



YATHO HASTASTATHO DRISTIHI

-A Dance Analysis of Hand and Eye synchrony in Bharatanatyam from theory to practice.

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Abstract: This paper investigates the relation between the hand movements and the eye movements in Bharatanatyam and contests the common understanding of the relation in the context of Bharatanatyam and other Indian classical dances. This paper employs Dance Analysis in the methodology. A video document is used to investigate the objective by an acclaimed Bharatanatyam performer Dr. Sathyanarayana Raju.

Research question: Do eyes always follow the hands in Bharatanatyam? If yes, are there any contradictory situations for this? If not, what is the relationship of eyes with respect to

1. Hand movements
2. Rhythm accent and
3. Lyrical meaning?

I. INTRODUCTION:

Natyashastra, the written manual for almost all the Indian traditional dances is one of the oldest scripts on dance and theatres that is available till date. In this book Sage Bharata has set few rules in a verse that goes like below-

"Yatho hastastatho Drishtih yatho drishtih tatho manah |
Yatho manastatho bhaavah Yathobhaavastatho Rasah ||"

This verse establishes the interrelation between the movement of eyes and arms through which rasa is attained. It is often seen that there is a misinterpretation in the translation of this verse in the translated version.

"Where the hands are, go the eyes; where the eyes, goes the mind; where the mind goes, there is an expression of inner feeling and where there is Bhaava, mood or sentiment is evoked." (Jayaram,2020:7)

This is a highly debatable way of interpretation because this gives an understanding to the reader that the verse is talking about the path or place or the direction of the hand. Whereas, it is about the nature of what the hand is indicating. In this essay, I shall try to prove the right interpretation is different from that of this using a dance video and other tools to support the theory such as other translations, Labanotation etc.

II. Methodology:

The process of selecting a dance video to analyse was not easy, Perhaps, the complexity of dance form such as Bharatanatyam and my minimal knowledge in the different systems to analyse dance was contradicting any idea that appeared in my mind. I realised that I can not stick on to one system to analyse a dance completely and have to use multiple techniques. So, Pushpanjali turned out to be an interesting option, as it contains both Nritta (pure dance) and Abhinaya (Emotions) in it. Musically speaking, Pushpanjalis are beautiful compositions which have both non lyrical musical notes as well as Lyrics at the end. Hence different analysis systems to analyse the relation of eye movements with respect to different aspects as mentioned above shall be very appropriate.

The methods like Labanotation, Choreomusical analysis, Linguistic analysis may suit this concept the best. However, other approaches such as proxemics, structural, Anatomy, observational analysis may also be used to fill the gaps.

III. Dance Analysis:

3.1 Pushpanjali - The structural analysis:

A Pushpanjali majorly consists of 3 parts

1. Pallavi
2. Anupallavi
3. Charana.

In a Pushpanjali, Dancer enters the stage with flowers in hands (David,2007). Etymologically the word pushpanjali derived from Samskrit language. It can be broken into two words namely,

1. Pushpa- Flowers
2. Anjali- Offering. (sanskritdictionary.com)

After performing some footworks covering the stage in different rhythmic and geometric patterns, the dancer offers flowers to Lord Nataraja- The god of cosmic dance, as well as the Mother Earth on which she/he will be dancing. After which the dancer will be greeting the musicians, the instruments and the audience.

Further, the dancer enters the Nritta or pure dance phrases called Korvai. Korvai is a phrase which has different motifs set together to suit the complex rhythmic structure of the choreography that always ends with the Motifs called "Muktaya Adavus". The composition may contain many korvais depending on the choreographer and the lineage. This part is musically called Pallavi. While speaking musically, during all this the vocalist sings the same phrase repeatedly.

In the second part, that is Anupallavi, the singer starts the next phrase that is attached to the pallavi. There is a korvai that usually goes with the musicality of the phrase. This is also termed as Anupallavi korvai.

The charana or the end is a Lyrical part. Charana in Samskrit means feet. Their lyric is usually a worship to a deity, most of the times Lord Ganesha who is believed to be the deity who blesses devotees by removing all the obstacles in any work. Lord Ganesha is offered the first prayer in Hindu religion. This is the overlook of pushpanjali (Varadpande, M.L., 1973).

3.2. Transcription of Pallavi/ Stanza 1:

In the Carnatic music system, One Rhythmic cycle is called an Avartha or Avarthana. This particular Pushpanjali is set to Adi Thalam, which is an 8 beats cycle. Probably this can be called one measure, in the western music system. To transcribe the videos, I have considered each rhythmic cycle as the reference to divide the phrases. Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanas are the 3 stanzas.

Levels here are :

Stanzas - Pallavi, Anu pallavi and Charanam

1. Phrases - Each bit of 8 beats cycle or a full musical phrase.
2. Motif- Adavus
3. Motif cells (Kaepller and Adrienne,1972)

1st Stanza can be divided into 6 Phrases. (From 2:50 to 4:44)

3.3. Phrase 1(Time in the video 2:50 to 3:06):

Table 1: Breakdown of phrase 1 of the dance video indicating motif 1, 2 and 3.

No. Motif	Name of the Motif	Number of repetitions	Rhythm speciality
1	Jaaradavu 3	4	2nd speed
2	Muktaya 2	2	3rd speed
3	Thattadavu + Muktaya 2	1	2nd speed

3.4. Phrase 2 (3:06 to 3:22):

Table 2: Breakdown of the phrase 2 of the dance video indicating motif 4 and 3mod.

4	Rangakramana	12	2nd speed
3 Modified	Tattu Kattu	1	2nd speed

(This whole set is repeated once in anti clockwise.)

As mentioned above, phrase 1 consists of 3 different motifs. Motif 3 is an amalgamation of two different basic motifs. But here it can be considered as a single motif because of the meaningfulness of the motif. This phrase notes the entry of the dancer. In a pushpanjali, generally a dancer enters from the 3rd side wing of the stage repeating a series of motifs bound together until reaching the centre of the stage. This part of the stage is called the Brahma sthaana in Natyashastra of Bharatamuni. Further in the 2nd phrase, there are two different motifs. The dancer dances one full phrase in the centre of the stage. The dancer during these phrases holds flowers in the palms and are held together at the chest level in pushpaputa hasta. So, This can be the phrase of pure footwork. In these two phrases, the four factors of Laban movement analysis can be analysed like below,

1. Effort Factor - Free
2. Space - Direct
3. Weight - Strong
4. Time - sustained

The entry by this analysis can be observed to be a vibrant and free style of entry. (Bound to the choreography)

3.5. Phrase 3 (3:23 to 4:03)

Table 3: Breakdown of phrase 3 with indication of motifs 5,6, 7 and 8.

5	Tei Tei Tam	4	2nd speed
6	Nadae	6	2nd speed
7	Namaskara	1	1st speed

6 Modified	Reverse Nadai	8	2nd speed
8	Tatti Kumbidal	1	-

3.6. Phrase 4 (4:02 to 4:19) :

Table 4: Breakdown of phrase 4 with indication of motif 9.

9	Natu Kattu	4	2nd speed
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In the phrase3, the dancer moves towards the left diagonal corner (with respect to the dancer), doing motifs 6 and 7. Then offers the flowers to the idol of Nataraja placed there and walks back to the Brahma sthaana again. Later offers his salutations to the stage, musicians and the audience respectively. Hence done, the dancer also turns to the four major directions and offers his worship to the preceding deities. In Sage Bharata's Natyashastra, he has mentioned the name of the direction, the name of the deity and the way of worshipping the particular deity in a chapter called Purvaranga vidhanam. Traditionally in the earlier days, this process was done days earlier before the performance. Nowadays as the dance is done in the auditoriums, these procedures are converted to the brief symbolic movements.

3.7. Phrase 5 (4:20 to 4:44) :

Table 5: Breakdown of phrase 5 with indication of motif 1,4,3,10 and 11.

1	Jaradavu 2	2	3rd speed
1 Modified	Jaradavu 5	2	3rd speed
4 Modified	Rangakramana	4	3rd speed
3	Thattadavu 1	3	2nd speed

(Whole sequence is repeated twice)

The phrase involves both hand movements and the foot work. Here the dancer dances in the indulging flow across the sustained time.

10	Naatu 6	2	3rd speed
11	Paraval 1	2	3rd speed

This Phrase acts as the link between Pallavi and Anupallavi. Here the dancer dances in the indulging flow across the sustained time. In this whole choreography, it can be observed that the choreographer has strictly restricted the phrase length to exactly that of the musical phrases. Usually one dance phrase can extend to 3 repetitions of musical phrase and so on. With this the Pallavi or Stanza 1 ends.

3.8. Anupallavi or Stanza 2 (4:45 to 5:16):

The Anupallavi choreography is generally done to match the flow of the musical phrase exactly. In this video, we can see a typical example of such.

3.9. Anupallavi Phrase 1 (4:45 to 5:00) :

Table 5: Breakdown of Anupallavi phrase 1 with indication of motif 12 to 15.

12	Tei Tei Tam	4	3rd speed
13	Theyyi	1	2nd speed
14	Korvai adavu	2	3rd speed
15	Muktaya adavu +Tattajham ta	1	3rd speed

(Whole sequence is repeated twice)

In this phrase the dancer dances along with the flow of the music. The time is accelerating through the phrase and space and directions are direct. Geometrically the dancer takes paths such as straight lines parallel to the audience perspective.

3.10. Anupallavi Phrase 2 (5:01 to 5:16) :

Table 5: Breakdown of Anupallavi phrase 2 with indication of motif 16 to 17.

16	Taihattaihi	4	3rd sped
17	Nadai	1	2nd speed

(Whole sequence is repeated twice)

The dancer performs this phrase with the free flow through the direct space. The weight is strong and the time is decelerating. At the end of this phrase, We can observe that the link is already established to the next Stanza by the introduction of lyrics in the last two beats. This can be recognised by the audience who is familiar with the language. But, the dancers' indulging attitude at the end beats is clearly stating the change that the lyric is about to begin. The geometrical paths taken here are point and semi circular.

3.11. Stanza 3 (5:17 - 6:05):

The Charanam or the stanza 3 consists of the lyrical part of the composition. The dancer offers salutations to the deity called Ganapathi. The lyrics explain the features of the deity and offer worship and so does the dancer through the hand gestures and facial expressions.

Motif 6	Nadae	6	2nd speed
Motif 17	Dhi Dhi thai (swastika)	4	2nd speed

The same lyrics and hand gestures are done with a different set of footwork and flow of time and the attitude, space, time, weight, flow completely changes by introduction of this footwork to the phrase. The details are as follows

Motif 18	Chaturasra tattimettu	7	3rd speed
Motif 15 modified	Muktaya	1	3rd speed

In the next level, with the change in the lyric the dancer still sticks on to the same footwork with different hand gestures and facial expressions to suit the lyrical meaning.

IV. Laban Kinetography to prove the relation between eye and arms :

4.1. Discussion of problem:

There is a problem with the interpretation of the sentence of Sage Bharata that restricts the relationship of hands and eyes to the directions and placements of hands. The Quote is in Samskrit language. The sentence can be dissected into a combination of 4 words.

1. Yatha - in which manner or way, according as, as, like
2. Hastaha - Hands
3. Tathaa- as, since, As - therefore, likewise, accordingly
4. Dristihi - Vision (sanskritdictionary.com, No date)

From the above given words and meanings, it is clearly understood that none of the words in the quote is stating the direction or the placement of the hands explicitly. Although, direction can be one of the factors, it is not the only factor. The quote gives the relation between the arms or hands in a broader sense. The correct translation would be "the eyes move in accordance with the hands". Eyes follow hands with whatever meaning the hands have to state. It can be direction, it can be the meaning of a word, it can express the statement of space or number. To defend my point here, I will quote another verse from Natyashastra itself.

"Kantenaalambayet geetam
hasthena artham pradarshayeth
chakhubhyaam darsayeth bhaavam
paadaabhyaaam taalam aachareth"

The translation of this verse is translated like this to English:

As the verse says, the hand gestures correspond to the meaning of the words in the lyrics or the context and the eyes reflect the emotions that are related to the gesture and its meaning. So, the relation between the hands and eyes is Karya- (action) and karana- Cause is that from which the effect is produced (stimulus) as stated in the Indian Darshana shastra (Bhattacharya, 1992:). However, In the pure dance the direction of hands and eyes are together, but in expression of emotions, it can be different.

In the current video, we can check if this concept holds good.

4.2. Relation between Hand and eyes in pure dance:

To understand this relation, let us take a couple of examples from phrase 4 of stanza 1. The phrase consists of Motif 9. It is the 6th variation of nattadavu (set of similar motifs). This motif consists of 8 cells.

In motif cell-a, the leg makes a gesture by stretching out the knee from the Aramandi position (deep plea with turned out knee) to touch the ground by heel. The hand is stretched out to make a parallel line to the stretched leg and in the next level, the other leg taps in place. In motif cell-b, the stretched leg turns to shift on toes. The hand turns to almost 180 degrees. The head turns in accordance to the hand shifting the path of vision to the other direction.

In the following notation, it is clear that the eyes follow hands.

V. Laban Kinetography:

To check the validity of my discussed points, I am using Labanotation. (Fugedi, 2016)

5.1. Relation of eyes and hands in the Abhinaya (Emoting) :

I will illustrate this condition with the charanam in the video with lyrics. The dancer enacts the meaning of the lyric using hand gestures. The hands reach different positions with every beat (word), but the eyes may or may not follow the direction of the hand.

In the video at duration 5:18, Dancer stretches out his right arm to the back right diagonal position with suchi hasta (a hand gesture) where he looks at the hand. Whereas, at 5: 45, When the arms are stretched on the head (place-high), the eyes do not follow the direction of the movement of the arm but looks down. Why is it so? It is because the meaning of the gesture is "god blessing the devotee". When a dancer enacts a deity or god and has to show blessings, he should always look down, this is to show that the one who is blessing is greater in power and position. Here there can be an argument that the sentence of natyashastra that says eyes always follow the hand is wrong. But it is not so. Eyes are still carrying the meaning of the hand gesture. If the dancer looks up and if the quote just speaks about the directions of arms, then there is a clear disturbance in creating the meaning of lyric on stage.

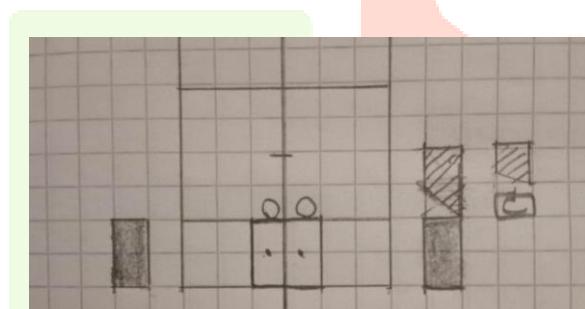
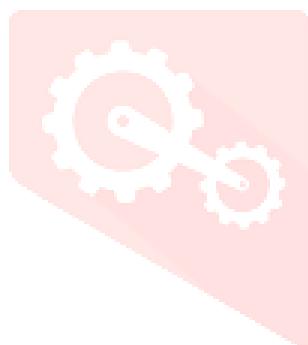


Fig 1: Labanotation 1

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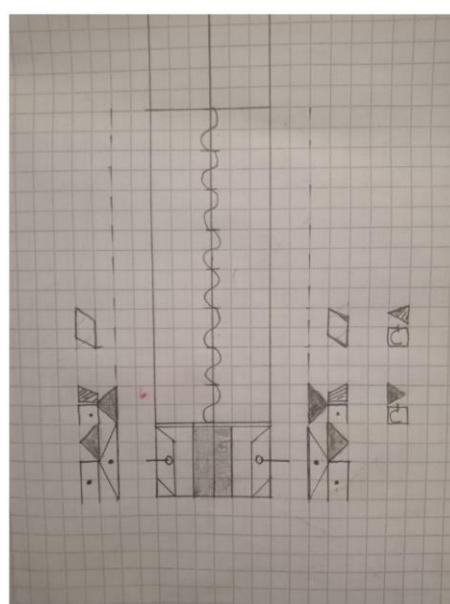


Fig 2: Labanotation 2

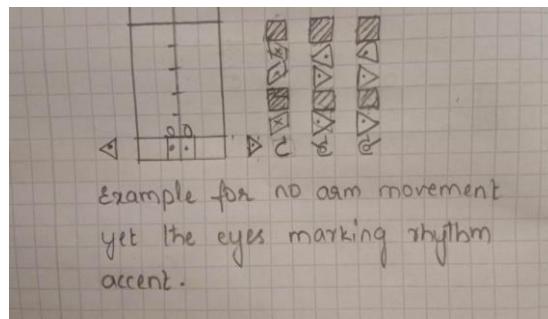


Fig 3: Labanotation to show the relation of eyes with rhythm.

VI. Conclusion:

As a dancer myself, I always used to think about this aspect of the relationship between eyes and hands. There are many factors that influence the eye movement in a dance composition such as direction of the hand movements, meaning of the lyric, sometimes rhythmic accent. In this essay I have established the first two cases. However the selected video does not have the 3rd factor. But as a practitioner of the same dance form, I can defend that the point is still valid. I have included some notations that proves this with links for the video with specific timeline for the reference of the readers. Generally dancers follow this while learning, performing and transmitting the choreography. But, in the academic set up it is mostly misinterpreted. Hope this essay fills this gap in interpretation of Natyashastra.

"A dancer must have her eyes following hands, conscience following glance, expression following conscience and aesthetic element of emotions-Rasas following expression." (Madhusudan.R, 2012:24)

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