



NAMING VARIATIONS OF MUDRAS: RECONCILING BĀLARĀMABHARATAM WITH CLASSICAL CANONICAL TEXTS

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Abstract: The *Bālarāmabhāratam*, composed by King Bālarāma of Kerala in the 18th century, stands as a distinctive treatise within the corpus of Indian dance literature. Though less widely studied than canonical texts such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, it offers valuable insights into the practice and pedagogy of classical dance. One of its notable contributions lies in its detailed classification of *samyukta hasta-s* and *asamyukta hasta-s*. This study examines the correspondences between the *hasta-s* described in *Bālarāmabhāratam* and those codified in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*. While the physical gestures and their usages remain largely identical across both texts, the nomenclature employed in *Bālarāmabhāratam* diverges, reflecting regional and temporal variations in terminology. By systematically analyzing these parallels, the research highlights how shifts in naming conventions do not diminish the continuity of practice but rather underscore the adaptability of the tradition.

Index Terms – hasta, Bālarāmabhāratam, viniyog, mudra.

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Bālarāmabhāratam* is a seminal text on Indian dance and dramaturgy authored by King Bālarāma of Kerala in the 18th century. Emerging within a rich tradition of Sanskrit treatises such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, this work reflects both continuity and innovation in the codification of performance practices. While the *Abhinayadarpaṇam* of Nandikeśvara is widely regarded as a foundational manual for Bharatanāṭyam, the *Bālarāmabhāratam* provides a regional perspective that adapts and reinterprets established conventions.

A particularly significant aspect of the text lies in its classification of *hasta-s* (hand gestures), which are divided into *samyukta hasta-s* (double-hand gestures) and *asamyukta hasta-s* (single-hand gestures). Although the gestures themselves and their applications remain consistent with those described in the *Abhinayadarpaṇam*, the nomenclature employed in the *Bālarāmabhāratam* diverges. This shows how the practice of dance remained continuous, even when the terminology changed. By comparing the two texts, we can see how the *Bālarāmabhāratam* adds to our understanding of Bharatanāṭyam and helps preserve the link between written tradition and performance.

II. ASAMYUKTA HASTA

Bālacandra

सूचीहस्तस्थिताङ्गुष्ठो विशालेन प्रसारितः ॥
बालचन्द्रकरः सोऽयं नाट्ये च कथितो बुधैः ।

sūcīhastasthitāṅguṣṭho viśālena prasāritaḥ ॥
bālacandrakaḥ so 'yam nāṭye ca kathito budhaiḥ ॥

If the thumb of the *Sūcimukha* is stretched and extended, it is *Bālacandra hasta*. It is similar to the *candrakala* in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*.

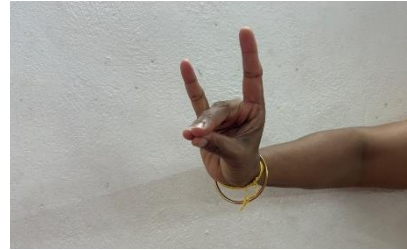


Siṃhanāna

चतुरे मध्यमाङ्गुष्ठानामिकाग्रस्य मेलनात् ।
शेषप्रसारणाच्चापि सिंहाननकरः स्मृतः ॥

cature madhyamāṅguṣṭhānamikāgrasya melanāt
śeṣaprasāraṇāccāpi siṃhānanakaraḥ smṛtaḥ ॥

If in the *Catura* the tips of the thumb, the middle finger and the ring finger are joined together, it is called *Siṃhanāna*. It is the same as *siṃhamukha* in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*



Alapallava

पद्मकोशकरस्तावदङ्गुष्ठान्तो विवर्तितः ।
कनिष्ठाद्याश्च विरलाः क्रमादुपरि विस्तृताः ।
एवंलक्षणसंयुक्तः स्थितोऽयमलपल्लवः ॥
लघुना मणिबन्धेन चलनात् सालकः स्मृतः ॥

padmakōśakaraḥ tāvad aṅguṣṭhānto vivartitaḥ
kaniṣṭhādyāś ca viralāḥ kramād upari vistrīṭāḥ
evamlakṣaṇasamyuktaḥ sthito 'yam alapallavaḥ
laghunā maṇibandhena calanāt sālakaḥ smṛtaḥ ॥

If the fingers of the *Padmakōśa* are turned round upto the thumb and the little finger etc., are separated and extended up in order, it is *Alapallava*. This is similar to the *alapadma* in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*



Puronnata

पद्मकोशकरेऽङ्गुष्ठः कनिष्ठनखरोपरि ।
शेषप्रसारितो हस्तः पुरोन्नत इति स्मृतः ॥

padmakōśakare 'ṅguṣṭhaḥ kaniṣṭhanakharopari
śeṣaprasārito hastaḥ puronnata iti smṛtaḥ ॥



If the thumb in the *Padmakōśa hasta* is placed on the nail of the Jittle finger and the rest are stretched, the *hasta* is called *Puronnata* This is mentioned in the *Abhinayadarpaṇam* as *Triśūla*.

III. SAMYUKTA HASTA

Makara

अर्धचन्द्रकरद्वन्द्वे वामस्योपरि दक्षिणम् ॥
अधोमुखतलौ न्यस्तौ करौ मकर उच्यते ।

*ardhacandrakaradvandve vāmasypari dakṣiṇam
adhomukhatalau nyastau karau makara ucyate //*



Of the two *ardhacandra hasta*, if the right hand is placed on the left hand so as to bend the palms downwards, the *hasta* is called *makara hasta*. It is called as the *matsya hasta* in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*

Kalaha

दृढः कुटिलहस्तस्थतर्जन्यन्योन्यशृङ्खलात् ।
कळहः कर इत्येवं कथितो नाट्यबोदधिः ॥
*dr̥ḍhaḥ kuṭilahastasthatarjanyanyonyaśṛṅkhalāt
kaḷahaḥ kara ityevaṁ kathito nāṭyabodabhiḥ //*



If the forefingers of both the *Kutilla hasta*-s are joined together, it is called *Kalaha hasta*. This is the same as the *Pasa hasta* of *Abhinayadarpaṇam*.

Śubha śobhana

मुष्टिहस्तकनिष्ठाभ्यां मिथः शृङ्खलपीडनात् ।
शुमशोभनहस्तस्तु विज्ञेयो भरतागमे ॥

*muṣṭihastakaniṣṭhābhyāṁ mithaḥ śṛṅkhalapīḍanāt
śumaśobhanahastastu vijñeyo bharatāgame //*



If the little fingers of the two *Muṣṭi hastas* are joined together, it is *Subha-śobhanahasta*. This is the same as the *Kilaka hasta* in *Abhinayadarpaṇam*.

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