

# CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF *HASTA MUDRĀS* AND THEIR INTERPRETATIONS IN DANCE

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## ABSTRACT:

*The purpose of the paper is to critically analyse the term Hasta Mudrās in terms of its origin, evolution and its usage in various disciplines. It analyses the terminology "Hasta Mudra" and critically analyses their attributes in comparison with various texts and scholars. It explores on its objectives and significance in general and introspects into dance. This research paper tries to enlighten the various domains of Hasta Mudrās and highlights its benefits and usages in various disciplines like Dance, religious practices of Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism etc. It tries to investigate the various types of Hasta Mudrās used in Dance that are explained by various scholars in various treatises on Dance and allied subjects. The research paper also analyses scientifically the various ways and means of holding the Hasta Mudrās and their positions (Articulations, Pronation and Supination). Finally, it concludes highlighting the various benefits and usages of Hasta Mudrās.*

**Keywords:** *Hasta Mudrās, Mudrās, Nāṭya Shāstra, Dance, Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Asamyuta, Samyuta, Nṛitta Hastās, Nṛitta Ratnāvali, Sangētaratnākara, Sārangadeva, Balarāma Varma, Balarāmabharatam.*

## INTRODUCTION:

Communication through gestures of the hands is said to be one of the most ancient forms of communication in human evolution. The spoken language is developed much later, long after the use of gestural communication. Even after the invention of spoken language, the gestural language has never lost its importance and thus gesticulation is a universal feature. Speech without gesticulation is often incomplete. Signaling or sign is the first and foremost means of communication. It involves the hand signals, head movements, eye movements, body postures etc. An infant starts using signs and signals before he or she could speak to communicate. Besides children, the deaf and the dumb, the traffic police, crew in the flights, army, navy and air force, also use the hand gestures to communicate. In fact we all use the hand gestures often to communicate certain things in spite of speech. Thus using the hand gestures is the fastest way of communication added with speech. In *Bhāratēya* context from the Vedic times, the hand gestures have always been a part of sacred rituals like recitation of mantras and dance performances. These hand gestures used in rituals and performances are referred to as *Mudrās* or as *Hastās*.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

Keeping in view of the abstract, the following are the objectives of the study.

- To give a brief overview on *Hasta Mudrās*.
- To explore into the terminology *Hasta Mudrā* and critically analyse their various attributes in various texts.
- To explicate the objectives and significance of *Hasta Mudrās* in various means and modes.
- To analyse various features and benefits of *Hasta Mudrās* that are used in various disciplines like Dance, religious practices of *Hinduism*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism* etc.
- To highlight the various types of *Hasta Mudrās* in Dance with brief analysis on various texts on *Hasta Mudrās*.
- To enlighten and educate the various modes and means of holding and positioning of the *Hasta Mudrās* with scientific approach.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This is a theoretical study which uses analytical and qualitative methods to analyze the ideas, opinions and theories presented in relation to *Hasta Mudrās* and its various benefits. Various ways and means are explored to study the *Hasta Mudrās* used in various disciplines to understand the benefits with an analytical approach to substantiate the objectives of the study. The study involves the critical analysis of *Hasta Mudrās* in Dance as explained in various texts. The analysis is drafted through the descriptive method.

## DISCUSSION - BRIEF OVERVIEW OF *HASTA MUDRĀS*:

The origin of the word '*Mudrā*' is uncertain. It is derived from the Sanskrit words '*Mud*' and '*Dhrā*', meaning 'bliss' and 'dissolving'. The word *Mudrā* in Sanskrit refers to a seal, sign, mark, gesture, imprint, passport, badge, mystery, code, language, signet-ring and lock<sup>1</sup>. The origin of "*Mudrā*" can also be traced to the Persian word '*muhāra*' meaning a 'sign'. *Muddika*, the Pali word for *Mudrā*, is derived from the word "*muddā*" which means authority<sup>2</sup>. Thus, the word *Mudrā* indicates the seal of authenticity which involves the hands and fingers and sometimes the entire body. Its origin, according to the scholars, lies in the tantric text. In addition to these, *Mudrā* is a symbolic or a spiritual gesture used in the iconography and spiritual practices of *Hinduism*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism*<sup>3</sup>. In the post-Vedic literature, the term *Mudrā* referred to a seal or the imprint left by a seal and the later usage designated it as a ritual gesture; the way of holding the fingers.

*Mudrā* is the term used to indicate a sign with different parts of the body and mind. Such *Mudrās* include *Hasta Mudrās* / *Kara Mudrās* (Hands), *Kāya Mudrās* (Body), *Shira Mudrās* (Head), *Ādhāra Mudrās*, *Bandhā Mudrās* (to unite / arrest), *Chakshu Mudrās* (Eyes), *Swasa Mudrās* (Breath), and *Manō Mudrās* (Mind)<sup>4</sup>. As mentioned above *Mudrās* are of eight types which are used spiritually and socially for various purposes like *mantra*, *tantra*, *yantra*, religious worships, sculptures, *yoga*, dance etc. Out of the eight mentioned *Mudrās*, *Hasta Mudrās* play a very major role and can be learned easily (or) held without much difficulty.

The term "*Mudrā*" which means a 'sign' or '*chinha*' is not the terminology used for expression of gestures used in dance. In *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance, the term "*Hasta*" "*Abhinaya Hasta*" "*Abhinaya kāra*" or "*Hasta Mudrā*" is used<sup>5</sup>. The hand gestures are referred as *Mudrās* in *Yoga*, *Mantra* and *Tantra Shāstrās* whereas in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance it is referred as *Hastās*. *Hastās* are hand gestures used to convey various feelings or expressions or meanings. The literal translation of *Hasta Mudrā* in Sanskrit is hand (*Hasta*) symbol (*Mudrā*), though *Hasta Mudrā* can be interpreted in English as hand gestures or sign language. Hence it would be more appropriate to use "*Hasta Mudrās*" for general reference of the hand gestures. The *Hasta Mudrās* are static in *Yoga* and spiritual practices, whereas they are dynamic in the dance practices.

## ORIGIN OF HAND GESTURES – *HASTA MUDRĀS*

The origin of *Hasta Mudrās* is still shrouded in mystery. There is no proper evidence on the origin of the hand gestures but they have been in use for millenniums by people of all religions and sects throughout the world. The *Hasta Mudrās* are found in everyday life, in both *Mantra* and *Tantra*, in the religious rites and rituals of *Hinduism*, *Buddhism* and *Jainism*, *Yoga* and *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* Dances. Hence the origin of *Hasta Mudrās* can be treated as Divine and Social origins. The *Hasta Mudrās* used in the religious practices are Divine in nature whereas the *Hasta Mudrās* used in *Yoga* and in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* Dance are regarded as Social.

<sup>1</sup> Kegan Paul & Co, *A Monograph on "Mudra"*, 1924 – Monier – William Sanskrit to English online dictionary, Sarvad Karand, RTL. 204; 406; Appa Rao PSR, *Nātya Shāstra*, Nātyamala Publications, 2000, p. 292. Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, Telugu University Publications, 1995, p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica -2010, Retrieved October 11, 2010;

<sup>3</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Prakash Rao Dharanipragada, *Mudralu, Bandhālu*, p.3.

<sup>5</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Nātya Shāstra*, op.cit, p. 292.

According to divine origin theory, the hand gesture practice is prevalent all over the world. “*Kalika Purāna* has an elaborate description of various *Hasta Mudrās* of spiritual importance. *Mudrās* are extremely important in *Hindu* and *Buddhist* iconography. They also form a useful aid to identify *Buddhās*, *Bōdhisattvās* and deities”<sup>6</sup>. In Hindu rituals, we can find the *Hasta Mudrās* in prayers, *Surya Namaskarams*, *Gayatri Mantram*, *Hōmam*, sculptures of Gods and Goddesses etc. The sculptures of Gods in *Hinduism*, *Buddhism* and *Jainism* show various varieties of *Hasta Mudrās*. The rites and rituals in *Hinduism*, *Buddhism* and *Jainism* portray various *Hasta Mudrā* which are followed in *Bhārat*, Tibet, China, Japan Indonesia etc.

*Yoga* has abundant varieties of *Hasta Mudrās* which even explain about various benefits and therapeutic effects of practicing them. The science dealing with finger postures or the *Mudrā Vidyān* holds a significant position in ancient *Bhāratēya* Sciences. It is an independent and separate branch of *Yoga*.

*Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* Dance communicates expressions (*Abhinaya*) through the *Hasta Mudrās*. Most of the *Hasta Mudrās* have a scope of Therapeutic effects hidden in them as they are used for various purposes since ancient times. The *Hasta Mudrās* used in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* Dance along with their scope of therapeutic effects have been described in this chapter. The description of *Hasta Mudrās* used in *Yoga* and *Hindu* rituals and their scope of therapeutic effects is dealt in the third chapter.

Documentation of different gestural techniques and artistic practices has not been a priority until very recent times. Data materials from written texts, archeological findings, temple sculptures, paintings, and inscriptions have been the best sources to create a reasonable history. The paintings in the caves of *Ajanta* and sculptures in the *Ellora* caves dating back to 2nd and 1st centuries BC show innumerable *Hasta Mudrās*. *Hinduism* shows the earliest recorded knowledge and analysis of *Mudrās*.

The earliest documentations are found in *Mantra Shāstra* (the book of incantations), *Upasana Shāstra* (the book of worship and prayers) and the *Nātya Shāstra* (the book of *Shāstrēya* dramatology). The following verse from *Srimad Bhagwad Gita* mentions that Lord *Krishna* was in the posture of *Gyān Mudrā* when he bestowed the knowledge of *Gita* to *Arjuna*.

“*Prapannapārijātāya totrevetre pānaye, gyān Mudrāya Krishnāya gētāmritā duhe namah*<sup>7</sup>”

It says – Lord *Krishna* held the *Gyān Mudrā* and preached *Gētāmrutam* (*Gita*/ *Gētōpadesham*) to *Arjuna*.

However, in *Bhāratēya* context of dance, more than any other evidence, a written text, the *Nātya Shāstra*, holds invaluable information about the form, function, and technical details of dance and theatre in ancient *Bhārat*, thereby introducing us to the codification of *Hasta Mudrās*.

*Bharata* in *Nātya Shāstra* explains the birth of dance as divine as it is created by Lord *Brahma*. Based upon the origin of dance, we can trace the origin of *Hasta Mudrās* (gestures) from *Yajur Veda*, as Lord *Brahma* has extracted the *abhinaya* aspect (expressions) from *Yajur Veda* to create dance. In addition to *Nātya Shāstra*, *Hindu* Mythology regards, Lord *Shiva* as the Lord of Dance. He is described as using different hand gestures while performing *Tāndavam* – the *Nṛītā* aspect of dance. The *Hasta Mudrās* used by Lord *Shiva*, while performing the *tāndava* aspect could be the first usage and origin of *Hasta Mudrās* technically.

<sup>6</sup> Rajender Menen, *The healing power of Mudras*, Pustak Mahal Publications, Delhi, 2007, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Lokesh Chandra & Sharada Rani, *Mudras in Japan*, Vedam Books, p. 1.

Another important treatise on *Bhāratēya* Dance is *Abhinaya Darpanam*. Traced back to the medieval times, this text delineates in detail the communicative aspects through the *Hasta Mudrās*. In fact, the gestural language as given in *Abhinaya Darpana*, is followed more than in *Nāṭya Shāstra* by southern *Bhāratēya* dance forms.

“*Kanthaenāmbayaeth Gētam, Hastae na Ardham pradarshayeth I*  
*Chakshubhayām darshayaeth Bhāvam, Pādābhāyam Tālamācharaeth II*  
*Yatho Hasta thatho Drishti, Yatho Drishti thatho Manah I*  
*Yatho Manah thatho Bhāva, Yatho Bhāva thatho Rasā II*<sup>8</sup>”

(*Abhinaya Darpanam – Slokas 56-57*)

It says – The song is retained through the throat, the hands are used to express meaning, the *bhāvam* / expression can be seen through the eyes, the legs follow the rhythm of *tāla*, where the hands (*Hasta*) are - the eyes follow (*drishti*); Where the eyes are - the mind (*manah*) follows; Where the mind goes, there is expression of inner feeling (*bhāva*) and where there is expression or *bhāva*, mood or sentiment (*rasā*) is evoked.

Thus, it can be said that hand gestures become a primary aspect of dance and plays a very important role in the final evocation of the *rasā*.

Let us look at various religious practices and the usage of *Mudrās* in them. In *Jainism*, *Swāmi Mahāvīr Jain* and in *Sikhism*, *Guru Nanak Devji* always shows the *Gyān* or *Dhyān Mudrā*. In Christianity, Jesus, John the Baptist and Virgin Mary are depicted holding various *Mudrās*<sup>9</sup>. Even today, the sign used by the priests of Catholic Churches while blessing the devotees, is the *Mahāgyān Mudrā*. Egyptian hieroglyphics are a virtual treasure house of *Mudrās*. The postures of their kings and queens and even the mummies show them holding *Mudrās*. The Babylonian sun God *Damuzi* shows certain *Mudrās* while descending into the underworld. In Islam, the mystical Whirling Dervishes used hand signs or *Mudrās* for various rites and rituals. Roman art is replete with *Mudrās*. Along with the spread of the *Ramayana*, the *Shāstrēya* performing arts and the *Buddhist Tantras* have spread *Hasta Mudrās* across Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Srilanka, Indonesia, Nepal, Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea and Japan<sup>10</sup>.

We eat, write with our hands, type with the fingers, rub our hands, press them in anxiety, wash them, and scratch with fingers and the list goes on. Knowingly or unknowingly we use our hands and we use the *Hasta Mudrās* for different purposes and most of us are not aware that these *Mudrās* have therapeutic effect in our daily life.

The above references of *Hasta Mudrās* shows that hand gesture is the universal phenomena and hence used by different gods which signify the hidden meaning and power seen through the hand gestures which are believed to have spiritual and healing powers. Hence *Hasta Mudrās* has both divine and social origin.

<sup>8</sup> Nadikeshwara's *Abhinaya Darpanam* (980 – 1020 Century AD), Slokas 56-57.

<sup>9</sup> J.S.M.Ward, *Pictures from the book "The sign Language of the Mysteries"*.

<sup>10</sup> Lokesh Chandra & Sharada Rani, *op.cit.*, p. 1

## HASTA MUDRĀS – OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE

The hands are the bearers of important symbols, which are universally understood. A *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dancer expresses the whole universe through the language of gestures which has a greater influence on the mind than words could express. The gestures of the deities depicted in *Hindu* and *Buddhist* art symbolize and evoke specific mythological occurrences<sup>11</sup>.

The main objective of the *Hasta Mudrās* is to communicate a particular meaning. Its importance is extended in *Hindu* rituals, daily adoration's, dance, *Yoga*, sculpture, painting and other fine arts. The *Hasta Mudrās* are described as devotional, emotional, aesthetic and psychic attitudes or gestures. Several kinds of hand gestures are brought in for varied uses. Research on hand gestures has revealed several benefits of practicing them. *Yogis* have reckoned *Mudrās* as postures of energy flow and associated them to *Prānic* force of individuals with the cosmic or universal force.

Bending and stretching the fingers of the hand and holding them in various positions form the *Hasta Mudrās* in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* Dance. These *Hasta Mudrās* are the vital source of communication in all the *Shāstrēya* dance forms of *Bhārat* like *Kuchipudi*, *BharataNāṭyam*, *Odissi*, *Kathak*, *Kathakali*, *Manipuri*, *Mohiniattam*, *Chhau*, *Sattriya*, *Gaudiya Nāṭyam*, *Vilasinināṭyam*, *Andhranāṭyam*, *Perini Shiva Tandavam*, and *Yakshaganam* etc. An accomplished practitioner of dance would make the use of these *Hasta Mudrās* along with the accompanying facial expressions and body movements. A dancer could use any number of *Mudrās* to show a particular meaning but can judiciously choose one over the other with the understanding of subtle distinctions in their meaning. Each *Hasta Mudrā* has a name that is used to indicate the form as it is explained in the written texts. This name is usually indicative of the shape that the fingers create and/or the object represented by the shape.

### HASTA MUDRĀS – BODY DISCIPLINE:

Scientifically the human body is divided into head, body and limbs. The limbs include the hands and legs. The hand is divided into the shoulder, upper arm, elbow, lower arm, wrist, palm and fingers. The human body comprises of muscles, bones, nerves, blood etc., and is systematized into different systems. The important systems of the body, which aid in effective functioning of the body include the skeletal system, muscular system, nervous system etc.

The human hand in general has 5 fingers *Angustha* - Thumb Finger, *Tarjani* - Fore Finger, *Madhyamā* - Middle Finger, *Anāmika* - Ring Finger and *Kanishtha* - Little Finger<sup>12</sup>. These five fingers represent *Agni* (fire), *Vāyu* (air), *Ākāsh* (space), *Prithvi* (earth) and *Jal* (water) respectively according to *Ayurvedic* terminology<sup>13</sup>.

The *Yogic* studies say that the physical body is composed of five elements which are fused with each other in different proportions to form each human body.

<sup>11</sup> Gertrud Hirschi, *Mudras – Yoga in your Hands*, Samuel Weiser INC publications, Maine, p. 6.

<sup>12</sup> Rajender Menen, *The healing power of Mudras*, op.cit, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Dhiren Gala, *Health at your Fingertips*, Navnēt Publications, Delhi, p. 12.

## HASTA MUDRĀS IN DANCE

The usage of hand gestures - 'Mudrās' used by the priest in prayers and holy rituals became the language of expression and communication for the dancer known as 'Hastās'. This research encompasses a thorough analysis of the ancient art of hand symbols found in wide range of disciplines including performing and other fine arts, medicinal and other alternative therapies, ritual activities, *Yoga* etc.

The language of communicating a particular meaning through the *Hasta Mudrās* in dance is known as '*Sharirabhāsha*'<sup>14</sup>. The *Hasta Mudrās* are as important to a dancer as alphabets to a language. They are important to a dancer just as notes for music, words for literature, brush and colours for painting and hammer and chisel for sculpture. *Hasta Mudrās* play a very important role in communication. Before the invention of written languages, dance was one of the methods of passing stories down from generation to generation<sup>15</sup>. In the ancient times, the specific language to name the hand gestures (*Hasta Mudrās*) is known as '*Akshara Mustika*'<sup>16</sup>.

*Hastābhinayam*, the nonverbal language of communication through gestures is the central point in a course of research study on communication in dance. It offers an in-depth approach and understanding of dance especially in communication through the gestures. *Abhinaya Darpanam* – the mirror of gestures written by *Nandikeshwara* mentions *abhinaya* as fourfold namely *Āngikābhinaya*, *Vāchikābhinaya*, *Āharyābhinaya* and *Sātwikābhinaya*.

*Sātwikābhinaya* or expression (*abhinaya*) of the mind is performed by *Āngikābhinaya* through the usage of suitable body movement and limb gestures as it is the extension of psychological emotions expressed through the body movements. *Aharyābhinaya* is associated to the dressing, decor and deals with the costumes and make-up of an artist who performs various roles. A dancer translates the meaning of communicating the language between the writer and the audience through the gestures and body movements. *Vāchikābhinaya* especially in theatrical dance is associated with the use of verbal language and communicating it through a non verbal language which involves the tone, voice, accent and rhythm which brings out the lyrical characters of the play through enacting.

*Āngikābhinaya* is the expression through the gestures of limbs and body and *Hasta Mudrās* occupy a very special place in it. The emotions and the thoughts of the mind are expressed effectively through various body parts, which involve different postures, movements, gaits and gestures of the limbs. The application of gestures in the daily routine is very much different from that of the artistic gestures and at times there is no correlation between the realistic and artistic gestures. The artistic gestures add aesthetic appeal to the dance.

*Bharata* explains that *Āngikābhinaya* which is an expression through body gestures is three fold containing *Angās*, *Upāngās* and *Pratyangās*. Hand is a major limb in his division of three fold that plays a very important role. *Angās* further divide the body into 6 parts – *Siram*, *Hastās*, *vaksha*, *pārswās*, *kati* and *pādas*. The *Hastās* play a very vital role in dance independently as well as with facial expression and body gestures.

According to the available literature, *Hasta Mudrās* in dance are first conceived by *Bharata* in the first known treatise on dance "*Nāṭya Shāstra*". Most of the texts on dance divide the *Hasta Mudrās* into two categories

<sup>14</sup> Munukuntla Sambashiva, *Gateway to Koochipoodi*, Nishumbitha Publications, Hyderabad, 2010, p.21.

<sup>15</sup> Nathalie Comte, "*Europe, 1450 to 1789: Encyclopedia of the Early Modern World*", Ed. Jonathan Dewald. Vol.2. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004. p. 94–108.

<sup>16</sup> Munukuntla Sambashiva, *Gateway to Koochipoodi*, op.cit, p.21; Mrinalini Sarabhai, *Sacred Dances of Bhārat*, Darpana Publications, Ahmedabad, 1961.

*Abhinaya Hastās - Asamyuta Hastās, Samyuta Hastās**NṛittaHastās - articulations*

The difference between the first two varieties and the *NṛittaHastās* is that while the *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hastās* belong mostly to the sphere of finger manipulation indicating their positions, the *NṛittaHastās* indicate movements of the fingers for the most part and invariably suggest an arm movement also<sup>17</sup>.

The *Nāṭya Shāstra*, *Abhinaya Darpana* and *Nṛitaratnāvali*, as mentioned earlier, explains *Hasta Mudrās* in the form of verses. *Bharata*, *Nandikeshwara*, and *Jayapāsenāni* pursued a common format and explained all the dance related movements pertaining to hands, feet, eyes, eyebrows, neck, head etc., in the form of verses. These texts also include which specific parts of the body should be used and exactly how to move or place them in relation to the rest of the parts. Further the authors proceed to explain, in which contexts this particular position, movement, or symbol could be used. It is important to note that many of the verses, after listing the possible contexts, end with the word etc., indicating that these are suggestions and guidelines but not exclusive uses. This explanation gives an enormous amount of depth into each element of the dance technique and its practice. These texts on *Hasta Mudrās* play a very important role in communicating various aspects in dance.

Scholars have explained the hand gestures (Single and double hand gestures) and have also mentioned their usage in different ways. The technique of holding the *Hasta Mudrās*, their placement, significance, other subsidiary *Hasta Mudrās* and many more details of *Hasta Mudrās* are explained in the dance treatises written by different scholars. Besides gestures some scholars have identified the positioning of the fingers besides holding it in a particular posture.

*Sārangadeva*, the author of *Sangitaratnākara* has explained the movement of the fingers<sup>18</sup> which are seven in number which include

- Samyuta* – joined together
- Viyukta* – separated
- Vakra* – curved
- Valita* – moved
- Patita* – fallen
- Kunchanmula* – bent at the root
- Prasarita* – spread out.

He further explains the *Hasta Karanās* (the movement of the fingers to make a gesture) *Āvestita*, *Udvestita*, *Parivartita* and *Vyāvartita*; and 20 *Hasta Karmās*<sup>19</sup> (characteristic usage of hand gestures) which are

- Ahvāna* – to invite
- Utkarshana* – to draw up
- Chaedana* – to cut
- Tarjana* – to threaten
- Tādana* – to strike
- Tōdana* – to push
- Dhunana* – to shake
- Nigraha* – to lower
- Parigraha* – to enfold

<sup>17</sup> E. Easwaran Nampoothiry, *Balaramabharatam – a critique on dance and drama*, Keralasamskritam Publications, Trivandrum, 1983, p. 155.

<sup>18</sup> Sarangadeva, *Sangitaratnakara*, Rishi Publications, New Delhi, 1957, p.261. verse 412.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 291. verse 441.



*Bhaeda* – to split  
*Mōksana* – to release  
*Mōtana* – to crush  
*Rakshana* – to protect  
*Vikarśana* – to remove  
*Vikshepa* – to throw  
*Viyōga* – to separate  
*Visarga* – to send forth  
*Vyākarśana* – to pull  
*Samslaesha* – to join  
*Spōtana* – to disengage.

He has also mentioned the *Hasta Ksetrā* (places or positions of holding the hand gestures) which are 14 in number that include *Pārsvadvayā*, *Purastat-Siras*, *Paschat-Siras*, *Urdhvah-Siras*, *Adhah-Siras*, *Lalāta*, *Karna*, *Vakshas*, *Nābhi*, *Katisērsha*, *Urudvaya* and *Skandha*<sup>20</sup>.

Similarly, in order to explore into the details of the *Hasta Mudrās* and to create awareness on the hand gestures and their movements, the *Hasta Mudrās* can also be divided on the basis of the number of fingers extended, number of fingers bent, number of fingers curved partially or fully while holding them. Depending on the number of fingers extended, they can be classified as six types; single finger extended, double finger extended, three fingers extended, four fingers extended and five fingers extended. The single finger extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Shikhara*, *Sūchi*, *Hamsapaksha*. The double fingers extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Katakāmukha*, *Chandrakala*, *Mrigashīrsha*, *Simhamukha*. The three fingers extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Ardhapatāka*, *Kartarīmukha*, *Mayura*, *Shukatunda*, *Hamsāsya*, *Trishūla*. The four fingers extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Tripātāka*, *Arāla*, *Kāngūla*, *Chatura*, *Bhramara*. The five fingers extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Patāka*, *Ardhachandra*, *Alapadma*, *Samdamsha*, *Mukula*. No fingers extended *Hasta Mudrās* include *Musthi*, *Kapitta*, *Padmakosha*, *Sarpasīrsha*, *Tāmrachūda*.

Scholars have explained various *Hasta Mudrās* with different finger positions which stimulate the acupressure points located in the fingers and palm. These scholars are well versed in various disciplines and hence have explored the significance and usage in various ways and means. Jayāpasēnāni in his book *Nṛitta Ratnāvalī* relates *Hasta Mudrās* to the nature in the below *sloka*.

*Chatura makararāji, prōllasat padmakosham*  
*bhramaralalitā lēlam, hamsapakshābhirāmam I*  
*pravichala dalapadmam karkatādyaryupaetam*  
*jaladhi jala mivedam brūmahae Hastalakṣma II*<sup>21</sup>

The characteristics of the *Hastās* are numerous and compared to the water in an ocean. It is like the talented crocodile, the lotus buds and petals, honey bees, beautiful swans etc.

Alike *Abhinaya* (expressions), the usage of *Hasta Mudrās* is also two types – *Lōka Dharmi* and *Nātya Dharmi* which is further divided in to two more types each depending on the *Hasta Kśhetrās* and *Hasta Karmās*<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Jayaprasenani, *Nrutta Ratnavali*, II, p.164.

<sup>22</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 5.

The treatises that deal with the *Hasta Mudrās* include – *Nāṭya Shāstra* of Bharatamuni, *Abhinaya Darpanam* and *Bharatārnavam* of Nandikeshwara (3-4 Century AD), *Abhinava Bhārati* of Abhinavagupta (980 – 1020 Century AD), *Nṛutta Ratnāvali* of Jāyapasēnāni (1253-54 Century AD), *Nṛutya Ratnakōsham* of Rājakumbakarnadēva (1449 Century AD), *Srē Hastamuktāvali* of Shubhankarā (1500 Century AD), *Telugu Abhinayadarpanam* of Mātrubhutaiah (16-17 Century AD), *Hasta Lakshana Dēpika* of Somanarya, *Balarāmabaratam* of Balarāmavarma Kartikatirunal (1724-98).

Apart from these the *Hasta Mudrās* are also mentioned in the ancient literature of dance, drama and music which include *Maheswara Mahapātra's Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Simhabhūpāla's Lāsyaranjanam*, *Vishnudharmottara puranam* (500-600AD), *Rāja Someshwara's Mānasōllāsam* (1131 AD), *Shāradatanaya's Bhāvaprakasham* (1175-1250AD), *Sārangadeva's Sangētaratnākaram* (1230 AD), *Sudhakalasha's Sangētopanishat Sāram* (1324-1354), *Asokamalla's Nṛutya Adyāyam*, *Pundarēka Vithala's Nartananirnayam*, *Subhankara's Sangēta Damodaram* (1500AD), *Vipra das's Sangētachandram* (1450AD), *Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi's Bharatakosham* (1951AD), *Vedasuri's Sangētamakarandam* (17<sup>th</sup> Century), *Parshwadeva's Sangēta Samayasāram* (13-15 Century AD), *Utakae Govindachary's Nāṭya Shāstra sangraham* (1800AD), *Ilango Adigal's Silappādikaram*, *Someshwara's Abhilāsītārtha Chintamani*, *Srikantha's Rasakowmudhi* (1575AD), *Chandrashekara Pandita's Bharatasāram*, *Chillakuri Diwakarakavi's Bharatasāra Sangraham*<sup>23</sup>.

*Bharata* has explained certain basic *Hasta Mudrās* and some detailed *Hasta Mudrās* for different usages. However he says that the hand gestures should be devised for their form, movement, significance and class according to the personal judgment of an artist. This can be clearly observed from the following *slokas*<sup>24</sup>.

“Ākrtyā chaeshtayā cihnaih jātyā vignyāya vastutah I  
Svayam vitarkya kartavyam Hastābhinayanam budhah II”

“Noktā ye ca mayā hyatra lokād grāhyastu te budhah I”

The similar idea is also explained by *Sarangadeva* in *Sangeta Ratnākara* and is clearly evident from the below *sloka*<sup>25</sup>.

“Lokavruttānusārātteppuyhyantam anayā dishā I  
Netrabhrumukharāgādyair upāngair upabrmhitāh II

From the enumeration and description of the *Hastās* explained, it may be observed that *Nāṭya Shāstra*, *Sangēta Ratnākara* and *Nṛitta Ratnāvali* belongs to one group as they are the basic source and *Abhinaya Darpana*, *Sangēta Samayasāram*, *Abhinava Bhārati* etc., belong to another group as they have been written by referring the basic sources. However *Sangētaratnākara* and *Nṛitta Ratnāvali* give additional information and additional *lōkadharmi* besides following *Nāṭya Shāstra*.

<sup>23</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. XV-XVI.

<sup>24</sup> Bharatamuni, *Nāṭya Shastra IX*, p 161.

<sup>25</sup> Sarangadeva, *Sangēta Ratnākara*, VII, p. 287.

*Nāṭya Shāstra Sangraha*, *Bharatārnavam* and few other texts are only the compilations of stanzas from these sources and therefore they have no independent value. *Hastalakshana* Dēpika which is popular in *Kerala* and used in *Kutiyattam* and *Kathakali* is different from other texts to some extent and so stands separate. The *Balarāma Bharatam* takes materials from all these and is intended for the use of *BharataNāṭyam* as well as *Kathakali*<sup>26</sup>.

*Nāṭya Shāstra* comprises of the 36 chapters which detail all aspects of the performing arts including exhaustive elements of artistic experience (from the point of view of the creator), artistic content or states of being, and structure of the dramatic plot. *Hasta Mudrās* which is part of *Āngikābhinaya* is dealt in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter and are included in the artistic content. There are several other texts on the topic of dramatic performance and dance movements. One of the most important of these, with reference to *Hasta Mudrās*, is *Nandikeshwara's Abhinaya Darpana* (literally, Mirror of Gestures) written around 1000 AD. This compact text can be described as an abridged dancer's guide based on the *Nāṭya Shāstra*. The chapters which deal with *Hasta Mudrās* are from chapter 6 to 11 and partly in chapter 12 of *Nāṭya Shāstra*.

The *Hasta Mudrās* form an integral part of *Āngikābhinaya* or stylized body language, in which the goal is to create an image in the mind of the observer. *Nāṭya Shāstra* is the basic reference for the *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance forms; however there are few other texts which are followed along with *Nāṭya Shāstra*. The *Nāṭya Shāstra* describes 24 *Asamyuta Hastās*, 13 *Samyuta Hastās* and 30 *NṛittaHastās* 67 varieties in all<sup>27</sup>.

*Sarangadeva* accepts all these *Hastās* of *Bharata* and says that the *NṛittaHastās*, though primarily intended for *Nṛitta*(pure dance) are allowed by the highest authorities like *Bharata* and by approved practice, in *abhinaya* also. He also states that the use of the *Nṛitta Hastās* is regulated by imaginative skill, approved traditional and the general practice<sup>28</sup>. According to *Sarangadeva*, the total number of the *Hastās* of *Bharata* is 67. He splits the *Nṛitta Hastās*, *Alapadmōlbana* into two, namely *Alapadma* and *Ulbana* and thereby enumerates 30 *Nṛitta Hastās*. He also gives explanation on the 64 *Hastās* mentioned by *Bharata*<sup>29</sup>.

*Nṛitta Ratnāvali* is another treatise on dance written by *Jāyapasēnāni* of *Kākatēya* dynasty during 1253 A.D. This treatise also deals with the *Hasta Mudrās* in the chapter 2. According to *Jāyapasēnāni*, the *Hastās* single and combined and the *Nṛitta Hastās* are just those given by *Bharata* in name and number which would give 66 in all. He gives a more satisfactory explanation for *Bharata's* statement of the number of *Hastās* as 64, by emphasizing on the word "*Nāmatah*" means by name. The *Sūchasyam* among the single hand gestures and *Svastika* among the combined hand gestures are included in the *Nṛitta Hastās* also. Therefore the names are 64 and the gestures are 66<sup>30</sup>.

*Bharatārnavam* mentions 27 *Asamyuta Hastās*, 16 *Samyuta Hastās* and 22 *Nṛitta Hastās*. On the authority of *Brihaspati*, it further gives a list of 27 *Hastās*, many of which are included in the first list<sup>31</sup>.

*Hasta Lakshana Dēpika* gives 24 Alphabetic hand gestures almost closely following the terminology given by *Bharata*, with some changes affected in their definitions and applications<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> E. Easwaran Nampoothiry, *Balaramabharatam – a critique on dance and drama*, op.cit, p. 190.

<sup>27</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Sarangadeva, *Sangētha Ratnakara*, op.cit, p. 90-92.

<sup>29</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> Jayapasenani, *Nrutta Ratnavali*, op.cit, p. 87-88.

<sup>31</sup> Nandikeshwara, *Bharatarnava*, Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswathi Mahal Library Society, p. 1-92.

<sup>32</sup> Somanarya, *Hasta Laksana Dēpika*, p. 1-89.

*Balarāmabharata* mentions 40 *Asamyuta Hastās* and 27 *Samyuta Hastās* totaling 67 in number. Among the 40 *Asamyuta Hastās*, the 24 names are from *Bharata's Nātya Shāstram*, 7 are based on *Abhinaya Darpanam* and the remaining nine are based on other sources. He does not enumerate all the *Nṛitta Hastās* of *Bharata*, but mentions that some of the *Hastās* can be used as *Nṛitta Hastās* also not in the context of *Hasta*, but in the context of *Bahupracharas*<sup>33</sup>.

There are over 250 *Hasta Mudrās* in the *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance forms especially *Kuchipudi*, *Bharatanātyam*, *Odissi*, *Kathakali* etc.

### LINGABHAEDA (GENDER) OF HASTĀS

*Bharatamuni*, in his treatise mentions that he has explained the division of *Hastās* and their number along with the usages. Both the male and female performers have to implement the *Hastās* keeping in view of the region, time, implementation and the meaning of the *Hastās*.

However, there could be numerous other *Loukika Hastās* which can be identified and implemented based on the *Rasa* (sentiments) and *Bhava* (emotions)<sup>34</sup>.

“*Daesham kālam prayōgam chāpyardhayuktimavaekshyacha  
Hastāhyaetae prayōktavyā nrōnām stēnām vishaeshataha*”<sup>35</sup>

“*Anyaechāpradha samyuktā loukikā yae karāstviha  
Chandatasthae prayōktavyā rasa bhāva vichaestitaihi*”<sup>36</sup>

*Balarāma Varma*, the author of *Balarāmabharatam* divides *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hastās* into three groups namely *pullinga*, *strilinga* and *napumsakalinga*. Among the *Asamyuta Hastās*, the fifteen *Hastās* – the *Patāka*, *shikhara*, *musthi*, *sūci*, *mṛigasīrsha*, *hamsāsya*, *mukula*, *bāna*, *bhadra*, *arāla*, *apaveshtita*, *silimukha*, *tāmraçhūda*, *mayūra* and *ardhapatāka* are *Pullinga Hastās*. The twelve *Hastās* namely *tripatāka*, *hamsapaksha*, *kartari*, *katakāmukha*, *trilinga*, *pūrnachandra*, *bālachandra*, *ardhachandra*, *udvestita*, *sarpasīra*, *kutilla* and *bhramara* are *Strilinga Hastās*. The remaining thirteen *Hastās* namely *padmakōsha*, *sandamsa*, *urnanābha*, *alapallava*, *puronnata*, *chatura*, *kapittha*, *chaturunnata*, *simhānana*, *gāngula*, *shukatunda*, *nirēkshana* and *prālamba* are the *Napumsakalinga Hastās*<sup>37</sup>.

Among the *Samyuta Hastās*; *anjali*, *garuda*, *dola*, *gajamukha*, *visratapallava*, *kurparaswastika*, *tādanaPatāka*, *sankalpa*, *gajadanta*, *varadābhaya* and *kapota* – these eleven *Hastās* are *Pullinga Hastās*. The nine *Hastās* namely *puspaputa*, *bharati*, *Patākaswastika*, *utsanga*, *padmamukula*, *katakāvarta*, *subhashobhana*, *samyuktapallava* and *vardhamāna* are *Strilinga Hastās*. The remaining seven namely *makara*, *mallyuddha*, *kartariswastika*, *upachāra*, *kalaha*, *karkataka* and *avahittha* are *Napumsakalinga Hastās*<sup>38</sup>.

This kind of classification of *Hastās* on the basis of gender is not mentioned elsewhere except in *Balarāmabharatam*. *Abhinayadarpanam* is one that goes into the details of *Hastās* indicate the *Vedas*, mountains (*Parwatās*), seasons (*Rhitus*), tenses (*Kālas*), numbers (*Sankhya*), tastes (*Shatrasās*), musical notes (*Sapta-swarās*), melodies (*Rāgas*), stars (*Nakshatrās*), sentiments

<sup>33</sup> Karthika Thirunal Bala Rama Varma - Maharajah of Travancor, *Balarāmabharatam*, p. 249.

<sup>34</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Nātya Shāstram*, *op.cit*, p. 308.

<sup>35</sup> Sriramachandrudu Pullela, *Bharatamuni pranētam NātyaShāstram( andhrabhashavyakhya balanandini toh)* 2014, p.360, Sloka No. 165.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, Sloka No. 164.

<sup>37</sup> Karthika Thirunal Bala Rama Varma, *op.cit*, p. 90 st. 619 – 624.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p. 90 st. 625 – 630.

(*navarasās*), parts of the body (*Sarwa Angās*), week days (*Sapta Vāras*), nine gems (*Navaratnās*), metals (*Lōhās*), zodiac signs (*Rāsis*), sage (*rishi*), race (*vamsha*), colour (*varna*), flower arrows of *Manmatha* (*Pancha Bānas*) and the guardian deity (*daevata*) etc., of the *Hastās* and in a way gives a religious and cultural touch of the *Hasta Mudrās* besides practitioner oriented.

Keeping in view of the division of the *Hastās* in *Abhinayadarpanam*, the author of *Balarāmabharatam* brings in another element to *Hastās* namely the *Linga bhaeda Hastās*.

Apart from the *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hasta Mudrās* there are few extra *Hasta Mudrās* known as *Grandhāntara Hastās* brought out by *Nandikeshwara*<sup>39</sup>. The *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hastās* play a very major role in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance forms for expressing varied meanings and emotions. These two *Hastās* are the base and they become the major sources in reproducing the various other *Hasta Mudrās*.

Both *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hasta Mudrās* are used to represent various other *Hasta Mudrās* with the combination of one or both these *Hasta Mudrās*. The examples of such *Hasta Mudrās* are *Nṛitta Hastās*, *Bāndhavya Hastās*, *Navagraha Hastās*, *Dashāvatāra Hastās*, *Devata Hastās*, *Navaratna Hastās*, *Sapta samudra Hastās*, the seven upper worlds and the even lower worlds, hands that represent different rivers, trees, animals, aquatic beings, emperors etc., the *Nātya Shāstra* and *Abhinaya Darpana* also lists *Hasta Mudrās* for the 27 stars, the different *rāsis* (moon signs and sun signs), the seven musical notes, different ragas and the four classes of *Nāyikas* such as *Padmini* etc.

### **HASTĀBHINAYA (GESTURES OF THE HANDS)**

*Hasta Mudrās* or the hand gestures play a very important role in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dances. They represent a particular object, person, animal, mood, emotions etc. The two most important varieties are:

- *Asamyuta Hastās* or single hand gestures
- *Samyuta Hastās* or double hand gestures

#### **Asamyuta Hastās**

*Asamyuta Hastās* are single hand gestures or uncombined *Hastās*. According to *Abhinaya Darpanam* there are 28 *Asamyuta Hastās* apart from 6 additional *Hastās* totaling to 34 and according to *Nātya Shāstra* there are 24 in number.

‘*Nātya Shāstra* describes 24 *Asamyuta Hastās* namely *patāka*, *tripatāka*, *kartarīmukha*, *ardhachandra*, *arāla*, *shukatunda*, *musti*, *shikhara*, *kapittha*, *katakāmukha*, *suchasya*, *padmakosha*, *sarpashīrsha*, *mrigashīrsha*, *kāngūla*, *alapadma*, *chatura*, *bhramara*, *hamsāsya*, *hamsapaksha*, *samdamsa*, *mukula*, *ūrnanābha* and *tāmrachuda*<sup>40</sup>.

*Abhinaya Darpanam* mentions all these *Hastās* except *ūrnanābha* and adds seven more namely *ardhapatāka*, *mayūra*, *trishūla*, *chandrakalā*, *vyāghra*, *simhamukha* and *ardhasūchika*<sup>41</sup>.

*Sangēta Samayasāram* mentions all the above mentioned *Hastās* except the *trishūla*, *chandrakalā* and *ardhasūchi* and adds *udvaestita*, *apavaestita*, *parivrutta*, *damaruvadaka* and

<sup>39</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Abhinaya Darpanam*, op.cited, p.281.

<sup>40</sup> Bharatamuni, *Nātya Shastra*, op.cit, p 18-126.

<sup>41</sup> Nandikeshwara, *Abhinaya Darpanam*, op.cit, p. 93-167

*varṭana*<sup>42</sup>.

*Sangēta Ratnākara*<sup>43</sup> and *Nṛitta Ratnāvali*<sup>44</sup> closely follow the *Nāṭya Shāstra* and mention only the 24 *Hastās* of *Bharata*.

*Bharatarnavam* includes the 23 *Hastās* of *Bharata* except *ūrnanabha* along with *ardhaPatāka*, *mayura*, *bana* and *hamsasya* from *Abhinaya Darpanam*<sup>45</sup>.

*Nāṭya Shāstra Sangraham* which is the compilation of different sources mentions *Bharata*'s 24 *Hastās* and adds *ardhapatāka*, *mayūra*, *chadrakala*, *trishūla* and *hamsāsya* of *Abhinaya Darpanam*<sup>46</sup>.

The *Hasta Lakshana Dēpika* which is used for *Kudiyāttam* and *Kathakali* in *Kerala* does not make the divisions of *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta*; but it prescribes that certain *Hasta Mudrās* are used with both the hands. The terminology of the hand gestures is almost the same as that found in *Bharata*'s *Nāṭya Shāstra*. It is in their definition, application and number that the *Hasta Lakshana Dēpika* differs from the other texts. It does not mention the single hand *Hasta padmakōsha*, *kāngula*, *alapadma*, *chatura*, *samdamsa* and *tāmrachūda* of *Bharata*; but adds six other varieties namely *Mudrākhya*, *kataka*, *anjali*, *mukula*, *pallava*, *vardhamanaka*, many of which are differently defined.

The *Balarāmabharatam* describes 40 *Asamyuta Hastās*<sup>47</sup> from *Nāṭya Shāstra*, *ardhapatāka*, *mayūra*, *bāna*, *hamsāsya*, *udhvestita* and *apavestita* from *Sangēta Samayasāram* and ten other varieties namely *trishula*, *kutula*, *balachandra*, *nērkshana*, *prālamba*, *puronnata*, *caturunnata*, *puronnata*, *caturunnata*, *punacandra*, *silimukha* and *bhadra* based on oral and other sources.

Apart from these, there are few more *Hastās* mentioned by the libertarians. Some of them are *Ūrnanābha*, *Ardha-Suchi Hasta* (Half needle), *Bāna Hasta* (Arrow), *Ūrnanābha Hasta* (spider), *Vyagra Hasta*, *Kataka Hasta*, *Valli Hasta*.

Below are the *Asamyuta Hastās* (single hand gestures) along with the pictorial representation according to *Nandikeshwara*'s *Abhinaya Darpanam*<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>42</sup> Parshwadeva, *Sangēta Samayasāram*, p. 2-4.

<sup>43</sup> Sarangadeva, *Sangētha Ratnakara*, VII, St. 102 – 184.

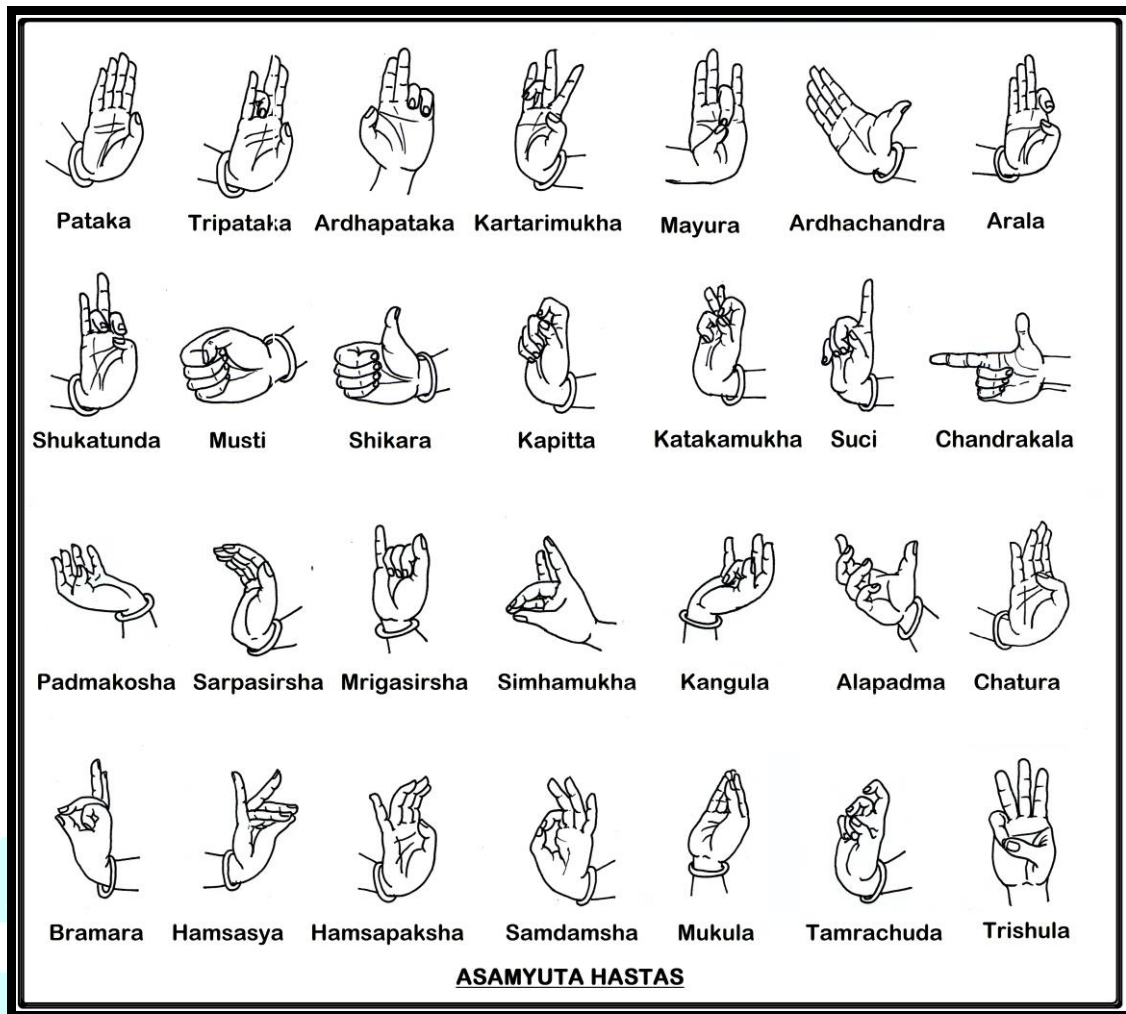
<sup>44</sup> Jayaprasanna, *Nrutta Ratnavali*, op.cit, p. 97-171.

<sup>45</sup> Nandikeshwara, *Bharatarnava I*, op.cit, p. 5-61.

<sup>46</sup> Govindacharya Utake, K. Vasudeva shasty, A. Krishnaswamy Matik, G. Nagaraja Rao, *Nāṭya Shastra Sangraham*, Sarasvati Mahal Library, 1979, p. 99-184.

<sup>47</sup> Nandikeshwara, *Bharatarnava*, op.cit, p. 40 st. 5 – p. 74 st. 433.

<sup>48</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Abhinaya Darpanam* op.cit, p. 155 - 255

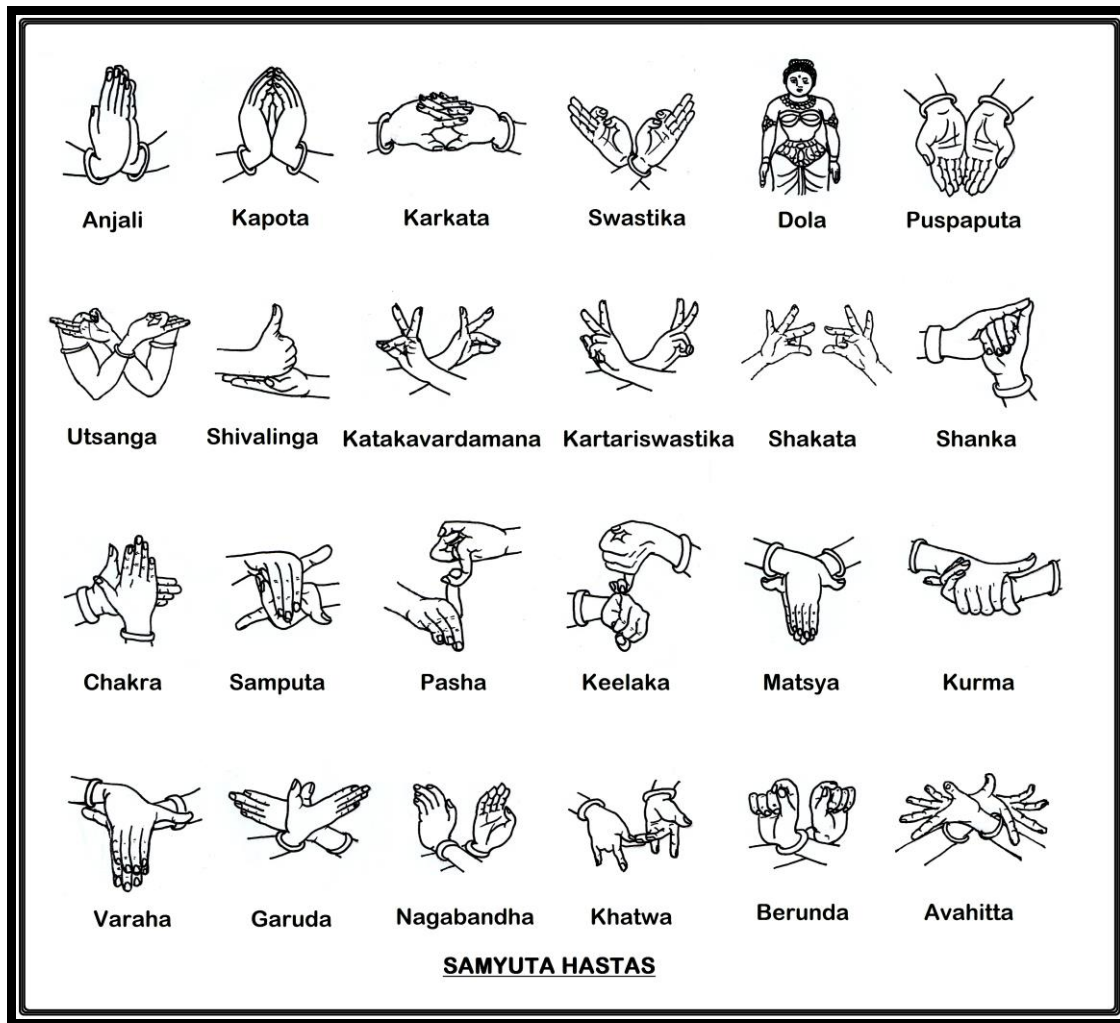


### Asamyuta Hastās

#### **Samyuta Hastās<sup>49</sup>**

*Samyuta Hastās* are double hand gestures or combined *Hastās*. According to *Abhinaya Darpanam* there are 24 *Asamyuta Hastās* and according to *Nāṭya Shāstra* there are 13 in number. The *Asamyuta Hasta* include *Anjali*, *Kapōta*, *Karkata*, *Swastika*, *Dōla*, *Puspaputa*, *Swastika*, *Shivalinga*, *Katakavardamāna*, *Kartarīswastika*, *Shakata*, *Shanka*, *Chakra*, *Samputa*, *Pāsha*, *Kēlaka*, *Matsya*, *Kūrma*, *Varāha*, *Garuda*, *Nagabandha*, *Khatva*, *Berunda* and *Avahitta*. Below are the *Samyuta Hastās* (single hand gestures) along with the pictorial representation and some major usages.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 256 – 287.



### Samyuta Hastās

#### **Adhika Hastās:**

Apart from the *Asamyuta* and *Samyuta Hasta* there are some extra hand gestures (*Adhika Hastās*) which have been mentioned by the scholars. *Nandikeshwara* in his *Abhinaya Darpanam* has mentioned about 52 *Adhika Hastās* and few of them are *Nishādha*, *Gajadanta*, *Avahitta*, *Vardhamāna*, *Viprakērna* (Loose), *Arāla-Katakāmukha* (giving pieces of betel leaf), *Suchāsya* (Needle-face), *Ardha Raechita* (invitation), *Kaasha-Bandha* (Tying the hair), *Mushthi-Swastika*, *Nalini-Padmakōsha* (cluster of flowers), *Urdhestitālapadma* (indicating desires), *Ulbana* (Abundance), *Lalita* (mountain), *Garudapaksha* (wings of eagle), *Nishaedha* (prohibit) etc<sup>50</sup>.

#### **Hasta Prānas:**

In dance, the way *Hasta Mudrās* are held is divided into 12 different ways which are known as '*Hasta prānas*' or '*prāna lakshanās*' in dance terminology<sup>51</sup>. Below is the list of the twelve *Hasta pranas* and the process of its usage.

*Prakarana Hasta* – The fingers are stretched.

*Kunchita Hasta* – The fingers are folded.

*Raechita Hasta* – The fingers are given movement.

*Punchita Hasta* – The fingers are folded or moved or stretched.

*Apavaeshtita Hasta* – The fingers are bent down.

*Prerita Hasta* – The fingers are bent back or moved or stretched.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 155 - 255

<sup>51</sup> Appa Rao PSR, *Hastābhinayam*, op.cit, p. 273



*Udveshita Hasta* – The fingers and hand are held upwards while dancing.

*Vyavrutta Hasta* – The hands are held up to the sides.

*Parivrutta Hasta* – The hands are brought together from sides.

*Sanketa Hasta* – The hands used to convey implied meanings.

*Chihna Hasta* – The hands used to convey certain things which are visible and invisible.

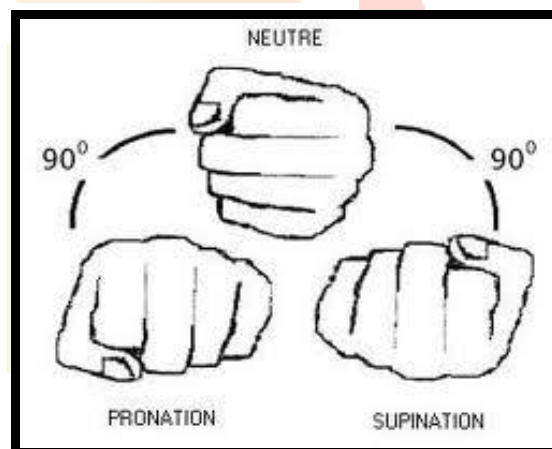
*Padārthatēka* – The hands used to confirm the meaning of certain words.

The *Hasta Mudrās* are static in *Yoga* and spiritual practices, whereas they are dynamic in the dance practices.

As we have explored the various types of *Hasta Mudras* according to various texts and their benefits and usages, now, let us explore the holding and positioning of these *Hasta Mudras* correlating them with scientific approach.

### PRONATION – SUPINATION OF HAND

The *Hasta Mudrās* are held in a prescribed shape and angle according to the requirement. Few of the *Hasta Mudrās* are held facing the fingers towards the ground, few facing the sky and few facing different directions or angles. The hand is rotated in different angles and directions either from the wrist or forearm. The science of hand, describes the rotation of the hand in different angles.



#### Pronation and Supination

In simple terms Pronation of the hand is facing the knuckles outwards / upwards from the neutral position and Supination of the hand is facing the knuckles inwards / downwards from the neutral position. It can be clearly understood from the above picture. The keen observation of the wrist, forearm, and hand gives the clearest understanding of the mechanism of pronation/supination. At the end of the arms, we find the supinator, a short muscle whose fibres run from the ulna (long forearm bone) and the lateral end of the humerus (upper arm bone) to the radius (short forearm bone). It assists the biceps brachii in rotating the forearm laterally (supination). Whereas, the pronator teres is a short muscle connecting the ends of the humerus (upper arm bone) and ulna to the radius (forearm bones). It functions to rotate the arm towards inside, as when the hand is turned so the palm is facing downward (pronation). The pronator

quadratus, which runs from the far end of the ulna (longest forearm bone) to the far end of the radius (shortest forearm bone) helps in this activity.<sup>52</sup>

Supination and Pronation (rotation from the axis of the forearm) are added to the two axes of movements of the wrist while holding the *Hasta Mudrās* individually or while performing the *Nṛitta Hastās*. Pronation and Supination are a paired set of joint manipulations though not unique to humans, gives us a greater degree of dexterity and flexibility. This ability is found in both the hands, feet and to a lesser extent in other joints. Neither set of muscles could accomplish the task separately, nor could they do so without a special joint that allows the radius and ulna to cross each other within the arm. Yet together they make the process of pronation or supination possible to rotate the arms outwards and turn the palms upward and downward.

The *Hasta Mudrās* in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance are held in different postures and in different angles depending on the necessity. The pronation and supination play a major role in turning the hand to a particular angle from the base of the wrist and is very much useful in holding the *Hasta Mudrās* in different postures and angles in *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance. The *Bhāratēya Shāstrēya* dance either uses pronation or supination to hold the *Hasta Mudrās* with ease and perfection either individually or in *Nṛitta Hastās*. The *Hasta Mudrās*, which involves pronation include *kapitta*, *katakāmukha*, *sūchi*, *sarpashērsha*, *mrigashērsha*, *simhamukha*, *bhramara*, *hamsapaksha*, *samdamsa*, *dōla*, *matsya*, *varāha* etc. The *Hasta Mudrās*, which involve supination, include *padmakosha*, *kangula*, *chatura*, *mukula*, *puspaputa*, *khatva*, *avahitta* etc. The *Hasta Mudrās*, which involve both pronation and supination, include *samputa*, *pasha*, *kēlaka*, *kurma*, etc. However, while performing the *Nṛitta Hastās*, each both pronation and supination might be used to show each *Nṛitta Hasta*.

## ARTICULATIONS OF HAND

The *Hasta Mudrās* are held either by stretching the fingers or by bending them. The stretching of the fingers may involve all or few of the fingers. Similarly, the bending of the fingers may involve all or few of them. Hence, the holding of the *Hasta Mudrās* individually or while performing the *Nṛitta Hastās*, involve different joints of the bone in the hand to bend the fingers.

The different joints in the hand include the wrist, the carpal joints, the metacarpal joints, the proximal phalanges, the middle phalanges and the distal phalanges. The joints in the hand are identified as articulations in the language of science. The articulations are<sup>53</sup>:

- Interphalangeal articulations of hand (the hinge joints between the bones of the finger)
- Metacarpophalangeal joints (the place, where the fingers meet the palm)
- Intercarpal articulations (the portion, where the palm meets the wrist)
- Wrist (that may also be considered as a part of the forearm)

There are numerous sesamoid bones in the hand that differ in number, from person to person. A pair of sesamoid bones is found virtually in metacarpophalangeal joints and interphalangeal joint of the thumb (72.9% chances), the metacarpophalangeal joints of the little finger (82.5% chances) and the index finger (48% chances). In rare cases, the sesamoid bones can be seen in all the metacarpophalangeal joints and all distal interphalangeal joints except that of the longest finger<sup>54</sup>.

The articulations play a very important role in holding the *Hasta Mudrā* in a particular pose, particular level, in a particular angle and importantly in a particular posture. All the above

<sup>52</sup> Schmidt & Lanz, *Human Physiology*, op.cit, p.107.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p.107.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

mentioned four articulations are involved in holding the *Hasta Mudrās* depending upon the *Hasta Mudrā*, its positioning and the angle of holding it (*Hasta Pranas – Nṛitta Hastās*). The interphalangeal and metaphalangeal joints or articulations are involved in holding the *Hasta Mudrā*, whereas the intercarpal articulation and the wrist is involved in positioning of the *Hasta Mudrās* in different angles while performing the *Nṛitta Hastās*.

## CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion, we have explored into the terminology of *Hasta Mudra*, their origin, evolution, its attributes and usages in various disciplines like Dance and religious practices of *Hinduism*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism*. The objectives, significance and principles of the *Hasta Mudras* are also investigated in brief. A detailed critical analysis of the *Hasta Mudras* used in Dance are analysed in detail as enumerated by various scholars and disciplines. The various attributes like place, movement, holding and positioning of the *Hasta Mudras*, their genders, classifications, types etc are all dealt in detail as explained by various scholars. The positioning and holding of the *Hasta Mudras* are compared and analysed with scientific approach. The above analysis has to be promoted, propagated and educated to understand the concept of *Hasta Mudras* in detail for effective implementation in Dance and religious practices.

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