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STUDY OF HAND GESTURE RECOMMENDATIONS IN BHARATĀRṆAVA DEPICTING VARIOUS FORMS OF LORD ŚIVA

B.Shobana¹, Dr.Sujatha Mohan²

**¹Research Scholar, School of Music and Fine Arts, Vels University, Pallavaram, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu, India**

**²Research Supervisor, School of Music and Fine Arts, Vels University, Pallavaram, Chennai,
Tamil Nadu, India**

1E-MAIL: laasyamthandavam@gmail.com

2E-MAIL: bharathanrithyam@gmail.com

Abstract

Bharatārṇava, authored by Nandikeśvara is one of the invaluable treatises that has ample technical informations needed for Indian classical dances. In addition to the fifteen main chapters, Bharatārṇava has appendix consisting details on abhinaya (histrionic representation). The sub topic Brahmāḍidevā (under an individual appendix topic called Abhinayaviśeṣā) has abhinaya recommendations for depicting principal Hindu God/Goddess. The objective of this paper is to study and analyze the hand gestures recommended for depicting various forms of Lord Śiva under Brahmāḍidevā. The results of this study exhibit that the abhinaya recommended for the deity is mainly based on the nature, feature, popular act and attributes of that particular form of Śiva. Equally significant outcome of this study are the critical observations about the correlation gap between the contents of appendix and the contents of main chapters, thus paving way to new studies and research.

Keywords: Bharatārṇava, Nandikeśvara, Abhinaya, Hasta, Sthānaka, Hand gestures, Śiva, Pañcamūrti

1.INTRODUCTION

1.1.INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE AND TREATISES

Indian classical dances are traditional dance forms of India that has evolved over a long period of time. We have eight classical dances in India and each one portrays its own gestures, expressions, steps, postures and much more. Such representations not only reflect the sentiments, ancient standards and history of the society where the dances have been evolved but also an embodiment of the deep artistic and aesthetic aspects of the society. A well structured and completely established stance of Indian classical dances made it possible to be codified into various forms of treatises. A diverse and rich collection of such ancient classical dance treatises are a treasure and in fact an ultimate guidance to dancers in this modern era.

1.2.BHARATĀRṆAVA

Bharatārṇava is a rare and important treatise on the theoretical and technical knowledge of Indian classical dance, authored by Nandikeśvara. The period of this text is not so certain and is placed between 11th to 16th century by various scholars. The Bharatārṇava used for this study, edited by Sri.K.Vasudeva Sāstri has been gathered by a number of sources. In the introduction of this book, it is mentioned that apart from the original Bharatārṇava, this book has contents from other sources namely Guhēśa Bharata Lakṣaṇam, Sumathi Bhōdhaka Bharatārṇavam and Pārvati Prayukta Bharatārṥha Candrikā. Originally, Bharatārṇava is described as a text of 4000 ślokas/verses. However, the available ślokas are only from 101 to 810.

1.3.THE AUTHOR

Abhinaya darpaṇa is referred as an abridgment of Bharatārṇava and both the treatises are authored by Nandikeśvara.

1. The introduction of Bharatārṇava edited by Sri.K.Vasudeva Sāstri indicates the mention of 5 works of



Nandikeśvara. The first being Nandikeśvara Samhita and the second being Bharatārṇava itself. In this book, there is no explicit mention of relating Nandikeśvara authoring Abhinaya Darpaṇa. 2. In the book “Nandikēśvara’s Abhinayadarpaṇam” by Prof. Manomohan Gosh, while discussing the author of Abhinaya darpaṇam it has been mentioned that ‘according to Mm.Ramakrishna Kavi, Abhinaya darpaṇam is one of the chapters and probably the only available chapter of Nandikeśvara’s Nandikeśvara Samhita,whilerest of the work is extinct’. According to this statement, Abhinaya darpaṇa precedes Bharatārṇava hinting us Abhinaya darpaṇa may not be the abridgment of Bharatārṇava. Scholars have placed both the texts in different centuries and interestingly according to some scholars like Mm.Ramakrishna Kavi, Bharatārṇava seems to be of a later period than Abhinaya darpaṇa. While we connect the citations from “Bharatārṇava edited by Sri.K.Vasudeva Sāstri” and “Nandikeśvara’s Abhinayadarpaṇam by Prof. Manomohan Gosh”, we could hypothesize that

- Abhinaya Darpaṇa is one of the chapters of Nandikeśvara Samhita
- Nandikeśvara Samhita is the first of the five works of Nandikeśvara
- Bharatārṇava is the second of the five works of Nandikeśvara
- Thus Abhinaya Darpaṇa and Bharatārṇava are authored by the same author Nandikeśvara

However there are researches and findings that show the authors could be carrying the same name but may not be the same person. In Sreenivasarao’s blog on comparing Bharatārṇava and Abhinaya Darpaṇa, it has been presented in detail that over centuries, scholars, ancient authorities, poets etc were being referred as Nandikeśvara and each named Nandikeśvara do not refer to one and same person. Be that as it may, our objective here is to study the hand gestures used in Abhinaya detailed in the book Bharatārṇava and Nandikeśvara mentioned throughout this study hereafter refers to the author of Bharatārṇava.

1.4.ABHINAYAVIŚEṢĀ

The Abhinayaviśeṣā is one of the topics listed under appendix of Bharatārṇava. In the introduction of this book, the editor has specified that there are few additional manuscripts focused on Abhinaya and cannot be fitted under any chapterization of the book. Thus they are listed under Appendix. Abhinayaviśeṣā provides a recommendation of Abhinaya for Principal deities (Brahmādidevā), Dīkṣāpālas, Sunrise through Sunset, Navagrahas, Bhairava-Bhairavī, apsaras Ūrvaśī and five great elements. This topic interests me as the author takes the work that has to be depicted and guides us how it can be represented from the perspective of the end work itself. In other words, instead of listing uses of hand gestures, the author provides details on the application of the hand gesture in order to depict a subject-matter. As a first step in the search for knowledge, I have taken the sub topic Brahmādidevā that lists the poses for depicting principal deities and analyzed the idea behind the hasta (hand gesture) recommendations provided by the author for various forms of Lord Śiva. Furthermore, as Abhinayaviśeṣā is under appendix of Bharatārṇava, I’m also eager to see how well this content is connected with the main chapters of the book.

1.5.BRAHMĀDIDEVĀ

Brahmādidevā (Lord Brahma and all other Gods), the pivot of our analysis is a sub topic under Abhinayaviśeṣā. In Brahmādidevā, the poses for depicting the principal deities are explained. Here the principal deities are Vighnēswara, Brahma, Viṣṇu and his avatārs, Śiva and his forms, Goddesses Saraswati, Lakṣmī dēvi, Pārvati dēvi and Durgā, Manmatha and Ṣaṇmukha. I have analyzed the hand gestures provided for various forms of Lord Śiva to discover their embedded intent.

2.ANALYSIS AND RESULTS :VARIOUS FORMS OF LORDŚIVA

The recommendations on hand gestures and standing posture for depicting various forms of Lord Śiva are studied. Though only hand gestures are thoroughly analyzed, definitions for standing postures are given alongside from the main chapters to provide a holistic view of the author's proposal.



Left Hand Gesture: Mṛgaśīrṣa Right Hand Gesture: Śūla Mudra Standing posture: Śaiva Sthānaka
Śaiva sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava: Place one foot on ground and raise the other leg with knee bent and obliquely stretched over the leg placed on ground.
Analysis and Result: Mṛgaśīrṣa on the left hand could be denoting a ḍamaru (a small two-headed drum) and Śūla mudra on right hand denotes holding of Triśūla or trident, a weapon of Lord Śiva. Hasta definition for Śūla or Triśūla hasta is not available in Bharatārṇava. So we can assume that stretching out index, middle and ring fingers straight while bending the little finger and holding it using the thumb is the most commonly known way of representing Triśūla or trident. Interestingly, Tāmracūḍa hasta has a similar but not exactly the same definition as the most common representation of Triśūlahasta. Tāmracūḍa hasta definition in Bharatārṇava: If first, middle and ring finger are stretched out and the thumb reaches the base of the little finger, it is Tāmracūḍa hasta and primarily it can be used to denote three Vedas, three worlds and the four castes. Looking at the definition and recommended usages, we wonder why author has rather recommended Śūla mudra (which is not available in the text) than recommending Tāmracūḍa hasta (which is defined in the text) to represent the holding of Triśūla.

2.2.ARDHANĀRĪŚWARA

Left Hand Gesture: Padmakōśa hasta Right Hand Gesture: Triśūla hasta Standing posture: Śaiva Sthānaka
(Refer “2.1. SADĀŚIVA” for analysis on Śūla Mudra or Triśūla hasta) (Refer “2.1. SADĀŚIVA” for Śaiva sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava) Analysis and Result: Ardhanārīśwara is depicted as Lord Śiva on the right side and Goddess Pārvati on the left side. Left hand gesture represents Goddess Pārvati holding a lotus and the right hand gesture represents Lord Śiva holding his weapon Triśūla.

2.3.THE ABHINAYA OF THE FIVE FACED MŪRTI OF ŚIVA

2.3.1.SADYŌJĀTA

Hand Gesture: Hamsāsya Mudra near the ears Standing posture: Śaiva Sthānaka
(Refer “2.1. SADĀŚIVA” for Śaiva sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava.)
Analysis and Result: Sadyōjāta is said to be the controlling Lord of Brahma and is associated with the power of creation. In the uses of Hamsāsya hasta, the author has mentioned that if it is held near ear it may denote tale-bearing which is not relevant at all while depicting Sadyōjāta and thus this aspect of the hasta usage is ruled out. Hamsāsya hasta near the ears can be assumed as Hamsāsya hasta near the temple indicating mind.

2.3.2.VĀMA DĒVA MŪRTI

Hand Gesture: Śikhara hasta at the lowered forehead and Ākāśa mudra at the heart
Analysis and Result: Vāma dēva is said to be the controlling Lord of Viṣṇu and is associated to the power of preservation. One of the uses of Śikhara hasta is to represent permanence, however the author hasn't specified the position of the hasta under usages. Yet we can relate that when Śikhara hasta is held at a lowered forehead symbolizes permanence. Other hand holds Ākāśa mudra at the heart. The definition of Ākāśa mudra as such is not available in Bharatārṇava. However it is a popular mudra in yōga where the middle finger is believed to be the seat for the Ākāśa or space element. In yōga, to hold Ākāśa mudra, the tip of the middle finger should be pressed to the tip of the thumb, while stretching out other fingers (Inner Yoga). It is worthy to be noted that the author has an almost identical description for Mudrā hasta (middle finger and thumb are joined and other fingers are stretched out), one of the Nṛtta hastas in Bharatārṇava. This finding leads us to peruse the definition and uses of Mudrā hasta in order to discern the author's thought behind rather stating as Ākāśa mudra than referring as Mudrā hasta. One of the uses of Mudrā hasta is listed as showing Cin mudra (symbol of knowledge).

• Let's first look at Cin mudra. In yōga, Cin mudra is referred to as a gesture of consciousness where the thumb and index fingers touch at the tips while other fingers are stretched out (Ambuja Yoga) (Note that index finger and not middle finger). So the definition of Cin mudra and Mudrā hasta are not the same, yet



the author has listed Cin mudra as one of the uses of Mudrā hasta. Let's for an instance assume that index finger and thumb are joined to form Mudrā hasta, then it justifies why the author did not mention Mudrā hasta for Vāma dēva and also justifies listing Cin mudra as one of the uses of Mudrā hasta. However we do not have concrete research supporting any such assumption, so the question on the description of Mudrā hasta remains open.

- Let's look into the "Symbol of knowledge". In yōga, the symbol of knowledge is the Jñāna mudra. While certain yōga practices recognize Cin mudra and Jñāna mudra are same while certain other yōga practices cite them as different. According to the latter, Jñāna mudra gesture is the same as Cin mudra except that the palm is faced upwards in Cin mudra and is faced downwards in Jñāna mudra (Ambuja Yoga). Regardless of Cin mudra and Jñāna mudra being the same or different, it is apparent that the index finger and thumb are joined to form the mudra that symbolizes knowledge. This strengthens our open question about the description of Mudrā hasta and why it was not directly referred to be used for Vāma dēva.

- Another arresting detail is that the author has in fact defined Jñāna hasta as one of the Nṛtta hastas except that the gesture is slightly different from the definitions given in yōga practices. Per the author, if one hand holds Patāka and the other holds Hamsāsya hasta over it, then it is called Jñāna hasta. While the findings from above explorations are much into the technique of holding a mudra or hasta, the author's perception of using Ākāśa mudra to represent Vāma dēva mūrti could be to indicate the power of knowledge. Thus Śikhara hasta and Ākāśa mudra together could be an act of showing the highest power of knowledge.

2.3.3.AGHŌRA MŪRTI

Hand Gesture: Kartharīmukha hasta before face Standing posture: Ālīdha Ālīdha Sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava: Left foot is planted firm and right foot is placed at a distance of 5spans forward. The definition expresses the vigilant body posture ready to shoot the target if needed. Analysis and Result: Aghōra is the controlling Lord of Rudra and is associated with the power of dissolution. Holding Kartharīmukha hasta before face is suggested to indicate dissolution itself as Kartharī symbolizes breaking up something. Or this gesture could also indicate fire symbolizing the power of dissolution. Ālīdha Sthānaka justifies the dreadful nature of this mūrti.

2.3.4.TATPURUṢA MŪRTI

Hand Gesture: Kartharīmukha hasta shaking it downward from the head Standing posture: Śaiva Sthānaka (Refer "2.1. SADĀŚIVA" for Śaiva sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava.) Analysis and Result: Tatpuruṣa is the controlling Lord of Mahēśvara and is associated with the power of obscuration. In this form, it is believed that the Lord purposefully limits our awareness and allows us to evolve, preparing us to liberate ourselves from illusion and realize his true identity. Shaking Kartharīmukha hasta downward from the head is suggested to show the action of destroying ego.

2.3.5.ĪŚĀNA MŪRTI

Hand Gesture: 3 eyes - One hand; Ardhaçandra - Other hand Standing posture: Caturasra Sthānaka Caturasra Sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava: When the heels touch each other and the feet diverge from each other and heels are placed at a distance of one and a half spans between them. Analysis and Result: Īśāna is the controlling Lord of Sadāśiva and is associated to the power of revealment. The hand gesture recommendation is to show 3 eyes by one hand, the action of which can be expressed in more than one way as the author has not suggested one definite way. We can show either Tāmracūḍa hasta or Triśūla mudra indicating 3 and change the hasta to Catura (as the author has listed "denoting eyes" as one of uses of Catura hasta). An Alternative way is to show only the third eye using Kartharīmukha hasta held upside down at the forehead. The third eye is a mystical concept and an invisible eye located on the forehead. Īśāna mūrti is the power of revealment and a hand gesture revealing the third mystical eye brings out the nature of this mūrti. (Refer "2.1. SADĀŚIVA" for analysis on Tāmracūḍa hasta or Triśūla mudra) The other hand Ardhaçandra shows the crescent moon on the Lord's crown.



2.4.CANDRAŚĒKHARA

Hand Gesture: Abhaya and Varada OR Paraśu and Mṛgaśīrṣa
Standing posture: Śaiva Sthānaka
(Refer “2.1. SADĀŚIVA” for Śaiva sthānaka definition in Bharatārṇava.)
Analysis and Result: Lord Śiva is also known as Candrasēkhara referring to his well known feature of having moon as his crest. However this feature is not expressed in the suggested hand gestures. Abhaya and Varada mudra are not defined in Bharatārṇava, probably because they were either in common practice or commonly used Sanskrit words. The meaning of the Sanskrit word Varada is granting wishes/conferring a boon. When the index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger of the left hand are held together and pointed vertically downwards with palm facing the observer, it is Varada hasta. The meaning of the Sanskrit word Abhaya is removing the fear/fearlessness. When the index finger, middle finger, ring finger and little finger of the right hand are held together and pointed vertically upwards with palm facing the observer, it is Abhaya hasta. Thus Varada and Abhaya hastas are suggested for assuring devotees “Fear-not. I’m here to protect you and grantyouboons”. Paraśu is the battle axe of Śiva and per mythology this axe was given to Paraśurāma one of the avatārs of Lord Viṣṇu. Thus we can assume Patāka hasta on one hand to represent axe and Mṛgaśīrṣa on the other hand represents ḍamaru.

3.DISCUSSION

- Though the representations are indicated as Abhinaya in general, the details provided here are limited to Āṅgika abhinaya which is again confined to hand gestures and standing postures conveying an idea to the spectators.
- Tāmracūḍa hasta has different definition compared to the gestures commonly used in Bharatanāṭyam. So I have provided the definitions from main chapter of Bharatārṇava.
- First critical observation is that certain hastas and sthānakas mentioned under Brahmādivēvā are not part of the main chapters of the text. Varada and Abhaya Hastas (Candrasēkhara), Śūla Mudra/Triśūla hasta (Sadāśiva/ Ardhanārīśwara), Ākāsa mudra (Vāma dēva mūrti) are recommended without having any definition or reference in the main chapters of Bharatārṇava.
- Second critical observation is that certain hastas not part of the main chapters (yet mentioned under Brahmādivēvā) have an almost identical definition to hastas (with different names) defined in the main chapters. For those hastas not defined in the book, other reference materials were used to deduce a justifiable definition in association with the respective form of Lord Śiva. Śūla Mudra/Triśūla hasta (Sadāśiva/Ardhanārīśwara) which is not defined in the book has a similar definition to Tāmracūḍa hasta defined in main chapter. Ākāsa mudra (Vāma dēva mūrti) which is not defined in this book has a similar definition to Mudrā hasta defined in the mainchapter.
- The above two critical observations brings up a discussion point if appendix is an independent work of the same author who wrote the main chapters or work of different author (as Bharatārṇava includes a collection of contents from various sources) or part of the contents that has not yet been obtained (out of 4000 ślokas, we have 101 through 810 ślokas).
- After going through the first step of this study, it is recognizable that there is not just one next step but many following steps (listed below) to this study. The below listed studies could potentially reveal supporting points to the open questions and critical observations made in this original study.
 - (i) Critical study of rest of the deities under Brahmādivēvā
 - (ii) Study and analyze remaining sub topics of Abhinayaviśeṣā
 - (iii) Study and analyze other topics under appendix
 - (iv) Chapter X - Nānārtha Hastas lists application of hastas to convey a particular idea or situation. This chapter has to be studied to appreciate the similarities in the technique of describing hand gestures compared



4.CONCLUSION

After performing the study and analyzing the underlying meaning of hasta-s provided for various forms of Lord Śiva, it's apparent that the author details the hand gesture to be used on right hand and left hand, how and where to hold the gestures and appropriate standing postures (if applicable) in order to depict a deity. From the results of the study and analysis, we conclude that the abhinaya (histrionic representation) recommended for various forms of Lord Śiva is based on the nature of the deity, popular feature of the deity, popular act of the deity and attributes of the deity. This study which is almost like a reverse engineering where the analysis travels from end- recommendations (hand gestures) provided by the author, navigating through the possible thought process of the author and finally discovering and connecting to the initial idea (nature/feature/attribute/act of deity), has definitely shed light on the theoretical as well as sensuous aspects from an age old text. The open questions and critical observations that resulted from this analysis are all worthwhile as they would potentially open up further studies leading to further more awareness and discoveries.

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