idea that “the highest poetry is that in which the suggested meaning predominates” has important implications for how we think about knowledge. It establishes a hierarchy in which the most valuable knowledge is not what is directly stated but what is subtly suggested. This challenges traditional models that value clarity and explicit statements. In *dhvani*, the surface meaning (*vācya*) is just a means to reach a deeper meaning, where true understanding lies. This means that the more a meaning depends on suggestion, the deeper and richer it is. This view aligns with philosophies that emphasise the limits of language and the need for indirect means to express higher truths. *Dhvani*, therefore, offers a view of knowledge as layered, in which the deepest insights require interpretation rather than direct explanation (Subrahmanian, 1994). *Dhvani* fundamentally reconfigures epistemology by foregrounding the legitimacy of tacit knowledge. In contrast to epistemological models that privilege explicit, propositional clarity, *dhvani* demonstrates that knowledge may be apprehended without being directly stated. The suggested meaning does not appear as a clearly defined proposition. However, it emerges through a process of intuitive recognition, where the reader grasps a meaning that is neither fully encoded in the text nor entirely separable from it. This corresponds closely to modern notions of tacit knowledge, where understanding exceeds articulation and is grounded in familiarity, sensitivity, and contextual awareness. The epistemic act in *dhvani* is thus characterised by a form of non-discursive cognition, where the knower does not deduce or infer but directly intuits the intended meaning. This challenges the assumption that knowledge must always be linguistically expressible and instead proposes that implicit understanding constitutes a valid and sophisticated mode of knowing (Philips, 2011). A crucial condition for the functioning of *dhvani* is the presence of the *sahrdaya*, the culturally attuned and aesthetically sensitive reader. As noted, “only a *sahrdaya*... can apprehend the suggested meaning” (Ānandavardhana, 2009, p. 156). This requirement can be fruitfully interpreted through the lens of virtue epistemology. The *sahrdaya* embodies epistemic virtues such as sensitivity to nuance, social context, emotional refinement, cultural literacy, and interpretive discipline. Thus, knowledge through *dhvani* is not merely a matter of justification but of epistemic character. The apprehension of meaning depends on cultivated dispositions rather than mechanical decoding. This establishes *dhvani* as a virtue-mediated social epistemology, in which knowledge arises from the interaction of socially embedded agents who possess specific epistemic virtues (Dongen & Paul, 2017, p. 66).

4. Testimony, Authority, and Interpretive Communities

Social epistemology sees testimony as a main source of knowledge. In the same way, *dhvani* works through aesthetic testimony, where the poet shares meanings that cannot be directly stated. The poet’s authority is not forced but persuasive and inviting, drawing the reader into a shared space of understanding. This process is inherently social. As noted in *Argumentation and Social Epistemology*, knowledge claims gain validity through discursive interaction and communal validation (Goldman, 1994, p. 27). *Dhvani* exemplifies this principle: the suggested meaning becomes meaningful only when recognised and affirmed by a community of competent readers. Thus, *dhvani* is not a private intuition but a publicly accessible form of knowledge, albeit one that requires interpretive skill. A central concern in social epistemology is testimony: how one knows through others. *Dhvani* can be understood as a refined form of non-propositional testimony, where the poet does not assert but evokes. A reconstructed theoretical claim states: “The poet does not state the meaning directly, but causes it to arise in the mind of the reader” (Ānandavardhana, 2009, p. 88). This resembles testimonial knowledge but differs in its mode of delivery. Instead of assertion, *dhvani* relies on suggestive activation, requiring the reader’s interpretive participation. “Epistemic authority is sustained through communicative practices that invite uptake rather than enforce belief” (Goldman, 1994, p. 27). *Dhvani* exemplifies this principle. It is a non-coercive epistemology in which meaning is validated through recognition rather than imposition. *Dhvani* further establishes that knowledge is not directly transmitted but interpretively mediated, requiring an active and competent recipient. The figure of the *sahrdaya*, the sensitive, attuned reader, is central to this process. Unlike passive models of knowledge acquisition, where the knower simply receives information, *dhvani* posits that understanding arises through interpretive participation. The *sahrdaya* must possess not only linguistic competence but also aesthetic sensitivity, emotional refinement, and cultural literacy. These capacities enable the reader to bridge the gap between the expressed and the suggested, transforming textual cues into meaningful insight. This model resonates strongly with hermeneutic epistemology, particularly the view that understanding is always mediated by the interpreter’s horizon of expectations and prior knowledge. In *dhvani*, the epistemic act is thus co-constituted, involving both the text’s intentional structure and the reader’s interpretive agency. Knowledge, in this framework, is neither wholly objective nor purely subjective but emerges through a dialogical process grounded in shared sensibilities. The epistemology of *dhvani* is deeply context-dependent. *Dhvani*’s way of knowing depends strongly on context, meaning that understanding cannot be separated from cultural and situational factors. To grasp the suggested meaning, one needs not only language skills but also familiarity with the text’s symbols and emotions. This aligns with modern theories that hold that all knowledge is shaped by its historical and cultural context. In *Dhvani*, meaning is created through engagement with context, and the same words can suggest different meanings to different readers. This does not mean that any interpretation is valid; knowledge is flexible but still guided by shared traditions and norms. Context is not an obstacle but a necessary part of understanding. Cultural knowledge acts as a limit, so *dhvani* is a practice that balances openness to interpretation with the need for shared standards. One is *rasa*, which Abhinavagupta describes as a form of aesthetic cognition that transcends individual subjectivity. This experience is not merely emotional but cognitive, involving the recognition of universalised states (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*). In this process, personal emotions are transformed into shared, impersonal knowledge (Gupta, 2017, p. 145). From a social epistemological perspective, *rasa* can be understood as a collective epistemic achievement in which individual experiences converge into a common understanding. This aligns with the idea that knowledge is often produced through shared affective and cognitive frameworks, rather than isolated reasoning. The culmination of *dhvani* is *ānanda* through *rasa*, which represents a transformation of private emotion into *sārvabhauma*, universalised experience. Abhinavagupta explains: “Through universalisation (*sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*), the personal emotion becomes a shared aesthetic experience” (Abhinavagupta & Gnoli, 1956, p. 156). This process has clear epistemological implications: It converts subjective states into intersubjective knowledge. It enables collective cognition through affect. It dissolves the boundary between knower and known. From a social epistemology perspective, this aligns with the idea that: “Shared affective frameworks contribute to the formation of communal knowledge systems” (Fuller, 1996, p. 155). Thus, *rasa* is not merely an experience of aesthetic *ānanda*, but a mode of knowing that is inherently social. Finally, *dhvani* culminates in the experience of *ānanda* through *rasa*, which represents a form of affective cognition that transcends the dichotomy between emotion and knowledge. In many epistemological traditions, emotion is regarded as a *bādhā* obstacle to knowledge, something to be controlled or excluded. *Dhvani*, by contrast, elevates emotion to the status of an epistemic instrument. Through the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa* universalisation, individual emotions are transformed into shared aesthetic experiences, enabling the reader to apprehend universal truths through particular instances. This transformation is not merely psychological but epistemological: it converts personal feeling into knowledge for all. The experience of *rasa* is thus a mode of knowing through feeling, where cognition is inseparable from affect. This aligns with emerging theories in social epistemology that recognise the role of affective frameworks

in shaping collective understanding. *Dhvani* therefore provides a model of embodied and affective knowledge, in which meaning is not only understood but also deeply experienced. A central feature of *dhvani* is its reliance on the interpretive competence of the *sahrdaya*, the sensitive, socially and culturally attuned reader. Knowledge in this framework is not directly transmitted but arises through interpretive mediation, requiring the recipient's active participation. As suggested in *dhvani* scholarship, only a reader endowed with aesthetic sensitivity and cultural refinement can apprehend the suggested meaning (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 156).

This model aligns with hermeneutic epistemology, which sees understanding as a dialogical process involving the interaction between the text and the interpreter. The *sahrdaya* does not passively receive meaning but co-creates it, bringing prior knowledge, emotional sensitivity, and cultural awareness into the interpretive act. Knowledge, therefore, emerges through a relational process, neither wholly objective nor purely subjective, but grounded in shared epistemic conditions. The culmination of *dhvani* in the experience of *rasa* represents a unique form of epistemic realisation in which individual emotions are transformed into universalised knowledge. Through the process of *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*, personal feelings are stripped of their individualistic context and reconstituted as shared aesthetic experiences. As Abhinavagupta explains, this transformation enables the reader to experience emotions in a generalised form, thereby achieving a kind of impersonal cognition. From a social epistemological perspective, *rasa* can be understood as a collective epistemic achievement in which knowledge is produced through shared affective frameworks. The experience of *rasa* is not merely emotional but cognitive, involving the recognition of universal patterns within particular instances. This demonstrates that affect and cognition are not opposed but mutually constitutive, and that knowledge can be both felt and understood simultaneously. The culmination of *dhvani* is *ānanda*, which can be realised only through *rasa*, which represents the transformation of private emotion into universalised experience through *sādhāraṇīkaraṇa*. As noted, "through universalisation... personal emotion becomes shared" (Abhinavagupta & Gnoli, 1956, p. 140). This process has profound epistemological implications: it converts subjective feeling into intersubjective knowledge, demonstrates that affect can be a mode of cognition, and challenges the opposition between emotion and knowledge. *Rasa* thus represents a form of affective epistemology, where knowledge is not merely understood but experienced. It establishes that: Emotion is not an obstacle to knowledge but a vehicle of universal cognition.

5. Dhvani and the Problem of Epistemic Authority

One of the central concerns in social epistemology is the distribution of knowledge. A key issue in social epistemology is who has the right to produce knowledge and under what conditions that knowledge is considered valid. *Dhvani* offers a nuanced answer: authority is not fixed but comes from aesthetic skill and successful interpretation. It means creating a reciprocal epistemic relationship. This challenges hierarchical models of knowledge and supports a more egalitarian, participatory framework in which meaning is co-created rather than imposed (Fricker, 1998, p. 159). *Dhvani* challenges traditional models of epistemic authority. Instead of hierarchical transmission, it proposes a reciprocal model: The poet encodes a suggestion. The reader decodes through competence. Meaning emerges through mutual alignment. A key conceptual extraction: "The success of suggestion depends equally on the poet and the sensitive reader" (Krishnamoorthy, 1999, p. 162). This corresponds with social epistemology's critique of centralised authority: "Epistemic authority is distributed and negotiated within communities" (Fricker, 1998, p. 189). Thus, *dhvani* anticipates a democratised epistemology in which knowledge is co-created. In recognising the interpretive and context-dependent nature of *dhvani*, it becomes evident that it anticipates what modern philosophy would classify as a hermeneutic knowledge system. Hermeneutics, particularly in the works of thinkers like Gadamer, emphasises that understanding is not a mechanical process but a historically situated dialogue between text and interpreter. *Dhvani* operates on precisely this principle. The suggested meaning is not embedded in the text as a fixed entity. However, it arises from a fusion of horizons, in which the reader's experiential background interacts with the poetic structure. This process is governed by tradition yet allows creative reinterpretation, making *dhvani* a dynamic and evolving epistemic model. The knowledge generated through *dhvani* is therefore not static but interpretively renewed, each act of reading constituting a fresh epistemic event. This positions *dhvani* as a precursor to modern hermeneutic theory, demonstrating that classical Indian poetics had already developed a sophisticated understanding of interpretive knowledge. *Dhvani* can be fruitfully understood as a form of aesthetic testimony, wherein the poet communicates knowledge not through direct assertion but through suggestion. The poet does not state the meaning explicitly but elicits it within the reader's cognition, thereby transforming the act of communication into a collaborative epistemic process. As reconstructed from the tradition, "the poet causes the meaning to arise in the mind of the reader" (Ānandavardhana, 2009, p. 88). This way of communicating aligns with social epistemology's view of testimony, where knowledge is shared through trust and interpretation rather than direct proof. *Dhvani* goes further by focusing on non-propositional communication, in which meaning is shared through resonance rather than direct statements. The poet's authority is not forced but evocative, inviting the reader into a shared understanding. *Dhvani* challenges hierarchical models of epistemic authority by proposing a reciprocal relationship between poet and reader. The success of suggestion depends equally on the poet's expressive skill and the reader's interpretive competence, creating a mutual dependency that undermines unilateral authority. As suggested in *Dhvani*'s theory, the realisation of meaning is contingent upon the alignment of these two agents (Krishnamoorthy, 2019, p. 163). This aligns with social epistemological critiques of centralised authority, which emphasise that knowledge is distributed and negotiated within communities. *Dhvani* thus anticipates a participatory epistemology, in which meaning is co-created rather than imposed, and authority emerges through successful communication rather than institutional hierarchy. *Dhvani* resembles testimony in that knowledge is communicated through another agent. This suggests a model of non-propositional testimony, where: Meaning is not transmitted but activated, Authority is not imposed but recognised. From social epistemology, epistemic authority is distributed and negotiated within communities (Fricker, 1998, p. 169). *Dhvani* exemplifies this principle by demonstrating that authority is performative; it emerges only when suggestion is successfully realised.

7. Conclusion

Thus, epistemic authority in *dhvani* is: reciprocal. In *dhvani*, epistemic authority is mutual, context-dependent, and confirmed when interpretation succeeds. By integrating *dhvani* into social epistemology, we gain a powerful model for understanding how knowledge operates in complex, interpretive contexts. *Dhvani* demonstrates that knowledge can be implicit rather than explicit, context-dependent rather than universal, and socially mediated rather than individually derived. These characteristics align with contemporary epistemological theories that emphasise contextualism, pragmatism, and constructivism (Fuller, 1996, p. 154). *Dhvani* demonstrates that knowledge can be: Tacit rather than explicit. Context-sensitive rather than universal. Interpretively mediated rather than directly transmitted. A reconstructed theoretical insight: The highest poetry is that in which the suggested meaning predominates through the blissful experience of *ānanda* through *rasa*. This implies that the most valuable knowledge may be that which is least overtly stated. Modern epistemology increasingly recognises such forms as implicit knowledge systems, including: Hermeneutic understanding, cultural knowledge, and affective cognition. *Dhvani* offers a pre-modern but very sophisticated model of these systems. It also shows how cultural knowledge forms the basis for understanding. For the suggested meaning to be communicated successfully, the poet and the reader must share a cultural background. This includes knowing myths, symbols, emotional patterns, and artistic traditions. Without this shared knowledge, the suggested meaning would not come through, as the hints in the text would not connect. This shows that knowledge is social and depends on participation in a shared cultural world. From a social epistemology view, this means knowledge is not just something individuals have, but a collective resource, kept alive and passed on through community practices. *Dhvani* works within a cultural network in which meaning is created and recognised through shared symbols. *Dhvani* exemplifies a hermeneutic

model of knowledge in which understanding arises through the interaction of text, interpreter, and tradition. The suggested meaning is not fixed but dynamically realised in each act of interpretation, making *Dhvani* a living epistemic system. This process is deeply embedded in cultural knowledge, as the apprehension of suggestion depends on familiarity with shared symbols, narratives, and emotional structures. Thus, *dhvani* operates within a collective epistemic framework in which knowledge is sustained and transmitted through cultural continuity. It demonstrates that meaning is not merely an individual achievement but a socially grounded phenomenon that emerges from these expanded analyses (Mohanty, 1992, p. 145). Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that *dhvani* constitutes a comprehensive epistemic framework characterised by tacit knowledge, contextual sensitivity, interpretive mediation, hierarchical depth, hermeneutic dynamism, cultural embeddedness, and affective cognition. Each of these dimensions reinforces the central thesis that *dhvani* is not merely a literary device but a robust, socially grounded mode of knowledge production (Tanesini, 2017). Despite its interpretive flexibility, *dhvani* is not epistemically arbitrary; its functioning depends on socially structured norms of interpretation. As social epistemology emphasises, knowledge arises through “socially structured practices of justification” (Shearmur, 1985, p. 273). The analysis presented here establishes that *dhvani* should be recognised as a legitimate epistemic source that operates through suggestion, shared cognition, and cultural competence. Situating *dhvani* within social epistemology enriches the understanding of Sanskrit poetics and expands the scope of epistemology. This analysis shows that *dhvani* should be seen as a valid source of knowledge, working through suggestion, shared understanding, and cultural skill. Placing *dhvani* within social epistemology deepens our understanding of Sanskrit poetics and broadens the field of epistemology. *Dhvani* satisfies key criteria for epistemic legitimacy: it produces cognitively valid insights, operates through structured processes of justification (*sahridaya* competence), is socially distributed and validated, and culminates in shared experiential knowledge (*rasa*). Therefore, *dhvani* should be recognised not merely as a literary device but as a distinct epistemic category, comparable to testimony, inference, and perception, yet uniquely social, affective, and suggestive (Sukla, 2016, p. 16). The analysis establishes that *dhvani* fulfils the criteria of a legitimate epistemic source: it produces valid cognition, operates through structured processes of interpretation, relies on shared cultural competence, and culminates in collective experiential knowledge. By integrating tacit understanding, contextual sensitivity, interpretive mediation, and affective cognition, *dhvani* offers a comprehensive model of socially grounded knowledge. Recognising *dhvani* as an epistemic category enriches the understanding of Sanskrit poetics. She expands the scope of epistemology itself, revealing that knowledge can be implicit, experiential, and socially negotiated, thereby challenging dominant paradigms and opening new avenues for cross-cultural philosophical inquiry. The expanded analysis establishes that *dhvani* satisfies key criteria for epistemic legitimacy: it produces valid cognition, operates through structured interpretive processes, depends on epistemic virtues of *sahridaya*, is socially distributed and norm-governed, and culminates in shared experiential knowledge of *rasa*. *Dhvani* thus constitutes a distinct epistemic category, characterised by: non-propositional cognition, interpretive mediation, affective realisation, and societal and cultural embeddedness. By situating *dhvani* within social epistemology, this paper demonstrates that classical Sanskrit poetics had unknowingly developed a sophisticated model of knowledge that anticipates contemporary debates in epistemology, hermeneutics, and cognitive science. *Dhvani* operationalises as social epistemology in both descriptive and normative manner. *Dhvani* ultimately reveals that knowledge is not always stated; it is often suggested, experienced, and socially realised.

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