



THE IMPORTANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF BHEDAS IN BHARATANATYAM ACCORDING TO NĀṬYA SHĀSTRA

Baija Rani S

Research Scholar, Department of Dance
University College of Fine Arts,
Mysuru - 06

Dr K Kumar

Professor, Department of Dance,
University College of Fine Arts,
Manasagangothri, Mysore

Introduction:

Bharathanatyam, an Indian classical dance form from South India, is celebrated for its intricate footwork, elegant movements, expressive gestures, and profound spiritual and philosophical foundation. Among its myriad of elements, Bhedas, literally meaning *variations*, play a pivotal role in conveying the narrative and emotional essence of a performance. It enhances the technique, expressions, and overall aesthetic appeal.

Bhedas refers to the different positions and movements of various body parts are crucial for illustrating symbolic meanings. The concept is deeply embedded in the history of Bharatanatyam. The Nāṭya Shāstra, attributed to the sage Bharathamuni, is the earliest known text that categorises and describes the various Bhedas over centuries. These movements have been preserved and refined by practitioners and scholars. The Bhedas are not merely physical movements; they carry allegories and are often used to depict various gods, sentiments, and stories from Hindu mythology. As Dr Padmasubhranian notes, “Bhedas are the language of the feet, which convey the emotions and mood of the dance.”

Nāṭya Shāstra:

The Nāṭya Shāstra is the principal work of dramatic theory, encompassing dance and music in classical India. Nāṭya Shāstra is believed to have been written during the period of 200 BCE-200 CE by the sage Bharatha. He discusses a wide range of topics from the structure of the Stage or Mantapa, to a detailed analysis of musical scales and movements, and an analysis of dance forms that considers several categories of body movements, and the effect on the viewer. The text contains a set of precepts on the writing and performance of dance, music and theatre. While it primarily deals with stagecraft, it has influenced Indian music, dance, sculpture, painting and literature as well. Thus, Nāṭya Shāstra is considered to be the underpinning of fine arts in India.

Nāṭya Shāstra consists of 36 chapters containing approximately 600 poetic verses. In chapter 8, 9 and 10, he explains the gestures of Anga (major limbs) and Upanga (minor limbs).

ANGA

Anga is the six major limbs: head, hands, breast, sides, waist and feet. They are:

Shiro Bhedas, head movements. The Shirobheda is of thirteen kinds:

- Ākampita
- Kampita
- Dhuta
- Vidhuta
- Parivāhita
- Udvāhita
- Avadhuta
- Añcita
- Nihañcita
- Parāyṛta
- Utkṣpita
- Adhogata
- Lolita

Hasta Bhedas, hand gestures. They are broadly divided into *asamyūta-hastas* (single hand gestures that are 24 in number), *samyūta-hastas* (combined hand gestures, that are 13) and *nṛtta-hastas* (dance hands, 27) which altogether make 64 hand gestures.

Vaksha Bhedas, gestures of the breast. It is of five kinds: Ābhugna (slightly bent), Nirbhugna (unbent), Prakampita (shaking), Udvāhita (raised) and Sama (natural).

Parshva Bhedas. Sides are of five kinds: Nata (bent), Samunnata (raised), Prasārita (extended), Vivartita (turned around) and Apasṛta (drawn away).

Kati Bheda, the waist in dance and drama are of five kinds: Chinnā (turned aside), Nivṛttā (turned around), Recitā (moved about), Prakampitā=Kampitā (shaken) and Udvāhitvā (raised).

Pada Bheda, of the feet. They are also of five kinds, viz.

- Udghaṭṭita (standing on the fore part of the feet and touching the ground with the heels)
- Sama (naturally placed on an even ground)
- Agratalasañcara (heels thrown up, big toe put outwards and the other toes bent)
- Añcita (heels on the ground, the forepart of the feet raised and all toes spread)
- Kuñcita (the heels thrown up, toes all bent down and the middle of the feet also bent)

In Nāṭya Shāstra, the Padabhedas are categorised into

- Mandala Bhedas (standing positions)
- Sthanaka Bhedas (simple standing positions)
- Utplavana (leaps)
- Brahmhari (circling movements/turns)
- Caari (movements) and
- Gati Bhedas (gaits)

UPANGA

In the context of Nāṭya Shāstra, the minor limbs are eyes, eyebrows, nose, lower lip, and chin.

Dhristi Bhedas, the eye movements, according to Nāṭya Shāstra are:

- Samam (still)
- Saachi (looking through the corner)
- Anuvrittam (moving up and down rapidly)
- Alokitam (rolling in circular pattern)
- Pralokitam (moving from side to side)
- Nimilitam (half shut)
- Ullokitaṃ (looking upwards)
- Avalokitam (looking downwards)

Bhru Bhedas, of the eyebrows, are seven in number: Utkṣepa (raising), Pātana (lowering), Bhrukuṭi (knitting), Catura (clever), Kuñcita (contracted), Recita (moving) and Sahaja (natural).

Nasika Bhedas, gestures of the nose, are of six kinds viz. Natā (lobes cling for a while to the base), Mandā (lobes at rest), Vikṛṣṭā (lobes are blown), Socchvāsā (lobes when air is drawn in), Vikūnitā (lobes in the contracted nose), Svābhāvikā (lobes in the natural nose).

Adhara Bhedas, about the gestures of the lower lips, which are six: Vivartana (narrowing), Kampana (trembling), Visarga (spreading out), Vinigūhana (concealing), Sandaṣṭaka (biting), Samudgaka (contracting).

Cibuka Bhedas, gestures of the chin viz. Kuṭṭana (when the upper teeth clatter with the lower ones), Khandana (when the two lips repeatedly come together), Chinna (when the two lips meet very closely), Cuṣṭita (when the two lips are held very widely apart), Lehita (licking the lips with the tongue), Sama (when the two lips are slightly parted), Daṣṭa (when the lower lip is bitten by the teeth)

Conclusion:

The Nāṭya Shāstra emphasises the importance of Anga and Upanga Bhedas in dance as they help express different emotions and create an enthralling performance. The coordination between Anga and Upanga and other aspects like Dhristi and Gatis to achieve a harmonious dance form highlights its artistic integrity. Thus, the proper training in Anga and Upanga Bhedas helps dancers to master the art of expression and storytelling through movements.

References:

1. Ghosh Manmohan: Natyashashtra, Varanasi 2007
2. Professor P.S.R. Appa Rao: Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeshwara, Hyderabad 1997
3. KP Pisharadi: Natyashastram Malayalam Translation, Thrissur 1971
4. Ghosh Manmohan: Nandikesvar's Abhinaya Darpanam, Calcutta 1957
5. Vatsayan, Kapila: Bharatha, The Natyashashtra, New Delhi 1996
6. disco.teak.fi/asia/structure-of-the-natyashastra/
7. sreenivasaraos.com/tag/abhinaya-darpana/
8. Rangacharya Adya: Akshara Prakashana, 1984
9. Iyengar Rangaswamy: Laasya Ranjanam of Simha Bhupala, University of Mysore
10. Shastri Vasudeva: Bharatarnava of Nandikeshwara, Thanjavur 2016
11. Rao Krishna and Devi Chandra Bhaga: A Panorama of Indian Dances, Sri Satguru Publications, 1993