



A Study on References to *Nāṭya* as seen in the *Āgama-s*

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Introduction Purpose of study

The aim of the paper is to study any available references to elements of *nāṭya* in the *āgama-s*.

Scope and Limitations of study

The *Pādma Saṃhitā* and *Pārameśvara Saṃhitā-s* of the *Vaiṣṇava Pāñcarātra āgama* form the scope of this paper. This paper is limited by the English translation, wherever available, of parts of the above two *saṃhitā-s*. The paper aims to only identify and understand the presence of *nāṭya* elements with the *āgama-s* as the base.

Methodology employed

Historical and comparative qualitative analysis has been employed.

Āgama

The word *āgama* is said to be derived from the root word *gama* which means "to go" and when prefixed with *ā* this is said to mean that which has been passed down by means of tradition from the *guru* to the *śiṣya*. The *āgama-s* are considered a set of methods and doctrines which cover modes of religious worship and are primarily three in number - *Śaiva*, *Vaiṣṇava* and *Śākta* (or *Tantra*¹) *āgama* with respective principal deities being *Śiva*, *Viṣṇu* and *Śakti*.

Āgama-s are divided into - *Cārya pāda*, *Kriyā pāda*, *Yoga pāda* and *Gñāna pāda*. *Gñāna pāda* deals with the cause of creation and dissolution, how the self is bound to the eternal and other matters of spiritual philosophical knowledge. *Yoga pāda* deals with how the

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¹ 'Agama In Hinduism', *The Spiritual Life* (blog), 9 August 2020, <https://slife.org/agama-in-hinduism/>. body as an instrument can be used to realise the Divine and the path towards the same.² *Cārya pāda* lays down rules for code of conduct, rules for worship, rules for rituals and festivals among others. *Kriyā pāda* states rules for constructing a temple, consecrating the idol, initiation of the deities among others.

Pāñcarātra Āgama

The *Vaiṣṇava āgama-s* are divided into - *Vaikhānasa* (by *Vikhanasa ṛṣi*) and *Pāñcarātra āgama-s*. The *Pāñcarātra āgama* is said to have been given by *Nārāyaṇā*, Himself.

The text is said to contain more than two hundred and ten *saṃhitā-s* where they are divided into *Divyā*, *Muni bhāṣita* and *Pauruṣeya* respectively referring to whether the *saṃhitā* was of divine origin, was passed on by a sage as heard from the Supreme Lord and man-made.³ The most prominent amongst all the *divya saṃhitā-s* are said to be the *Sāttvata*, *Jayākhya* and *Pauśkara saṃhitā-s* known as the *Ratna Traya* or three gems of *Pāñcarātra literature*, the expansions (also considered as commentaries) of these respectively being *Īśvara*, *Pādma* and *Pārameśvara saṃhitā-s* penned between second and fifth century AD.⁴

Dr. Schrader states that the total number of *śloka-s* in this *āgama* must amount to more than half a million with the oldest from the northern regions being the *Jñānāmṛtasāra* or the *Nārādīya saṃhitā* and the *Īśvara Saṃhitā* from the south.⁵

Pārameśvara Saṃhitā



This *saṃhitā* is said to be one of the oldest according to the 39th *adhyāya* of the *Pauṣkara Saṃhitā* and is said to be the basis for the rituals being adopted at *Śrīraṅgam* temple. Several other *saṃhitā-s* like the *Pādma Saṃhitā*, *Bharadvāja Saṃhitā*, *Viśvāmitra Saṃhitā* and *Viṣṇu Saṃhitā* are said to be based upon this one.⁶

This *saṃhitā* consists of more than one lakh *śloka-s* in twenty-six *adhyāya-s* and deals with the rituals to be practiced by a priest or spiritual practitioner, the rules for installing the

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² 'VedaPurana | Hindu Encyclopedia', accessed 30 December 2022, <https://vedapurana.org/single.php?s=347&word=Agama,%20the%20four%20parts%20or%20pada%3E&secure>.

³ Dr. Prabhakar Apte, *Sri Paameshvara Samhita (English Translation)* (Srirangam: Sri Vaishnava Sri, n.d.), 7.

⁴ F. Otto Schrader, *Introduction To The Pancaratra And The Ahirbudhnya Samhita*, n.d., 20.

⁵ Schrader, 7–17.

⁶ Apte, *Sri Paameshvara Samhita (English Translation)*, 18–19.

deity, the rules for raising the pillars, fire pits, the *mahotsava vidhi*, the rules for atonement and more.

Pādma Saṃhitā

This *saṃhitā* is said to be based on the *Jayākhyā Saṃhitā* and it is the text used in the *Varadarāja Perumāl* temple in *Kāñcīpuram*. This contains all the four *pāda-s* and is named thus as it was handed over by *Padma*, the *nāgarāja* to narrate the *Mahatsāstra* to *Samvarta*. Among other topics, this deals with mode of worship (*pūjā vidhi*) and the mode of conducting festivals (*utsava*). *Śrī. Vedānta Desikan* refers to several verses from the *Pādma Saṃhitā* in his book *Rahasya Traya Sāram*. The *Caryā Pāda* contains thirty-three chapters in which are contained the *mudra-s* used for worship and this is known as the *mudrālakṣaṇa vidhi*.⁷

Analysis of Nāṭya elements

- The *Pāñcarātra* is said to be based on the *vedic* concept of *varṇāśrama dharma* by which it means that this does not bar anyone from performing the rites⁸ as against the *Vaikhānasa* which is meant only for the Brahmins. In this, the essence of the origin of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* was also meant to benefit all castes as may be seen in the twelfth *śloka* which says *vedam pañcakam sarvavarnikam*.⁹ The cause for the origin of *Pārameśvara* and *Sāttvata saṃhitā-s* find similarity with the cause for the origin of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* in this respect. When sage *Śāṇḍilyā* is questioned as to how those who are caught up in the mire of mundane worldly emotions and tasks may be enlightened, the sage responds by saying that this *Pārameśvara saṃhitā* contains the entire essence of the knowledge required to attain the Lord in its sixteen thousand verses which cater to all scientific branches.¹⁰ In the *Nāṭyotpatti* chapter (*śloka-s* 13–16), we find a similar reference (both happening at the start of the *Tretāyuga*) where people began to indulge in preposterous activities and *Brahma* created the fifth *veda* (for all classes of society) which contained the crux of scientific ideas, art and all other fields thus acting as a guide for the future generations.¹¹

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⁷ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, xxv–xxxii, accessed 1 January 2023, <http://archive.org/details/PadmaSamhitaSeethaPadmanabhanSampathR.N.Vol1>.



⁸ 'Intro_to_pancaratra.Pdf', 3, accessed 30 December 2022, http://www.srimatham.com/uploads/5/5/4/9/5549439/intro_to_pancaratra.pdf. ⁹ Dr. N. P. Unni, *NATYASASTRA*, vol. 2 (New Delhi: NAG Publishers, n.d.), 4. ¹⁰ Apte, *Sri Paarameshvara Samhita (English Translation)*, 27–29.

¹¹ Dr. N. P. Unni, *Text with Introduction, English Translation and Indices*, 2:3–4.

• In the thirteenth *adhyāya*, the preceptor is required to construct a sleeping chamber for the Lord where the pillars are painted in various colours and there are icons of *Brahma*, *Rudra*, *Chandra*, *Sūrya*, sages, *deva-s*, *asura-s*, nymphs and others in bowing posture to the Supreme Lord. While awakening the Lord, the *Garuḍā*, *Ananta* and Goddess *Lakṣmī* are also invoked. Here the deities cited find fair similarity with the deities invoked during the *raṅgadeivatapūja vidhānam*, *śloka-s* four to nine (*namaskṛtya mahādevam*), where most of the above Gods are invoked but the primary deity is *Śiva*.

• In the same *adhyāya*, the *Kautukā* ritual has been described in detail where the priest is required to tie the *kautuka* on the right hand of the Supreme Lord for all rituals. The *utsava murti* is placed on the vehicle with all benedictory songs.¹² In dance, the *kautuvam*, is said to be performed when the *utsava mūrti*, or, *kautuka bimbam* as it is called (deity with the *kautuka bandham*) was taken around in temple processions.¹³ In the nineteenth *adhyāya*, *prayaḥchitta vidhānam*, the Lord is said to be carried in all eight directions pertaining to the *vāstu* deities accompanied by song and dance known as *bheri tāḍanam*.

• According to *Pāncarātra āgama vidvān Teruḷundūr Śrī. U. Ve. ŚrīRāman Bhattācāriyar Svāmi*, specific *raga-s* are said to please specific deities with one hundred and sixteen *raga-s* being mentioned in the *Pāñcarātra* of which only sixty four have survived. He says that *Naṭarājan* is also a name for *Kṛṣṇa* when he danced on the *Kāliṅga*.¹⁴

Bheri Tāḍanam

The *bheri* is considered to be a large drum (the exact form of *bheri* is unknown according to *ŚrīRāman Bhattācāriyar*) which when sounded with a cane informs all Gods, *deva-s*, rivers, mountains, kings and others regarding the commencement of the *Brahmotsavam*. As part of the *devatāvāhana pūja* of the *Brahmotsavam*, *bheri tāḍanam* is done for all the eight deities of the eight directions and for *Brahma* in the centre, accompanied by appropriate song and dance also known as the *navasandhi pūja* in the *Śrī Prasna Samhitā*.¹⁵ References to this are also found in the *Pādma Samhitā*.¹⁶ The *raga-s*, *tāla-s* mentioned in the

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¹² Apte, *Sri Paarameshvara Samhita (English Translation)*, 365.

¹³ Sangeetha .S and Raghothaman .Y, 'Bharatanatyam and the Worldwide Web', *Kauthuvams - A Study* (blog), n.d., sangeethas.wordpress.com/2008/09/19/kauthuvams-a-study/.

¹⁴ *Beri Thadanam - Explanation*, n.d., <https://youtu.be/R6MuswUsUW8>.

¹⁵ Dr. Sadagopan, 'Sri Ranganatha Temple Brahmotsavam: Part V - Bheri Thadanam', n.d.,

<http://www.ibiblio.org/sripedia/oppiliappan/archives/jun07/msg00177.html>.

¹⁶ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, 132–55.

literature against what has been used by *ŚrīRāman Bhattācāriyar* in his explanation are different.

Rāga

Tāla

Nṛtta

Svar
a

Naḍai

Lit. Rāga

Lit. Tāla



<i>Brahma</i>	<i>Haṃsadh v ani</i>	<i>Brahma</i>	<i>Bhujāṅga</i>	<i>Niṣā d a</i>	<i>Miśram</i>	<i>Madhyam ā vati</i>	<i>Brahma</i>
<i>Indra</i>	<i>Kalyāṇī</i>	<i>Indra</i>	<i>Bhujāṅga</i>		<i>Miśram</i>	<i>Gurjari</i>	<i>Sama</i>
<i>Agnī</i>						<i>Varātai / Nāṭṭai</i>	<i>Maṭṭav a rṇa</i>
<i>Yama</i>						<i>Ramagiri</i>	<i>Bhringi</i>
<i>Nirutti</i>	<i>Bhairavi</i>	<i>Nairutti</i>	<i>Vilāsa</i>	<i>Maṭy a</i>	<i>Catuśr a m</i>	<i>Kuntala / Bhauravu</i>	<i>Malla</i>
<i>Varuṇa</i>	<i>Amṛtavar ṣ inī</i>	<i>Varuṇa</i>	<i>Antarālā</i>			<i>Varālī</i>	<i>Nāga</i>
<i>Vāyu</i>	<i>Śrīrāgam</i>	<i>Jhampa</i>	<i>Prṣṭakuṭṭ i nam</i>		<i>Miśram</i>	<i>Mukuntava / Deśagirī</i>	<i>Bali</i>
<i>Kubera</i>	<i>Mohana</i>	<i>Somas y aMaṅg ala</i>	<i>Maṅgala</i>		<i>Catuśr a m</i>	<i>Melavaśrī / Gaudikā</i>	<i>Gaulī</i>
<i>Īśāna</i>	<i>Śankarāb h aranam</i>	<i>Īśānas y a jaya</i>	<i>Tāṇḍava</i>		<i>Tiśram</i>	<i>Malahari / Tundira</i>	<i>Bhakkai</i>

The *navasandhi kautuvam-s* used in *Bharatanāṭyam* follow the following *rāga-s*, *tāla-s*, *hastā-s* as prescribed in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Though the deities are the same, the lyrics are in *Tamiḷ*. The below has been taken from the Geethanjali series on *Navasandhi kautuvam-s*.¹⁷

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¹⁷ *Navasandhi Kautuvam In Bharatanatyam - Dance on the Gods Ruling the Nine Junctions or Directions.*, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCcdME1CfGs>.



Deity	Rāga	Tā la	Nṛtta	Vādyā	Hast a	Pann	Sulādīta a
Brah ma	<i>Mad hya m āvati</i>	<i>Brahm a</i>	<i>Kamala</i>	<i>Cacc at puṭa</i>	<i>Catura- Hamsāsy a</i>	<i>Ekarāga</i>	<i>Rūpak a</i>
Indr a	<i>Kū ca rī</i>	<i>Sama</i>	<i>Bhujāṅ ala litam</i>	<i>Cacc at puṭa</i>	<i>Tṛpatāk a in svastika</i>	<i>Gāndhāra</i>	<i>Miśracā ppu</i>
Agn ī	<i>G ha ṭa</i>	<i>Simh alīl ai taṭā</i>	<i>Nṛttajānu</i>	<i>Taṭā - kaṭā</i>	<i>Kāṅgul a- Tṛpatāk a</i>	<i>Kuldi</i>	<i>Rūpak a</i>
Yam a	<i>De sā kṣī</i>	<i>Bhriṅ gi</i>	<i>Dandapāda</i>	<i>Mecu l alita</i>	<i>Pāśa-Sūci</i>	<i>Kauṣika</i>	<i>Catuśra Eka</i>
Niru tti	<i>Kun d aḷa</i>	<i>Malhi</i>	<i>Bhujāṅ gat āsa</i>	<i>Nīti ma tya</i>	<i>Kaṭv ā- śakaṭ a</i>	<i>Taṭṭavās c apriya</i>	<i>Rūpak a</i>
Varu ṇa	<i>Va rā li</i>	<i>Nava</i>	<i>Kuñcita (sarpa svastika)</i>	<i>Simha nanda na</i>	<i>Śikhar a- Patāka</i>	<i>Śikhā mar a</i>	<i>Catuśra Eka</i>
Vāy u	<i>Rām akir i</i>	<i>Bali</i>	<i>Kānti</i>	<i>Pañca vādyā</i>	<i>Ardhapa tāk a- Arāla</i>	<i>Takkeśi</i>	<i>Rūpak a</i>
Kube ra	<i>Māl a vaśrī</i>	<i>Padm ag atasta m</i>	<i>Varus andh yā</i>		<i>Alapad ma- Muṣṭi</i>	<i>Takka rāg a</i>	<i>Rūpak a</i>
Īśān a	<i>Mal a hari</i>	<i>Aṛul</i>	<i>Brahmari</i>	<i>Ku mbh a</i>	<i>Muṣṭi- Tṛpatāk a</i>	<i>Āndhāṇi</i>	<i>Khaṇḍ a</i>

- In the seventeenth *adhyāya*, one of the *phala* for the vows to be taken by a devotee who wishes to follow the path of *dharma*, is that if one performs either vocal or instrumental music, they would become one with the *Gandharva*-s.¹⁸



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¹⁸ Apte, 311.

- The importance of song, dance and musical instruments may be seen at several instances with some being – *pavitārōhaṇam* (twelfth *adhyāya*), Lord turning to the side in his sleep, Lord coming on *Garuḍā* to give *darśanam*¹⁹, idol gratified in sacred fire, placing of the idol in the west of the *Maṇḍalā* diagram, placing of the idol on the chariot and others (thirteenth *adhyāya*). In the procession, *devadāsī-s* (temple maids) are said to lead with song and dance.²⁰
- The *Pādma Saṃhitā* talks of eighty different types of *rāga-s* with some being *Kāmada*, *Kedāra*, *Gauḷī*, *Deśākṣī*, *Mālatī*, *Bhūpāla*, *Madhyamāvātī*, *Pūrṇacandra*, *Mohana*.²¹
- Twenty-eight different *tāla-s* are mentioned which include *Aṭa*, *Jhampa*, *Garuḍa*, *Jaya*, *Brahma*, *Malla*, *Sama*, *Madhyama*, *Tripata*, *Dhruva*, *Maṅgala*.²²
- Eighty eight types of instruments are also mentioned here, with some of them being, *Damaruka*, *Timila*, *Mardala*, *Malla*, *Muraja*, *Dundubhī*, *Veeṇā*, *Śaṅkha*, *Venu*, *Nāga* and *Paṭaha*.²³
- Fifty-two types of dance forms are mentioned in this with some of them being *Alaṅkāram*, *Avakuñcitam*, *Avabhāsam*, *Kamalam*, *Karaṇam*, *Kuñcitam*, *Kartarī*, *Kaṭibandhanam*, *Maṅgalam*, *Patākā*, *Vilāsam*, *Sūcī*, *Viṣṇukrāntam*, *Bhadramāli*, *Maṇḍalam*, *Dvayam*, *Ketakam*, *Cakramāṇḍalam*, *Cārī*, *Deśimaṇḍalam*, *Siddham*, *Saumyam* and *Svastikam*.²⁴
- The twenty second chapter of the *Pādma Saṃhitā* talks of fifty-eight types of *mudrā-s* used for worship and reference to deities. Similarity between the *mudrā-s* and *hasta-s* used in *Bharatanāṭyam* have been identified and enumerated.²⁵

Category of <i>Mudrā-s</i>	<i>Pādma Saṃhitā mudrā</i>	<i>Hasta in Bharatanāṭyam</i>
<i>Vasudeva-Vyūha mudrā-s</i>	<i>Vasudeva</i>	<i>Añjali</i> on forehead
	<i>Saṅkarṣaṇa</i>	<i>Añjali</i> on chest
<i>Trimūrtyaḥ mudrā-s</i>	<i>Brahma</i>	<i>Añjali</i>

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¹⁹ Apte, *Sri Paarameshvara Samhita (English Translation)*, 313.

²⁰ Apte, 312–18.

²¹ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, 71, accessed 29 December 2022,

<http://archive.org/details/PadmaSamhitaSeethaPadmanabhanSampathR.N.Vol1>.

²² *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, 71. ²³ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, 71. ²⁴ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1*, 72.



Category of Mudrā-s	Pādma Saṃhitā mudrā	Hasta in Bharatanāṭyam
	<i>Rudra</i>	Śikhara on both hands with fingers and thumb touching
Dharmādimudrā	<i>Dharmamudrā</i>	Two <i>hamsāsya</i> touching each other at the joint of forefinger and thumb
	<i>Vairāgyamudrā</i>	Two <i>mayūra</i> facing each other
	<i>Satyamudrā</i>	<i>Mukula</i> on right
	<i>Lakṣmī</i>	<i>Arāla</i> on right
	<i>Māyā</i>	<i>Triṣūla</i> on right
Dvāradevatā	<i>Caṇḍaḥ Pracaṇḍaḥ</i>	Two <i>Sūci hasta-s</i> facing each other
	<i>Gaṅgā-Yamunā</i>	Two <i>Bāṇa hasta-s</i> facing each other ²⁶
	Śaṅkhanidhi Padmanidhi	Two <i>Bāṇa hasta-s</i> facing each other
Viṣṇupariśadāḥ	<i>Ananta</i>	<i>Sarpaśīrṣa</i> on right
Bhagavataḥ Bhuṣaṇāyudhāni	<i>Kirīṭamudrā</i>	<i>Kapota hasta</i>
	<i>Śrīvatsa</i>	<i>Kapota hasta</i> near right side of chest
	<i>Śaṅkhamudrāḥ</i>	<i>Śaṅkha hasta</i>



	<i>Pāśamudrāḥ</i>	<i>Mṛgaśīrṣa hasta</i>
	<i>Aṅkuśamudrāḥ</i>	<i>Pāśa hasta</i>
	<i>Muṣṭimudrāḥ</i>	<i>Muṣṭi hasta</i>

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²⁶ Prof. P. S.R. Appa Rao, *Abhinaya Darpanam of Nandikeswara*, First Edition (Hyderabad: A Natyamala Publication, 1997), 251.

Category of <i>Mudrā-s</i>	<i>Pādma Saṃhitā mudrā</i>	<i>Hasta in Bharatanāṭyam</i>
<i>Daśāvātārāḥ</i>	<i>Kūrmamudrāḥ</i>	Similar to <i>matsya mudrā</i> of <i>Pādma Saṃhitā</i> but the little finger and thumb are out just as in the <i>Abhinaya Darpaṇa hasta</i> for <i>Kūrma</i>
	<i>Kolarūpimudrāḥ</i>	Used for <i>varāha avatara</i> and is similar to the <i>kapota hasta</i>
	<i>Nṛsimha mudrāḥ</i>	Two <i>hamsāsya hasta-s</i> facing each other
	<i>Vāmana mudrāḥ</i>	<i>Śikhara hasta</i>
	<i>Rāma mudrāḥ</i>	Similar to <i>Abhinaya Darpaṇa</i> but <i>Śikhara</i> is replaced by <i>Muṣṭi</i>
	<i>Kṛṣṇa mudrāḥ</i>	<i>Añjali</i> on chest
	<i>Buddha mudrāḥ</i>	<i>Hamsāsya</i>
	<i>Kalki mudrāḥ</i>	<i>Śikhara</i> on right atop <i>Mṛgaśīrṣa</i> on left

- Ten *aṅganyāsamudrā-s* and forty *itaramudrā-s* are mentioned in the *Pādma Saṃhitā*. The *praṇāma mudrā* which is also used for the same reason as *añjali* is done by holding the *añjali* above the forehead. The *svāgata mudrā* uses *puṣpapuṣa hasta* as though to welcome.



Kumbhamudrā uses the *puspapuṭa hasta* vertically which is used commonly in *Bharatanāṭyam* to show a pot. One of the uses of the *siṃhamukha hasta* is to show *homa* and the *homamudrā* in the *saṃhitā* uses this *hasta*. The *siṃhamukha* is also used to show denote the *āhutimudrā* and *kroḍamudrā*. *Muṣṭi* is used to show *balimudrā* and *kavacamudrāḥ*. One of the *vinīyoga hasta-s* of *muṣṭi* is to clasp the hair and this is seen in the *aṅganyāsamudrā śikhāmudrāḥ*. The *vinīyoga* of *śikhara hasta* may also be to put *tilaka*²⁷ while this is used as *netramudrāḥ* in the *saṃhitā*. *Tattvamudrāḥ* is depicted using *hamsāsya hasta* on right.²⁸

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²⁷ Prof. P. S.R. Appa Rao, 190.

²⁸ *Padma Samhita Seetha Padmanabhan Sampath R. N. Vol 1, 62–92.*

Inferences

Dance, music and the playing of kettle drums, conch and other instruments was an integral part of temple rituals as seen at various instances and in the specific mention of *devadasi-s*.

Bheri tādānam was probably a precursor for the lyrics of the *navasandhi kauthuvam*. The clarity on whether the *rāga-s*, *tāla-s* and others mentioned in the *āgama* are in vogue today or they are being used with a different name is not understood as these are largely extant.

The *mudrā-s* and *hasta-s* find similarity in form but the *vinīyoga* is varied. The *Buddha hasta* being used in the *āgama* makes one contemplate if it really referred to the *avatāra* as known today or just the *Buddha* meaning the enlightened soul.

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