

**ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF HASTAMUDRA AND ITS
APPLICATION IN KOOTIYATTOM AND
BHARATANATYAM A STUDY IN COMPARISON**

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The history of hastamudras dates as far back as the Indus valley period. Lord Siva is the oldest ever known dancer. Hastamudras form part of the ancient dance that was originally practiced in Hindu temples. The dance tradition has been disseminated orally for thousands of years. Hastamudras are inevitable in Indian dancing and acting. Dancing and acting are two art forms that are intimately related and both share the same name Nāṭya.

Nāṭyasāstra is the original source of information on hastamudras. Several books also have been written on the basis of Nāṭyasāstra. These books have obtained much popularity. Among them Abhinayadarpana, is believed to have been written by Nandikesvara.

The mudras adopted in Bharatanāṭyam, Kūṭiyāttam, Kathakali, Mohiniyāttam and Kuchupudi, which are the main dance forms of South India, can be divided into three as Mudras received from Nāṭyasāstra, received from other books and received from the world. Hasta means hand in Sanskrit. Mudra is a Sanskrit word that means sign, seal or image. Thus a hastamudra is the hand and fingers placed in a specific form, thereby creating a hand sign or hand symbol. Essentially, mythological stories of gods and creatures are considered to be highly relevant themes for plays and dances in India to convey moral, spiritual, or philosophical values.

Thus, the significance of the hastamudra can be seen in its power to represent and interpret ordinary and extraordinary characters and events, objects and thoughts, qualities and even feelings.

Nāṭyasāstra can be considered to be a mini-encyclopaedia of ancient India. It contains invaluable information about the form, function and technical details of

dance and theater in ancient India. It is also the Nātyasāstra that introduces us to the codification of hastamudras.

There are other texts on the topic of hastamudras, dramatic performance and dance movements. The Hastamuktavali written by Subhakarā is text very popular in Assam and Bengal. Sarngadeva who composed the Sangitaratnakara has dealt with hastamudras in the chapter or Nr̥tta. Another authoritative text in this regard is the Balaramabharatam written by Kartikatirunal Balarama Varma.

Another most important of these, with reference to hastamudras, is Nandikesvara's Abhinaya Darpana (literally, Mirror of Gestures) the date of which is a matter of dispute. This compact text can be described as an abridged dancer's guide based on the Nātyasāstra. What Nandikesvara did was to extract only the chapters specific to Indian Dramatic technique and its essentials.

Bharatanatyam used to be and is still mostly performed by women dancers. The Hindu temples, especially in South India, had dancers-priestesses called Devadasis. They sang and danced Dasi Attam (old version of Bharatanatyam) and played many musical instruments. They were well-versed in Sanskrit and other languages as they had to adapt compositions to suit the audience. Contemporary choreographers and dancers use some of the formal Bharatanātyam technique to convey nationalism, unity of religions, the sanctity of the environment etc.

Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara is largely followed in Bharatanatyam for the performance of hastamudras. Though Abhinayadarpana has come down to us, practically nothing is known about its author Nandikesvara. Nandikesvara is a legendary figure who is described in the Purānas as the attendant of Lord Siva. Nandikesvara is considered as an authority on Rasa also.

Nandikesvara explains the characteristics of the hand gestures. As done in Nātyasāstra, the hand gestures are divided into two, Asamyutahastas or single hand gestures and Samyutahastas or combined gestures.

The single hand gestures are twenty-eight in number. Natyasastra deals with twenty-four single hand gestures only. Mayura, Chandrakala, Simhamukha and Trisula are the single hand gestures found here in excess of those found in

Natyasastra. Apart from these basic single hand gestures, Abhinayadarpana deals with four other single hand gestures also.

There are twenty-three combined poses mentioned by previous authorities viz. Annjali, Kapota, Karkata, Svastika, Dola, Puspaputa, Utsanga, Sivalinga, Katakāvardhana, Kartarisvastika, Sakata, Sankha, Cakra, Samputa Pāsa, Kilaka, Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Garuda Nāgabandha, Khatvā and Bheranda.

Abhinayadarpana deals with all the twenty four combined hand gestures mentioned above. The Natyasastra of Bharata deals with thirteen combined hand gestures only. Annjali, Kapota, Karkata, Svastika, Dola, Puspaputa, Utsanga and Katakāvardhana are the eight combined hand gestures found commonly in the Natyasastra of Bharata and the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara. Nisadha, Makara, Gajadanta, Avahittha and Vardhamana are the five combined hand gestures found in the Natyasastra of Bharata and not in the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara. Sivalinga, Kartarisvastika, Sakata, Sankha, Cakra, Samputa, Pāsa, Kilaka, Matsya, Kūrma, Varāha, Garuda, Nāgabandha, Khatvā and Bheranda are the fifteen combined hand gestures found in the Abhinayadarpana of Nandikesvara and not in the Natyasastra of Bharata.

Kūtiyāttam, the oldest among the existing classical theatre forms in the world enacts Sanskrit drama through dance. Kūtiyāttam has its origins in the temples of ancient Kerala where the art was consecrated to appease the Gods. Thus, many temples in Kerala have a dance chamber with slopping roof known as the Kūttambalam. The word Kūtiyāttam literally means “acting together”.

Kūtiyāttam is based on mime language. Great emphasis is laid on facial and eye expressions, and hastamudras (hand gestures). Angikam, Vacikam, Sathvikam and Aharyam are the four types of Abhinaya highly emphasized in Kūtiyāttam. Elaborate costumes and extensive use of colours heighten the spectacular effect. It follows Hastalaksandadipikā in the use of hastamudras. Hastalaksandadipikā is a text of unknown authorship. Hastalaksandadipika mentions twenty four basic Mudras.

Bharatanatyam in its present shape is based on a single dancer presenting a number of items solidly based mainly on Sringara Rasa (the erotic emotion) in a

particular pattern from Alarippu to Tillana, very closely tied to vocal Carnatic music. In a similar manner, Kūtiyattam, the stylized Sanskrit drama or Kerala, was equally influenced by local socio-economic factors.

Like other Hindu forms of dance drama Kūtiyāttam evolved as a ritual dance, to be performed as an offering at temples and during religious festivals. Whereas, Mudras of Abhinayadarpana are mainly used in Bharatanātya and mudras of Hastalaksanadipika are used in Koodiyattam.

Mudras of Bharatanātyam and Kūtiyāttam having the same name are Patāka, Kartarimukha, Ardhaçandra, Crāla, Musti, Sikhara, Kapittha(ka), Katakāmukham Sūci (kāmukha), Sarpasiras, Mrgasiras (sirsa), Bharamara, Hamsāsya, Hamsapaka and Mukula.

Mudras having the same posture in Bharatanāyam and Kūtiyāttam but the same posture have different names and Viniyogas in Bharatanāyam and Kūtiyattam.