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Prālambam

A Contribution Of Bālarāmabharatam

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Abstract: This study discusses the relevance of the Prālambam hasta, a mudra frequently used in Bharatanatyam. *Mudras*, or hand gestures, are fundamental to Bharatanatyam, serving as a powerful means of expression and storytelling. They are used to convey specific meanings, emotions, and narratives. Each gesture has a distinct significance, allowing dancers to tell intricate stories without words. The Prālambam *mudra* is mentioned only in the 18th-century text *Bālarāmabharatam* of Maharaja Kartika Tirunna Balaramavarma. This work is an extension of earlier classical texts like the *Natyasastra* by Bharata Muni and the *Abhinayadarpanam* by Nandikeshwara. *Balarāmabharatam* is not merely a compilation but an adaptation of these ancient principles to the contemporary contexts of its time. It includes novel ideas on action, dramaturgy, and theatrics, reflecting the author's profound scholarship in music and dance.

Index Terms – Prālamba hasta, Bālarāmabharatam, mudras.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bharatanatyam is one of the eight forms of classical Indian dance that is believed to have originated in Tamil Nadu and expresses the religious and spiritual themes of Hinduism. This dance form subtly synthesizes philosophy, religion, sculpture, dance, music, and literature. Bharatanatyam was initially performed by the devadasis, or temple dancers, who dedicated their lives to serving the deities through dance and music. They performed in the temples of Tamil Nadu, especially in the Chola, Pallava, and Pandya kingdoms. The dance form was also known as *sadirattam* or *dasiattam*, and was patronized by the royal courts and the nobility.

Art and literature are two forms of human expression with a long and complex history of interaction. Several works of literature and texts have influenced and shaped Bharatanatyam over the centuries. *Nāṭya Sāstra*, one among them, is believed to be the oldest and most authoritative text on performing arts, written by the sage Bharata Muni.

Taking the primary resource as *Nāṭya Sāstra* of Bharata, many works were written, focussing on the *nṛtta* aspect of dance. *Bālarāmabharatam* is one such example. Focussing on *āṅgikā abhinaya*, this text was written by Maharaja Karthika Tirunna Balarama Varma in the eighteenth century A.D. The original text was written in Sanskrit using Malayalam script. The manuscript was found by Sambashiva Sastry and was published in 1935. *Bālarāmabharatam* also deals with the philosophical aspect of *rasa* (sentiment) and its presentation technique. Some parts of the body dealt with in the *āṅgikā abhinaya* section are totally different and very much in detail.

II. THE TEXT BĀLARĀMABHARATAM

Bālarāmabharatam is a Sanskrit treatise on classical Indian dance and drama, written by the king of Travancore, Karthika Thirunna Balarama Varma, in the eighteenth century C.E. He was also known as Dharma Raja, or the king of righteousness, and was a patron and reformer of Kathakali, another classical dance form from Kerala. The *Bālarāmabharatam* text is not a simple compilation of earlier texts on *nāṭya*, such as the *Nāṭya Sāstra* by Bharata Muni or the *Abhinayadarpanam* by Nandikeshwara. It is an extension and adaptation of the

earlier sastras to suit the contemporary contexts and needs. The text covers various aspects of dance, such as the origin, purpose, types, elements, techniques, expressions, styles, costumes, music, and aesthetics. It also reflects the cultural and historical influences on dance in the South in general and Kerala in particular during the eighteenth century.

This detailed work is based on the practical experience of the author. Although he follows the path of the Nāṭya Sāstra of Bharata, he has introduced some new and different concepts based on his practical experience. He claims he is not creating anything new but writing about the art of abhinaya as it is practiced around him.

Even though the original text, which is in the form of a manuscript, is not divided into chapters, it can be broadly divided into two sections.

1. The general part includes the first four chapters. It deals with the author's life and works and gives a general account of nāṭya.

2. The technical part deals with and describes āṅgikā abhinaya and compares it with the other works on Sanskrit dramaturgy.

The Bālarāmabharatam text is a valuable contribution to the tradition and evolution of any classical art form of South India. It is a testament to the creativity and vision of its author, who was both a scholar and a king.

III. MUDRAS OR GESTURES

Mudras, or hand gestures, are a fundamental aspect of Bharatanatyam, serving as a powerful non-verbal language that conveys emotions, stories, and spiritual concepts. Derived from the Sanskrit word meaning "seal" or "gesture," *mudras* are integral to the dance form's expressive vocabulary. *Viniyoga-s*, or the applications of *mudras* (hand gestures), are crucial in Bharatanatyam for several reasons:

1. Enhanced Storytelling

Viniyoga-s allow dancers to use specific *mudras* to depict various characters, objects, and actions, making the storytelling more vivid and engaging.

2. Emotional Expression

By using different *viniyoga-s*, dancers can convey a wide range of emotions and moods. This adds depth to the performance, enabling the audience to connect with the narrative on an emotional level.

3. Cultural and Spiritual Significance

Each *viniyoga* is rooted in Indian culture and mythology, often symbolizing deities, rituals, and philosophical concepts. This connection to tradition enriches the dance form and preserves cultural heritage.

4. Versatility and Innovation

Viniyoga-s provide a framework for creativity. While there are traditional applications, dancers can innovate and adapt gestures to suit contemporary themes and stories, keeping the art form dynamic and evolving.

The use of gestures is likely as ancient as humanity itself. Spoken language, a divine gift to humans, probably emerged long after gestural communication. Despite the advent of spoken language, gestures have retained their significance. People often find vocal sounds alone insufficient for expressing their ideas. Speech without gestures feels incomplete, making gesticulation a universal trait.

In Indian dance and drama, the use of hand gestures dates back to ancient times. The *hasta-mudras* in iconography highlight the connection between sculpture and the art of dance and drama. Some of these *mudras* can be traced back to the Indus Valley Civilization and the Rigveda. The Vajasaneyi Samhita discusses hand and body gestures as essential to rituals. Priests performing Yagas and pūjas use various hand poses, believing that symbolic *mudras* can easily invoke and please the gods. This practice continues in the Tantric system, where priests still use gestures.

Bharata codified all the *mudras* used in Natya. Most texts on Natya categorize *Hastamudras* into three types: *Asamyukta* (single), *Samyukta* (combined), and *Hastas* for Nṛtta (Nṛttahastas). The *Asamyukta* and *Samyukta hasta-s* mainly involve finger manipulation to indicate positions. In contrast, the *Nṛtta-hastas* primarily involve finger movements and often suggest arm movements. The Balaramabharatm lists 40 *Asamyukta-hastas* and 27 *Samyuta-hastas*, totalling 67

IV. PRĀLAMBA HASTA IN BĀLARĀMABHARATAM

Prālambam *hasta* is mentioned in Blaramabharatam as the thirty-second *asamyukta hasta*. The sloka says –

बालचन्द्रकरे तावत् कनिष्ठाद्यङ्गुलित्रिकाः ॥
विस्तीर्योर्ध्वमुखा अन्तर्नताः प्रालम्बहस्तकः । 359।

bālacandrakare tāvat kaniṣṭhādyāṅgulitrikāḥ
vistīryordhvamukhā antarnatāḥ prāambahastakah ।

If in the Balachandra *hasta* the three fingers, beginning with the little finger, are extended upwards and then curved inwards, it is Prālambam *hasta*.

Even though Prālambam *hasta* is widely used in Bharatanatyam, it is not mentioned in any texts before the 18th century. Despite its excessive use in Kathakali and Mohiniyattom, this *hasta* does not occur in the Hasta Lakshana Deepika.

The viniyoga sloka of Prālambam *hasta* is as follows –

द्वारपालकहस्ते च मोहने भ्रमणे करे ॥ ३६० ॥
चिबुकोपरि नारीभिस्तर्जन्यङ्गुलिधारणे ।
आलोचनायामाश्चर्येऽतिशये काकुभाषणे ॥ ३६१ ॥
चिबुकं सम्यगालम्ब्य स्त्रिया वा पुरुषेण वा ।
कोपोदयः किमर्थं ते दयां देहीति याचने ॥ ३६२ ॥
उपचारेण हस्तेन गुरुभूपालपण्डितान् ।
अत्रैवागच्छतागच्छतेति सन्तोषभाषणे ॥ ३६३ ॥
शाब्दिकानेषु असंयुतहस्तभेदाः ।
तथैव मार्गदाने च गच्छतेति प्रियोक्तिभिः ।
वक्रवक्रेण वेश्याभिर्विदधिकारभाषणे ॥ ३६४ ॥
निषेधे गच्छ गच्छेति भाषणे चानुरञ्जने ।
आश्चर्यमिति नारीभिः काकुभावेन निन्दने ॥ ३६५ ॥
अन्योन्यकलहे स्त्रीभिः पुरोहस्तप्रसारणे ।
मोहने स्तम्भने शोके वाग्विस्तारानुमोदने ॥ ३६६ ॥
नाट्ये शृङ्गारगमने सञ्चारिभावदर्शने ।
शस्य नायकस्याग्रे करौ सम्यक् प्रसार्य च ॥ ३६७ ॥
ईर्ष्या चालयित्वैव मानभञ्जनकर्मणि ।
अतिदुःखमहो प्राप्तमत्याहितमिवागतम् ॥ ३६८ ॥
रहस्यवारनारीभिर्विदवीभत्सवीक्षणे ।
रतिमूल्याप्रदानेन प्रत्यहं जारदर्शने ॥ ३६९ ॥
संकटासहमानेन स्वोरुयुग्मप्रताडने ।
प्रालम्बकृतपाणिभ्यामन्योन्यालिङ्गने सुखे ॥ ३७० ॥
वामहस्तेन चालिङ्गय नायिकामुख चुम्बने ।
प्रालम्बपाणियुगले धृतचालानुलालने ॥ ३७१ ॥
मत्करे नास्ति किमपि किं करोमीति भाषणे ।
मोक्षे महात्मभावे च मर्यादोल्लङ्घने करे ॥ ३७२ ॥
सौन्दर्ये च विशाले च शिरो (भा) गावलम्बने ।
एवमादिविशेषेषु सरसाभिनयेषु च ॥ ३७३ ॥
बालराममहीपाल चिन्तिताभिनये मुदा ।
प्रालम्बहस्त एतेषु कार्येषु विनियुज्यते ॥ ३७४ ॥

Viniyogaḥ

dvārapālakahaste ca mohane bhramaṇe kare || 360 ||
 cibukopari nārībhistarjanyaṅgulidhāraṇe |
 ālocanāyāmāścarye'tisaye kākubhāṣaṇe || 361 ||
 cibukaṃ samyagālambya striyā vā puruṣeṇa vā |
 kopodayaḥ kimarthaṃ te dayāṃ dehīti yācane || 362 ||
 upacāreṇa hastena gurubhūpālapaṇḍitān |
 . atraivāgacchatāgacchateti santoṣabhāṣaṇe || 363 ||
 śābdikāneṣu asaṃyutahastabhedāḥ |
 tathaiva mārgadāne ca gacchateti priyoktibhiḥ |
 vakravakreṇa veśyābhirviṭadhikārabhāṣaṇe || 364 ||
 niṣeṣe gaccha gaccheti bhāṣaṇe cānurañjane |
 āścaryamiti nārībhiḥ kākubhāveṇa nindane || 365 ||
 anyonyakalahe strībhiḥ purohastaprasāraṇe |
 mohane stambhane śoke vāgvistārānumodane || 366 ||
 nātye śrīṅgāragamane sañcāribhāvadarsāne |
 śasya nāyakasyāgre karau samyak prasārya ca || 367 ||
 īrṣyayā cālayitvaiva mānabhañjanakarmaṇi |
 atiduhkhamaho prāptamatyāhitamivāgatam || 368 ||
 rahasyavāranārībhirviṭavībhatsavīkṣaṇe |
 ratimūlyāpradānena pratyahaṃ jāradaṛśane || 369 ||
 saṃkaṭāsahamānena svoruyugmapratāḍane |
 prālambakṛtapāṇibhyāmanyonyāliṅgane sukhe || 370 ||
 vāmahastena cāliṅgaya nāyikāmukha cumbane |
 prālambapāṇiyugale dhṛtacālānulālāne || 371 ||
 matkare nāsti kimapi kiṃ karomīti bhāṣaṇe |
 mokṣe mahātmabhāve ca maryādollaṅghane kare || 372 ||
 saundarye ca viśāle ca śiro (bhā) gāvalambane |
 evamādiviṣeṣeṣu sarasābhinayeṣu ca || 373 ||
 bālarāmamahīpāla cintitābhinaye mudā |
 prālambahasta eteṣu kāryeṣu viniyujyate || 374 ||

Dr. V.S Sharma, in his book *Bala Rama Bharatham Saraswathi* has translated the sloka as follows ;

360. It is used to portray the hand of a doorkeeper, beauty and movement

361. To show women placing the index finger on the chin; to convey deep thought, surprise, wonder; and in questioning;

362. Whether it be a man or woman, someone, touching firmly the chin, asks, "What makes you angry? Please, behave with kindness."

363. To say respectfully and formally 'please come here,' 'please come' to one's masters, to kings, to scholars;

364. To say pleasingly, "move forward," and "give way"; in prostitutes defying their clients and speaking harshly with twisted faces;

365. To deny something; to say, 'go, go!'; in reconciling; to make women say in contempt, 'this is strange!' with a questioning face;

366. To portray women quarrelling among themselves and stretching the hand forward; to convey seductiveness, freezing and sadness; in praising a good speech;

367,368. In the movement of sexual feeling, to portray Sanchari bhava; to stretch one's hands fully before the detested hero, shaking them with annoyance, and insulting him; to say, "Alas! a great sorrow has come upon me; a great danger has befallen me!";

369. The prostitute looking at her client in a threatening manner (with a bizarre face); visiting the paramour daily for not paying her for the sexual favour granted;

370. In beating both thighs out of intolerable sorrow in embracing each other with Prālambam *hasta*;

371. In embracing the heroine with the left hand; kissing her face; in caressing a child held in stretched-out hands;

372. In saying, "I have nothing with me. What can I do?"; in portraying heaven (liberation); to portray the attitude of great souls; in transgressing the boundaries of good manners;

373,374. To indicate beauty, generosity, (vast expanse), and in Sirobhaga avalamba in all these special kinds of action, Prālambam *hasta* is made use of.

Apart from the *viniyoga-s* mentioned in *Bālarāmabharatam*, Prālamba *hasta* has many uses in the context of Bharatanatyam. They include

1. Showing the entire body
2. To denote, 'who? what? how?when?and why?'
3. To depict 'I'
4. To depict 'I' with pride
5. To show chest
6. To show hands
7. To depict armlets
8. To emote the bhava of Shoka
9. To depict Atbhuta rasa
10. To say 'I don't know'
11. To show indifference
12. To appreciate an accomplishment
13. To portray forehead/fate
14. To depict half moon
15. To denote neck
16. To show cheeks
17. To show head/or to place something on the head
18. To denote the action of searching

Apart from its *viniyoga-s*, Prālamba *hasta* is also frequently used in Bharatanatyam as a *nritta hasta*, especially while doing *mei adavu* in *Thillana*.

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