



# CONTRIBUTION OF PRATYAKṢA PRAMĀṆA IN LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING KARNĀTIC MUSIC.

S.R. SWATHI<sup>1</sup>, DR P. NATARAJAN<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of Vocal Music, Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts

<sup>2</sup> Research Supervisor & Principal, Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts



## ABSTRACT

*This paper investigates the function of Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa (perception), one of Indian philosophy's four modalities of true knowledge, in the learning and understanding of Karnātic music. From the aspect of Indian philosophy, this article highlights that the sensory perception, both ordinary and extraordinary, serves as the foundation for knowledge acquisition in Karnātic music. Each step of perception contributes to musical progress, from the early stages of passive listening to the advanced levels of intuition and improvisation. Concepts such as Nirvikalpa and Savikalpa Pratyakṣa and classifications such as Laukika and Alaukika Pratyakṣa are investigated in relation to Karnātic music education and performance.*

*Key words: Philosophy, Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa, Perception, Senses, Knowledge, Karnātic music.*

## Introduction

This article addresses the concept of Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa, mentioned in Indian philosophy, specifically in the Nyāya system, which relates to the field of Karnātic music. It investigates how different types and stages of perception shape the learning journey in Karnātic music from raw sensory input to refined intuitive insights. By connecting the philosophical principles to practical music education, the article underscores the relevance of traditional knowledge systems in contemporary artistic disciplines.

## Indian Philosophy

Philosophy is a Greek word which means the 'Love of Wisdom'. It is the exploration and critical examination of fundamental questions related to knowledge, reality, existence and the meaning of life. In short, Philosophy is 'Asking, Answering and Arguing for their answers'.

Philosophical traditions based in India are termed as Indian Philosophies (Darśana). According to Indian Philosophy, the ultimate aim of life is self-realisation (ātma-vicāra) and gaining liberation from sufferings, which is also known as Moksha or Kaivalya or Nirvana. To achieve this aim, Indian Philosophies give certain guidelines, such as Bramacharya, Ahimsā, Dhyāna, Yoga, etc. Following these guidelines, one can control his desires for worldly pleasures and attain true knowledge, which leads one to the aim of life, Salvation. The attainment of true knowledge is possible only by knowing the following

- Pramāta – The Subject of knowledge
- Prameya – The Object of knowledge
- Pramāṇa – Means of knowledge
- Pramā – The Valid knowledge

According to Nyāya Philosophy, Pramā & Apramā are the 2 categories of knowledge. Pramā is valid knowledge, and Apramā is invalid knowledge. (Barlingay, 1965)

## Pramāṇa

As per Indian Philosophy, Pramāṇa refers to the 'means of knowledge', 'proof'. Knowledge can be obtained in many ways. Based on Nyāya Philosophy there are 4 categories of Pramāṇas.

- Pratyakṣa (Perception)



- Anumāna (Inference)
- Upamāna (Comparison)
- Śabda (Verbal testimony)

This article deals with the Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa and how it helps in learning Karnātic Music.

### **Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa**

Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa denotes the sensory perception. Gaining knowledge directly through the 5 senses is the first source of knowledge for an individual (Satis Chandra, 1921). For this reason, Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa is also referred to as the First knowledge, Immediate knowledge, Direct knowledge and First impression.

Based on the concept of Tabula Rasa stated by John Locke, a human mind at birth is an empty slate, and it gets knowledge about the world only through sensory perception. The information perceived by the sensory organs was processed by the mind. The mind saves the perceived information and does the process of recalling and recognising whenever the information is needed.

For instance, A baby recognises its mother and gives her a smile

A little boy identifies his things correctly.

There are many learning theories in teaching methodology, which indicate the importance of the 5 senses in learning. E.g., Dugan Laird's sensory stimulation theory, Sensory integration theory developed by A. Jean Ayres. Likewise, these 5 sensory organs play an important role in learning Karnātic Music. To put it briefly, the ear helps to listen to the music, the eyes observe the structure of musical instruments, the body is used to play musical instruments and to do tāla, the mouth is used to sing & the nose is used for breathing, which is the fundamental and essential thing for a singer.

Even blind people learn to sing Karnātic Music and play musical instruments wisely. Observing these, it is evident that the auditory system (sense of hearing), somatosensory system (sense of touch), olfactory system (sense of smell) and gustatory system (sense of taste) are essential to learn Karnātic Music.

### **Stages of Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa**

#### **Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa (Earlier Stage)**

It is an indiscriminate and indeterminate perception. It is the initial stage of perception which can't be expressed in words. Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa can be described as the non-conceptual observation of an object and the state of mind after the direct perception without knowing the features and attributes of the perceived object.

e.g., Seeing the rainbow and not knowing what it is, what are the colours present, why was it appeared and etc.

At the Nirvikalpa stage of learning Karnātic Music, the learner can't understand what is Śruti, what is rāga & how to sing perfectly.

#### **Savikalpa Pratyakṣa (Later Stage)**

Opposite to the Nirvikalpa stage, Savikalpa Pratyakṣa is characterised by discriminate and determinate perception. It is the later stage of perception, which can be described as conceptual perception. In this stage, the knowledge was gained through the combination of senses and the mind. The attributes and



characteristics of the object were known. The mind will be able to generalise and discriminate the object and be able to comprehend the features.

e.g., Perceiving the rainbow and knowing what it is, the reason for its appearance, the colours present, etc.

In the later stage of learning Karnātic Music, the learner will be able to identify the rāga and its patterns. The learner will learn to concentrate simultaneously on sruti, tāla and lyrics. After practising, the learner will sing with perfection. (Sk Nur, 2024)

## Types of Pratyakṣa

There are 2 kinds of Pratyakṣa

- Laukika Pratyakṣa (Ordinary Pratyakṣa)
- Alaukika Pratyakṣa (Extraordinary Pratyakṣa)

### Laukika Pratyakṣa

Laukika refers to ordinary, and Laukika Pratyakṣa refers to normal or worldly perception, which involves the direct contact of sensory organs and the object. Seeing a pot, tasting a sweet are some examples.

Laukika Pratyakṣa can be further classified into 2 categories

- External – It is the process of obtaining knowledge through the 5 senses, which is the basic perception.
- Internal – It includes the sensory organs and the mind to gain knowledge. For example, knowing about desire, pain & pleasure, which is internal and does not have any physical form.

According to Nyāya Philosophy, each of the external sensory organs (Indriya) is material and the internal sensory organ (Mind) is immaterial in nature.

Relating these 2 categories to learning Karnātic Music, it can be concluded that the first stage of perceiving music is External, and the emotions like happiness, longingness, love, etc., are aroused by the perceived music in the Internal. The Internal perception involves the process of the senses which gets the contact of the mind influences the mental states (mood) of the listener.

### Alaukika Pratyakṣa

Alaukika means extraordinary, and Alaukika Pratyakṣa refers to the supernormal perception. This type of perception doesn't rely on direct physical contact between sensory organs and objects. Unlike Laukika Pratyakṣa, Alaukika Pratyakṣa goes beyond normal sense-organ contact, perceiving objects through unusual means or mental powers. Alaukika Pratyakṣa is further classified into three categories.

#### 1 Sāmānya Lakṣaṇa Pratyakṣa (Perception of Universals)

Sāmānya Lakṣaṇa is the perception of recognising the universal feature through identifying a particular. In other words, “It is the perception of a whole class of objects through the generic property perceived in any individual member of that class”.

Example: By perceiving an individual pot, the common characteristics of ‘potness’ were perceived, even though all of the pots in the world were not perceived directly. (Chatterjee, 1939)

In the process of learning Karnātic Music, a learner should come to know about Manodharma saṅgīta. At this advanced stage, there is a concept of singing Kalpanā svaras to a musical composition. By



understanding the rules and regulations of singing Kalpanā svaras to a musical composition, set to a particular rāga and tāla, one will be able to apply the same set of rules to sing Kalpanā svaras for any musical composition, set to any rāga and tāla. Even though this is an example of Sāmānya Lakṣaṇa Pratyakṣa, one should spend time regularly practicing Manodharma saṅgīta in their day-to-day life.

## 2 Jñānalakṣaṇa Pratyakṣa (Complex Perception)

It involves the process of sensing an object and recollecting its features with the help of prior knowledge. It means, a sensory organ can perceive a quality of an object, which is not attributable to the particular sensory organ. For instance, if one says that 'The tea looks hot', they perceive heat only with the help of their prior knowledge and experience & the heat was not sensed by the sense of touch. 'The stone looks hard', 'Chilly Paneer looks spicy' are some other instances. (Chhavi, 2022)

The Rāga System is the backbone of Karnātic Music. Each rāga has its own individuality in creating emotions. There is no musical composition without a rāga. Not only a musician, but also a common man could be influenced by the emotions aroused while listening to any kind of rāga.

There is a Notation system in Karnātic Music, which represents the musical information of a composition like rāga, tāla, gamakās, speed, etc. A Karnātic music learner should know about the methods of reading the musical notation in the later stages of learning. Despite listening to a musical composition, a Karnātic musician will be able to get the emotion of a certain composition by reading the notation itself. Thus, it is an example of Jñānalakṣaṇa Pratyakṣa where a musician perceives the emotion of a musical composition by seeing the notation itself and not by listening. Here, the emotions are not created by the influence of hearing, but are created by seeing and understanding the musical nuances which was already learnt.

## 3 Yogaja Pratyakṣa (Intuitive Perception)

Yogaja Pratyakṣa also refers to the intuitive, transcendental & supra-rational perception that goes beyond the ordinary sensory experience (Chhavi, 2022). One can experience the yogaja Pratyakṣa only through achieving the highest level of 'yogic practices' mentioned in Yoga Philosophy. An intuitive person experiences the intricacies, subtle nuances and hidden insights of the objects that are related to the past, present and future.

In this connection, a Karnātic music learner who practices the prāṇāyāma, dhāraṇā and dhyāna (which are the methods of Astanga Yoga), can understand the subtle nuances and get deep insights about Manodharma saṅgīta, the creative music. These gained insights will enable them to perform spontaneously at any time and in any situation. The yogic practice gives a good concentration level, which will be helpful to predict the upcoming rhythmic patterns in a tāla while singing. It facilitates the complexity of singing Kalpanā svaras and leads to the artistic rhythmic patterns of svaras at the concluding part of each āvartana. (Sambamoorthy, 2019)

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Pratyakṣa Pramāṇa, is not just a philosophical concept but a vital pedagogical tool in the study and performance of Karnātic music. From the early, undifferentiated experiences of sound in Nirvikalpa Pratyakṣa to the refined musical cognition seen in Savikalpa, and further into the realms of extraordinary perception such as Jñānalakṣaṇa and Yogaja, each stage marks a deeper integration of mind, body, and spirit with music.



The journey from ordinary sensory perception to intuitive and spiritual realisation shows the evolution of a musician. It reveals that musical learning is not merely technical but profoundly philosophical, where knowledge is a path to both artistic mastery and inner liberation.

## References

Vidyabhusana, Satis Chandra, "A History of Indian Logic", Calcutta University, 1921.

Chatterjee, S.C., "The Nyaya Theory of Knowledge", University of Calcutta, 1939.

Barlingay. S.S., A Modern Introduction to Indian Logic", National Publishing House, Delhi, 1965.

Mahajan, Chhavi, "Pratyaksha Pramana: A Comprehensive Review on its Types, Factors and Open Issues", International Journal of Novel Research and Development, 4 April 2022.

Upsar, Sk Nur, "The Nyaya Concept of Alaukika Pratyaksha: A Critical Analysis", Pratidhwani the Echo, January 2024.

Sambamoorthy P, "South Indian Music" Vol 4, Indian Music Publishing House, Chennai, 2019.

"Samanyalakshana definitions", [www.wisdomlib.org/definition/samanyalakshana](http://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/samanyalakshana)

Pratibha  
Spandan