

# A study of Asamyuta Hasta

## by Suhani Dhanki

*"#WednesdayWisdom is a series that began during the 40th anniversary celebration of **Akademi** to revisit Indian classical dance roots through dance texts by sharing gems of knowledge from ancient Shastras that hold relevance even today.*

*My Guru, eminent Performing Academician, **Dr. Sandhya Purecha**, has always trained her students through the extensive study of shastra (theory) and prayoga (practice) in the most authentic Guru Shishya Parampara. Compiling #WednesdayWisdom is just a humble endeavour to share my Guru's teachings in my own limited capacity with a larger audience."*

Indian classical dance, in essence communicates, expresses and evokes by carrying the feelings towards the spectator (*Abhinaya*). This stylised version of expression is discussed at length in various Dance texts that mention four such techniques of *Abhinaya* that should be applied harmoniously:

- 1) **Angika** (physical – of limbs)
- 2) **Vachika** (verbal – of speech)
- 3) **Aharya** (ornamental – of costumes and make-up)
- 4) **Satvika** (temperamental – of satva)

For the purpose of *Angikabhinaya*, the *Abhinaya Darpanam* divides the body into 3 parts – *Anga*, *Pratyanga* and *Upanga*.

The **Anga** comprises – head, hands, chest, sides, waist and feet. Some others include neck too.

The **Pratyanga** comprises – shoulder-blades, arms, back, belly, thigh, and shanks. Others add wrists, elbows and knees as well.

The **Upanga** comprises – shoulders, in the head – eyes, eyebrows, eyeballs, cheeks, nose, jaw, lips, teeth, tongue, chin and face, in other limbs – heels, ankles, toes and fingers.

The author of the *Abhinaya Darpanam*, Nandikeshwara states that when the *Anga* (major limbs) move, the *Pratyanga* and *Upanga* (minor limbs) also move and it is in the *Natyashastra* that we find mention of the variations in movement of all the major and minor limbs.

A popular verse from the Sanskrit text *Abhinaya Darpanam* states:

**'Asyena alambayed gitam, Hastena artham pradarshayet, Chakshurbhyam darshayet bhavam, Padabhyam talamachare'**

**Trans.:** A dancer should sing with the mouth, express the meaning through the hands, express the states in the eyes, and keep time-measure with the feet.

The hands, thus, serve as the communicative medium to convey the story, and according to the imagination and creativity of the creator, they can be used intelligibly and multifariously to express the meaning. This liberty in interpretation and application finds abundant mention in all the ancient Indian dance texts emphasising that scriptures provide the basic resource pool, the foundational practice of which must evolve and progress with time and requirements.

Broadly, there are 3 types of hand gestures –

- 1) **Asamyuta Hasta** – Single Hand gestures
- 2) **Samyuta Hasta** – Double Hand (Combined) gestures
- 3) **Nritta Hasta** – Hands used in dance

Dance texts also mention combinations of these hand gestures to denote various objects, ideas, nature, seasons, planets, colours, numbers, scriptures, family relations, Gods, incarnations of the Hindu Lord Vishnu, Lords of the directions etc.

This article focuses on the study of the *Asamyuta Hasta* – Single-hand gestures.

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## Asamyuta Hasta – Single-Hand Gestures used in Dance

The Natyashastra written by Bharata in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, the first encyclopaedia on Indian dance and dramaturgy mentions 24 single-hand gestures, whereas the 11<sup>th</sup> century text Abhinaya Darpanam by Nandikeshwara mentions 28 such gestures.

### The 24 *Asamyuta Hasta* from the Natyashastra are –

Pataka, Tripataka, Kartarimukha, Ardhachandra, Arala, Shukatunda, Mushti, Shikhara, Kapittha, Katakamukha, Sucyasya (Suchimukha), Padmakosha, Sarpashirsha, Mrigashirsha, Kangula, Alapadma (Alapallava), Chatura, Bhramara, Hamsasya, Hamsapaksha, Sandamsha, Mukula, Urnanabha and Tamrachuda.

### The 28 *Asamyuta Hasta* from the Abhinaya Darpanam are –

Pataka, Tripataka, Ardhapataka, Kartarimukha, Mayura, Ardhachandra, Arala, Shukatunda, Mushti, Shikhara, Kapittha, Katakamukha, Suchi, Chandrakala, Padmakosha, Sarpashirsha, Mrigashirsha, Kangula, Alapadma, Chatura, Bhramara, Hamsasya, Hamsapaksha, Sandamsha, Mukula, Tamrachuda, Trishula

### Asamyuta Hastas



[www.niruththafinearts.cjb.net](http://www.niruththafinearts.cjb.net)

Fig. 1 - 28 Asamyuta hasta in Abhinaya Darpanam

Whilst most of the definitions and their usages are common between both the texts, the *Natyashastra* (*Natyashastra*) mentions *Urnanabha* which does not find mention in the *Abhinaya Darpanam* (*Abhinaya Darpanam*) whereas the latter additionally mentions *Ardhapataka*, *Mayura*, *Chandrakala*, *Simhamukha* and *Trishula*. Additionally, the text also mentions four more *Hasta* namely, *Vyaghra*, *Ardhasuchi*, *Kataka* and *Palli*.

These *Hasta* in accordance with their uses are conventionally followed by Bharatanatyam, Kathak, Kuchipudi, Odissi, Manipuri and Mohiniattam dancers.

However, Mohiniattam and Kathakali dancers largely follow the text *Hasta Lakshana Deepika* which differ from the gestures mentioned in the *Natyashastra* and their connotations change when used singularly, and when used in combination (*Samana* – same hands and *Misra* – mixed hands).

**The 24 Asamyuta Hasta from the Hasta Lakshana Deepika are –**

Pataka, Mudrakhya, Kataka, Mushti, Kartarimukha, Shukatunda, Kapithakam, Hamsapaksham, Shikaram, Hamsasyam, Anjali, Ardhachandram, Mukuram, Bhramaram, Soochikamukham, Pallavam, Tripathakam, Mrigasheersham, Sarpashiras, Vardhamanakam, Araalam, Oornanabham and Mukhulam.



Fig. 2 - 24 Hasta mudras from Lakshana Deepika

The 'Theory & Practice of Angikabhinaya' by Dr. Sandhya Purecha is a valuable lexicon-like manual which serves as a resource book for bodily gestures relating to dance in general. The chapter on *Anga*, *Pratyanga* and *Upanga* contains a detailed chart comparing single-hand gestures from twenty-one ancient Indian Sanskrit treatises on dance and dramaturgy.

This text mentions names of some rare single-hand gestures unique to various lesser-known dance treatises, for example - *Nikunchaka*, *Simhasya*, *Kadamba*, *Nikuncha*, *Shirshanabha*, *Vardhabhaya*, *Dvishikhara*, *Krishnasaaraamkha*, *Ponika*, *Ankusha*, *Tantrimukha* to name a few.

Additionally, the author, Dr. Purecha, throws light on a treatise called *Balarama Bharatam* wherein gestures are assigned gender. Quoting from the text,

*"Pataka, Shikhara, Mushti, Suchi, Mrigashirsha, Hamsasya, Mukula, Bana, Bhadra, Arala, Apaveshithita, Silimukha, Tamrachuda, Mayura, Ardhapataka* are grouped under **masculine gender**.

*Tripataka, Hamsapaksha, Katarimukha, Trilinga, Purnachandra, Balachandra, Ard-hachandra, Sarpashrisha, Kutila, Bhramara* are under **feminine gender**.

*Padmakosha, Sandamsha, Urnanabha, Alapallava, Purnonata, Chatura, Kapittha, Chatur-annata, Simhaanana, Gangula, Shukatunda, Nirikshana* and *Pralamba* are grouped under **neuter gender**."

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## Definition, origin and uses of the Asamyuta Hasta – Single Hand Gestures

(Read reference: 'Theory & Practice of Angikabhinaya by Dr. Sandhya Purecha' and *Natyashastra* (*Natyashastra*) and *Abhinaya Darpanam* (*Abhinaya Darpanam*) as translated by Dr. Manmohan Ghosh)

### 1. **Pataka (flag)**

The fingers extended and closed against each one another, and the thumb bent.

#### **Origin:**

It is the first of all hands originating from the Creator – Lord Brahma when He went to Parabrahmā, and saluted him with the cry of "Victory!" he held his hand like a flag.

#### **Uses from *Natyashastra*:**

To represent an administration of blows, scorching heat, urging, attainment of happiness and arrogant reference 'of one's ownself' this hand is to be raised on a level with the forehead or in saying 'I too', 'of me too' 'in me too' and the like.

To represent the glare of heat, torrential rain and shower of flowers two Pataka hands with the fingers separated and moving, are to be joined together.

A shallow pool of water, present of flowers, grass and any design (lit. objects) made on the ground are to be represented by two such hands separated from the Svastika (cross) position.

The same Pataka hands with their fingers pointing downwards are to be used to represent anything closed, made open, protected, covered, dense or private (to be concealed).

This very hand with its fingers pointing downwards and moving up and down, is to express the speedy movement of wind and ocean waves breaking against the shore, and an objection.

The movement of this hand should be used to represent encouragement, many (in number), a great crowd of men, height, beating of drums, and flight of birds upwards.

And anything washed, pressed, cleansed, pounded, or holding up a hill or uprooting it, should be represented by the palms of two such hands rubbing each other. This is also the manner of representing man and woman.

### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used at the beginning of dance (natya), to denote clouds, a forest, forbidding things, bosom, night, a river, abode of Gods, the horse, cutting, wind, lying down, attempt at going, prowess, favour, moonlight, strong sunlight, forcing open doors, meaning of seven case-endings, wave, entering a street, equality, anointing the body of one's ownself, taking an oath, silence, Palmyra leaf, shield, touching things, benediction, the ideal king, saying 'such and such a place', the sea, succession of good deeds, addressing a person, going forward, holding a sword, month, a year, a rainy day and cleaning with a broom.

## **2. Tripataka (three-parts of a flag / flag with three fingers)**

The third finger of the Pataka hand is bent.

### **Origin:**

When Lord Indra held his weapon, the Vajra, he used three parts of the Pataka – flag hand excluding the third finger.

### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is to be used in representing invocation, descent, bidding, goodbye, prohibition, entrance, raising up anything (like one's chin), bowing (in salutation), comparing, suggesting alternatives, touching (the head with) with auspicious objects or putting them on the head, putting on a turban or a crown and covering the mouth or the ears. This very hand with its fingers pointing downwards and moving up and down is to be used in representing flight of small birds, stream, snake, bees and the like. And with the third finger of the Tripataka should be represented wiping off tears, drawing a Tilaka or Patralekha and touching of hairs.

When two Tripataka hands held like a Svastika represent adoration of the feet of venerable persons (Guru, parents, grandparents, spiritual guide etc.). Two such hands are to meet each other's end for representing marriage. Separated and moved to the forehead they indicate king. When obliquely forming a Svastika they represent planets. To indicate and ascetic they are to be raised with the palm turned forward. To represent a door they are to face each other. Submarine fire, battle and sea-monsters are to be indicated by two Tripataka hands, first raised near one's face and then moved with the fingers pointing downwards.

With these very hands should be indicated jumping of monkeys, waves, wing and women. To show the crescent moon this hand should put forward its thumb, and to indicate a king's march (against his enemy) this hand should turn itself towards the back.

### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote a crown, a tree, the Vajra – thunderbolt of Lord Indra, and Indra, the ketaki flower, a lamp, raising flames, a pigeon, patterns drawn on the face or breast (pat-rlekha), an arrow and turning round.

### **3. Ardhapataka (Half-flag)**

When the little finger of the Tripataka hand is bent down, it is called Ardhapataka

**Origin:** Unknown

### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote leaves, a board or slab for writing or painting, the bank of a river, saying 'both', knife, a banner, a tower, and a horn.

### **4. Kartarimukha (Scissor's blades)**

**Definition from the Nattyashastra** - the forefinger of the Tripataka hand is to bend backwards

**Definition from the Abhinaya Darpanam** – the forefinger and the little finger of the Ardhapataka hand are outspread

**Origin:**

When Lord Shiva set out to slay the demon Jaladhara, he drew a circle round the centre of the earth with his forefinger.

### **Uses from Nattyashastra:**

This hand with its fingers pointing downwards will represent showing the way, decorating the feet or dyeing them, and the crawling of babies. With fingers pointing upwards it will represent biting, horn and letters. And when the fingers in it are turned differently (i.e. if the middle finger is bent backwards) it will represent falling down, death, transgression, reversion, cogitation and putting anything in trust.

And with two such hands or even one hand should represent an antelope, yak, buffalo, celestial elephant, bull, gate and hill-top.

### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote the separation of a man and a woman, overturning or opposition, plundering, a corner of an eye, death, estrangement, lightening, sleeping alone during separation, falling and weeping.

### **5. Mayura (peacock)**

When the ring finger of the Kartarimukha hand is joined to the thumb, and other fingers are extended.

**Origin:** Unknown



### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote a peacock's neck, a creeper, a bird, vomiting, stroking the hair, an ornamental mark on the forehead (Tilaka), scattering (agitating) river water, discussing the Shastras and renowned.

## **6. Ardhachandra (crescent-moon)**

**Definition from the Natyashastra** – the fingers and the thumb so bent as to make a curve like bow

**Definition from the Abhinaya Darpanam** – (more specific) Pataka hasta with an outstretched thumb.

The 15<sup>th</sup> century dance text Bhoja's Nritya Ratna Kosh calls this Upadhana Hasta\*

### **Origin:**

To fulfil Lord Shiva's desire for ornaments, the moon took the shape of a flower and appeared as the half-moon as Shiva's ornament.

### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

With this should be represented young trees, crescent moon, conchshell, jar, bracelet, forcible opening, exertion, thinness and drinking. Women can use this to represent girdle, hip, waist, face, Talapatra which is a kind of ear-ornament and earring.

### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote the phase of the moon on the eighth day of the dark fortnight, a hand seizing the throat, a spear, consecrating an image, a platter, origin, waist, musing one's self, meditation, prayer, touching the limbs and greeting common people.

## **7. Arala (bent / crooked)**

The forefinger is curved like a bow. The thumb is also curved and the remaining fingers separated and turned upwards.

### **Origin:**

Lord Indra directed Arjuna to slay the demons Nivatakavacha, Kalakeya and others who were wreaking havoc in the heavens. Some of those demons hid in the ocean and thus, there was no way of discovering them. To his aid came the great Sage Agastya who used this gesture in drinking the seven seas and exposing the demons.

### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

With this should be represented courage, pride, prowess, beauty, contentment, heavenly objects, poise, act of blessing and other favourable states. And this, again, will represent woman's gathering of hairs or scattering them and looking carefully over the entire body. The preliminaries to the marriage by bride's going round the bridegroom and marital union are to be represented by two Arala hands moving around each other and their fingers meeting in the form of a Svastika (cross). And with similar hands should be represented circumambulation, round objects, great crowd of men, objects such as flowers arranged on the ground. In calling any one, in making offering to the manes, saying too many things, in censure and rebuke etc., wiping off sweat and enjoying sweet smell, women should specifically use Arala to represent these.



**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote drinking poison, nectar etc, and violent wind.

**8. Shukatunda (parrot's beak)**

The ring-finger (third finger) of the Arala hand is bent.

**Origin:** Goddess Parvati is known to use it in lover's quarrel with her consort, Lord Shiva.

**Uses from Natyashastra:**

To represent words such as 'It is not I, It is not you, It should not be done, invocation, farewell and saying 'Fie upon you' in contempt.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote shooting of an arrow, a spear, remembering one's abode, saying of mystique things, and violent mood.

**9. Mushti (fist)**

Fingers have their ends bent into the palm and the thumb is set upon them.

**Origin:**

Lord Vishnu used this gesture while fighting the demons Madhu and Kaitabha.

**Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to represent beating, exercise, exit, pressing (of the teats of cows and buffaloes while milking), shampooing, grasping sword and holding spears and clubs.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote steadfastness, grasping the hair, holding things and the fighting mood of wrestles.

**10. Shikhara (peak)**

While in the Mushti hasta, the thumb is raised.

**Origin:**

When Lord Shiva (Chandrashekhara) held the mountain Meru in the centre using it as his bow.

**Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to represent reins, whip, goad, bow, throwing a javelin or a spike, painting the two lips and feet and raising up the hairs.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote Manmatha the God of Love, a bow, a pillar, certainty, making offering to the ancestors, the upper lip, entering, tooth, questioning, the phallic symbol Linga, saying 'No!', recollection, intimate suggestion, untying at the girdle, embrace and sounding a bell.

### 11. Kapittha (wood apple / elephant apple)

The forefinger of the Shikhara hand to be bent and pressed by the thumb

#### Origin:

During the churning of the ocean for nectar, Lord Vishnu used this hand to pull the Mountain Mandara (that served as the pivot for the churning).

#### Uses from Natyashastra:

It is to represent weapons such as sword, bow, discus, javelin, spear, mace, spike, thunderbolt and arrows, true and wholesome deeds.

#### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote Goddess Lakshmi, Goddess Saraswati, holding cymbals, milking cows, collyrium, holding flowers at the time of dalliance, grasping the end of the robe, veiling the head with the cloth and offering incense or light.

### 12. Katakamukha (opening in a bracelet)

**Definition from the Natyashastra** – the ring finger and the little finger of this Kapittha hand to be raised and bent

**Definition from the Abhinaya Darpanam** – the Kapittha hand with the forefinger and middle finger applied to the thumb.

#### Origin:

When Guha received instruction in archery by Lord Shiva, this hand was used. Another treatise states that when Parshuram was instructed by Shiva, this hand was used.

#### Uses from Natyashastra:

It is used to represent sacrifice, oblation, umbrella, drawing up reins, fan, holding a mirror, drawing patterns or designs or anything, powdering, taking up big sticks, arranging a pearl necklace, wearing garlands gathering the ends of clothes, churning, drawing out arrows, plucking flowers, wielding a long whip, drawing out a goad, a rope, and representing a woman.

#### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used in picking flowers, holding a pearl necklace or a garland of flowers, drawing a bow, offering betel leaves, preparing the paste of mask and sandal etc. by rubbing them against something, applying scent, speech and glancing.

### 13. Suchimukha or Suchi (needle)

The fore-finger of the Katakamukha hand to be stretched

**Origin:** When Lord Brahma said 'I am the One'.

#### Uses from Natyashastra:

I shall tell you briefly of its various uses as the forefinger in it is raised and bent, moving sideways, shaking, moving up and down, and moving up without any rest. By moving the forefinger upwards in this hand are to be represented discus, lighting, banners, blossoms,

earring, zigzag movement, a cry of approbation (saying well done, how beautiful), young serpent, young sprout, incense, lamp, creepers, Shikhand, falling down, curve and roundness and with the forefinger raised this hand again should be used in representing stars, nose, the number one, club and stick. And this hand with forefinger bent should meet the mouth to represent a being with teeth, and by the circular movement of this hand one should represent the taking away a man's everything. And the forefinger in this hand should be quite near the ears in yawning and by the mouth lowered to represent long study and long day. And the same should be curved near the face to represent a sentence. And to indicate 'no' or 'speak' the forefinger should be stretched, shaken and moved up.

This hand should be shaken to represent anger, perspiration, hair, earring, armlet and decoration of the cheeks. And to represent pride, 'I am', enemy, 'Who is this' man? And in scratching of the ear it should be held near the forehead. **Abhinaya Darpanam**

And two Suchimukha hands should be united to represent the union of men, and be separated to indicate separation, and to represent a quarrel the two hands should be crossed, and to show bondage they are to press each other. The two Suchimukha hands facing each other and held separately on the left side will represent the close of the day, and held on the right side they will indicate the close of the night.

This hand moved in the front will indicate any form, stone, whirlpool, mechanical contrivance and a hill, and to represent the serving up of meals the same movement of the hand pointing downwards is required.

To represent Shiva this hand pointing downwards is to be held close to the forehead and to indicate Sakra (Indra) this hand is to be raised (to the forehead) and held across it.

By two such hands the orb of the full moon is to be represented, and to indicate the rising of Sakra (Indra), i.e. raiding his banner it should be held close to the forehead. **Abhinaya Darpanam**

This hand moved all around will represent the orb of the moon, and to indicate Shiva's third eye, it should be held on the forehead and in case of Sakra's eyes it should be raised obliquely.

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote the number one, the supreme soul (Parabrahma), one hundred, the sun, a city, the world, saying 'thus' and 'that which', in the sense of solitude, threatening, pining away or growing thin, a rod, the body, astonishment, braid of hair, an umbrella, capability, hairs (horripilation), beating the drum, turning the potter's wheel, circumference of a wheel, consideration and decline of the day / evening.

#### **14. Chandrakala (digit of the moon)**

Wherein the Suchi hand after releasing the thumb

**Origin:** Unknown

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote moon, the face, the span of the thumb and the forefinger, objects of that shape, the crown of Lord Shiva, Ganga (the Ganges) and a cudgel.

### **15. Padmakosha (lotus-bed)**

The fingers including the thumb to be separated and their ends to bend, but not to meet one another.

#### **Origin:**

Lord Vishnu (Narayana) used this hand while worshipping Lord Shiva with lotus flowers in order to obtain the discus.

#### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

To represent Bilva and Kapittha fruits and breasts of women, but to represent accepting these fruits or flesh, thus hand should be slightly bent at its end.

This hand should be held to represent offering Puja to a deity, carrying tribute, casket, offering the first funeral cake, and a number of small flowers.

Two such hands moving fingers meeting at the wrist and turning backwards will represent the full-blown lotus and water-lily.

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to show fruits such as the wood-apple, elephant apple etc., round breast of women, a circular movement or curve, ball of flowers, cooking pot, taking meals, a flower bud, mango, scattering flowers, cluster of flowers, japa-flowers, the shape of a bell, an ant-hill, a lotus and an egg.

### **16. Sarpashirsha (snake-head)**

The fingers including the thumb to be close to one another and the palm to be hollowed.

#### **Origin:**

When Vamana, the fifth incarnation of Lord Vishnu promised protection to the Gods against the evil King Bali, he used this hand.

#### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to represent the offering of water, movement of serpents, pouring water or anything, challenging for a duel, motion of the elephant's frontal globes and the like.

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote sandal paste, a snake, the middle tone, sprinkling, nourishing, giving water to gods and sages, the flapping of the elephant's two Kumbhas (the slight protuberances of the head), and arms of wrestlers.

**17. Mrigashirsha (deer-head)** – the Sarpashirsha hand with all its fingers pointing downwards, but the thumb and the little finger raised up.

#### **Origin:**

When Parvati practiced penance for the sake of Shiva for the second time (after the death of Madana, the God of Love), she used this hand to draw three lines on her forehead with the holy ashes.

### Uses from Natyashastra:

It is moved to represent here, now, "It is" today, able, shaking (ullasana), throw of dice, wiping off perspiration and pretended anger.

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote a woman, cheek, a wheel, limit, fear, quarrel, costume or dress, calling, *tripundraka* (drawing three lines) on the forehead, a deer's head, a lute, massage on feet, combining, the female organ, holding an umbrella, stepping and calling the beloved.

## 18. Simhamukha (lion-face)

When tips of the middle and the third finger are applied to the thumb, and the rest of the fingers are extended, the hand is called Simhamukha

**Origin:** Unknown

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used in denoting *homa* or a sacrificial fire, a hare, an elephant, waving *kusa*-grass, a lotus garland, a lion's face, preparations of medicine by physicians, and rectification.

## 19. Kangula (bud)

The middle and the forefingers and the thumb to be separated and the ring finger to be bent but the little finger raised.

**Origin:** Lord Shiva used this hand to make a pill out of the poison that originated during the churning of the ocean of milk.

### Uses from Natyashastra:

By this are to be represented immature fruits of various kinds and angry words of women.

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote the Lakucha fruit, bells worn by children, or any other bell, a partridge, a betel-nut tree, a breast of a young girl, a white water-lily, the *Chataka* bird and the coconut.

## 20. Alapallava / Alapadma (lotus)

All fingers turned towards the palm, standing on its side and separated from one another.

**Origin:** Lord Krishna used this hand to steal the freshly made butter

**Uses from Natyashastra:** It is to be used for indicating prevention, words like "Of whom are you," "It is not," "nonsense" and a woman's allusion to herself.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:** It is used to denote a full-blown lotus, elephant-apple, circular movement or turning, a breast, yearning for the beloved, looking glass or mirror, full moon, beauty, the hair-knot, a moon-pavilion, (turret), a village, height, anger, a lake, a *Chakravaka* (bird), murmuring sound and praises.

## 21. Chatura

The four fingers stretched and the thumb bent near the middle finger

12<sup>th</sup> century text Sharangdeva's Sangita Ratnakara this is called Nikuncha.\*

### Origin:

When Garuda desired to steal the nectar, Kashyap used this hand to show him the way.

### Uses from Natyashastra:

It is to be applied in representing policy, discipline, penance, cleverness, a young girl, a sick person, perfidy, gambling, proper words, salutary truth and tranquillity.

By one or two such hands moved round should be used to represent openness, deliberation, moving, conjecture and shame.

By the combined Chatura hands are to be represented lotus-petals compared with eye, and ears of deer.

Besides these, the Chatura hand is to indicate sports, love, brilliance, memory, intelligence, judgement, forgiveness, nutrition, consciousness, hope, affection, reasoning, union, purity, cleverness, sweetness, favourableness, softness, happiness, good conduct, question, livelihood, propriety, dress, soft grass, a small quantity, wealth, defeat, sexual intercourse, merit and demerit, youth, houses, wives and various colours.

Red and yellow are indicated by moving it round, and blue by pressing one such hand with another.

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote musk, a little, gold, copper, iron, wet, sorrow, aesthetic pleasure or emotion, the difference of castes, oath, sweetness, slow stepping, breaking to pieces, face, oil and ghee.

## 22. Bhramara (bee)

The middle finger and the thumb crossed each other, the forefinger bent, the remaining two fingers separated and raised.

### Origin:

Kashyap used this hand to make earrings for his wife Aditi, the mother of the Devas (Gods)

### Uses from Natyashastra:

It is used to indicate the plucking of flowers with long stems such as blue lotus and white-water lily, and earrings.

It should fall down with a sound to represent rebuke, pride of power, quickness, beating time and producing confidence.

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote a bee, a parrot, a wing, crane, a cuckoo, and similar birds.

### 23. Hamsasya (swan-beak)

**Definition from the Natyashastra** – the forefinger, middle finger and thumbs close to one another and the remaining fingers stretched.

**Definition from the Abhinaya Darpanam** – the thumb and forefinger touch each other and the remaining fingers out-stretched.

**Origin:** Lord Shiva as Dakshinamurthi used this hand while teaching the Tattva Philosophy to the Sages beneath the Nyagrodha Tree.

#### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

With a slightly throbbing end, it is used specially to indicate fine, small, loose, lightness, exit and softness.

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote a blessing or festival, the tying with thread, ascertaining instruction, horripilation, pearls, putting forward the wick of a lamp, a rubbing metal on a touchstone, a jasmine, drawing, the act of painting and a dyke impending a current.

### 24. Hamsapaksha (swan-wings)

The three fingers stretched, the little finger raised and thumb bent.

#### **Origin:**

Rishi Tandu used this hand while learning Tandava.

#### **Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to indicate pouring libation of water, and things connected with smell, acceptance of a gift, Achamana and taking meals by Brahmins, embrace, excessive stupor, horripilation, touch, unguent and gentle massage. It may again be used to indicate according to the Sentiment, amorous action of women relating to the region between the breasts, their sorrow and touching of their chin.

#### **Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote the number six, construction of a bridge, making nail marks, and covering or sheath.

### 25. Sandamsha (pincers)

**Definition from the Natyashastra** – the forefinger and the thumb of the Arala hand crossed and the palm a little hollowed.

**Definition from the Abhinaya Darpanam** – the fingers of the Padmakosha are brought close to another and drawn apart from one another in quick succession

#### **Origin:**

Goddess Sarasvati used this hand while holding the rosary (akshamala)



**Uses from Natyashastra:**

In representing the plucking of flowers, taking up grass, leaves, hairs or thread and holding or pulling out an arrow or thorn the Sandamsha should be held in one's front. And to represent taking off a flower from its stem, the wick of a lamp, collyrium stick, etc. filling up any vessel with any thing, in saying 'fie, upon you' in anger, this should be held near the mouth. To represent taking off the sacred thread, piercing a hole in pearls and similar objects, bow-string, fineness, arrow, and objects aimed at yoga, meditation and small quantity both such hands should be combined. This shown by the left hand held on one side and slightly turning its tip is used to represent softness, abuse and envy. It is used also to indicate painting, colouring one's eyes, deliberation, stem, drawing and squeezing of lac-dye by women.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote the belly or generosity, sacrificial offering to deities, wound, a worm, great fear or apprehension, worship and the number five.

**26. Mukula (bud)**

The fingers bent and close to one another and their tips meeting together in the Hamsasya hand

**Origin:**

Hanuman (Scion of the Wind) tried to grab the sun using this hand mistaking it for a bimba fruit.

**Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to represent the making of offerings in worshipping a deity, bud of a lotus or a water-lily, throwing a kiss, contempt, miscellaneous things, taking meals, counting of gold coins, narrowing of the mouth, giving away anything, quickness and buds of flowers.

**Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:**

It is used to denote a water-lily, eating, Manmatha the god of love with his five arrows, holding of a signet or seal, the navel and a plantain flower.

**28. Urnanabha (spider)**

The fingers of the Padmakosha hand are further bent

**Origin:**

Lord Vishnu as the fourth incarnation, Narasimha, used this hand to tear the body of King Hiranyakashyapu.

**Uses from Natyashastra:**

It is used to represent holding one by hair, receiving stolen goods, scratching one's head, skin disease, lions, tigers and such other animals, and seizing a stone.

## 27. Tamrachuda (Rooster)

The middle finger and the thumb crossed, the forefinger bent, the remaining two fingers at the palm. When the fingers in a hand are close to one another, bent and the thumb is set on them, the same is also called Tamrachuda

### Origin:

when the Three Vedas stood before Brahma in their visible forms, they used this hand to make exposition of themselves.

### Uses from Natyashastra:

It should fall down with a sound to represent rebuke, beating time, inspiring confidence, quickness and making signs.

This hand is also to be used to indicate small fractions of time as well as talking to a young girl and inviting her.

It is to be used to indicate hundred, thousand and lac of gold coins, and when the fingers in it are suddenly made to move freely it will represent sparks or drops.

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote a cock, a crane, a cow, a camel, a calf and engraving.

## 28. Trishula (trident)

The thumb and the little finger are curved. The Nritya Ratna Kosh refers to this hasta as Simhaasaya.\*

**Origin:** Unknown

### Uses from Abhinaya Darpanam:

It is used to denote a wood-apple, and the idea of Trinity or three together

**Four more hand gestures\* from the Abhinaya Darpanam are –**

**Vyaghra (tiger)** – the little finger and the thumb are bent in the Mrigashirsha hand

**Uses:** It is used to denote a tiger, a frog, a monkey and a mother of pearl

**Ardhasuchi (half-needle)** – the thumb moved up in the Kapittha hand

**Uses:** It is used to denote a sprout, young ones of a bird and big worms.

**Kataka (armlet)** – the middle finger and the third finger joined together

**Uses:** It is used to denote calling and moving

**Palli (village)** – in the Mayura hand, the middle finger should be put to the back of the forefinger.

**Uses:** It is used to denote a village or a hut.

*\*Additional hand gesture references as mentioned in the 'Theory & Practice of Angikabhinaya' p.257*

Dance texts such as the Bhartarnava, also penned by an author named Nandikeshwara mention uses of these hand gestures according to Sage Brihaspati, additional miscellaneous uses of these hands as well as special uses of certain gestures.

There are innumerable such ways in which the conventional hand gestures can be put into application and the Abhinaya Darpanam, aptly concludes with a verse that directs practitioners and students towards the same –

*'These gestures and movements are endless in number and variety and their uses in dance and drama are to be learnt from the Shastras, tradition and through the favour of wise people (Guru).'*

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*References:*

- *'Theory & Practice of Angikabhinaya' by Dr. Sandhya Purecha*
- *'Bharata's Natyashastra – Text & Translation Volume I' by Dr. Manmohan Ghosh*
- *'Nandikesvara's Abhinaya Darpanam' Translated by Dr. Manmohan Ghosh*