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HASTA MUDRA THERAPY - A novel exploration in the domain of Dance Therapy

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HASTA MUDRA THERAPY

- A novel exploration in the domain of Dance Therapy

ABSTRACT:

Dance, besides being spiritual in nature and a means of communication and entertainment, it has various hidden treasures that have to be explored and studied. The purpose of the research paper is to emphasize Dance as a mode of Therapy. The research topic titled "Hasta Mudra Therapy – A novel exploration in the domain of Dance Therapy" deals with various disciplines like Dance, Therapy, Dance Therapy, Hasta Mudra Therapy, Hasta Mudras used in Dance, Yoga, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religious practices; Acupressure, Physiology of palm and Pharmacokinetics. This research paper is the result of the PhD thesis titled "A study of Dance Therapy with specific reference to Hasta Mudra Therapy", submitted to University of Hyderabad, Telangana, Bhaarat (India), which fetched me a PhD degree. This research work is also selected by a reputed publisher and published it as a book. The research involved a comprehensive study and analysis of the above mentioned disciplines to substantiate the work and prove it scientifically. Dance Therapy research has been undertaken to heal both physical and mental illness, however, Dance as a whole or Dance Movement analysis is only considered as the research topic. Dance Therapy research in specific to Hasta Mudras is not done till 2008, which prompted me to choose it as my PhD research topic, as most of the Indian classical dance (Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam) forms use the Hasta Mudras to communicate Dance. From the study, it is obvious that, Dance therapy and in specific Hasta Mudra Therapy, can be a potential alternative therapy which has been substantiated, proved and established.

Keywords: Ailments, Acupressure, Dance, Dance Therapy, Hasta Mudras, Heal, Pharmacokinetics, Physiology of palm, Therapy, Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religious practices, Yoga.

INTRODUCTION:

Bhaarat (India), the land of art and culture, a land of devotion, and a land of proud heritage and rich legacy has always been known for its rich heritage and culture. This wonderful land has presented a wide range of hidden treasures with cultural and scientific values; performing arts are one among them. Dance is the most interesting form of performing arts that has been encouraged from centuries in Bhaarat (India) as a means of communication and entertainment. Dance is considered as divine and has always been part of various religious, cultural and social celebrations. Dance is an ocean which has boundless and inexhaustible benefits hidden in it. Dance involves all the fine arts, it encompasses mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, management; it is closely associated to mythology; imbibes culture and tradition; involves language with technical grammar; improves communication skills & memory; cultivates discipline; it is a fitness health, entertainment & refreshment; imparts knowledge and above all it is divine and next to God. Dance can also be a mode of therapy, a skill which keeps you fit and good health. Practicing dance nurtures the body just like any other physical training or meditation.

Although dance has been a method of expression for centuries, it wasn't until recently that it was characterized as a form of therapy. Dance can be a mode of Therapy which is actually the main purpose of its creation that has to be well explored, analysed, substantiated and propagated. Let us now explore the Origin, Evolution and Developments of Dance Therapy while giving special reference to *Hasta Mudra Therapy*. Research works involve reviewing of literature on Dance and Dance Therapy in the process of exploration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Dance as a mode of therapy is undertaken in terms of entertainment through movement pattern and many research books, journals and articles have been published globally. But, when it comes to Indian context, Dance Therapy is relatively a new domain in the field of Dance and hence, the literature is sparse and rare. In the process of exploring into the research topic, various books, articles, journals, websites, have been reviewed to explore and study the research topic while presenting the analytical views and conclusion. The list of publications referred has been listed in the References at the end of the research paper. Every research topic should have certain aims and objectives.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

This research visualizes Dance as therapy in a different angle. It studies the therapeutic effect of the *Hasta Mudras* as a mode of healing. Keeping in view of the abstract, the objectives of the research paper is formulated.

- To enlighten the concept of Dance Therapy and its developments since its origin.
- To give a brief overview of Dance in terms of its origin and evolution in Indian (*Bhaarateeya*) context.
- To analyse the benefits of Dance unification justified in various disciplines.
- To establish and highlight the various therapeutic benefits of Dance with reference to Indian context.
- The main objective of the study is to explore and combine applied science to art (dance) and to establish “*Hasta Mudra Therapy*” as an alternative therapy that can heal certain ailments and to spread the importance of it.
- To ascertain, prove and emphasize the therapeutic benefits of *Hasta Mudras* of Indian Classical Dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*) explored and comprehensively analysed with various allied disciplines to substantiate the study.
- To encourage Dance as a mode of Therapy and explore various therapeutic modes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This is a theoretical study with qualitative approach of research. The study involved observation and survey techniques to analyze the ideas, opinions and theories presented in relation to the origin, evolution and developments of Dance and its features. Analytical views are presented after exploring into the origin, history, evolution and development of Dance in its various practices with specific reference to the therapeutic benefits. The study is based on the analytical approach of the function, features and tools of Dance as a mode of Therapy, which are evidenced in the substantial study. The analytical views and opinions are drafted through the descriptive method.

DISCUSSION:

Dance enjoys a unique place in any culture globally. It is highly acclaimed in Indian culture (*Bhaarateeya Samskrithi*) and is assigned a divine status. It is considered as the most appealing form of performing arts that have been patronaged from centuries in *Bhaarat* (India).

Dance represents the miniature world. It is often referred to as a “unified art”, the most complete of all the arts. This can be justified because dance can utilize intelligence, spirituality, creativity and spontaneity while the body acts as a means of producing art. Dance is an excellent art which has imbibed almost everything necessary to maintain a perfect lifestyle. The knowledge, action, talent, behaviour, self development and entertainment are well balanced in dance “Dance is a

unique physical discipline in which emotional, psychological, spiritual, intellectual and creative energies are unified and harmonized¹".

The early man expressed his ideas and feelings through the bodily movements to communicate, before language evolved. Though un-noticed by us, it is a part of our day to day routine. Dance largely served the purpose of fulfilling the social needs and providing vent to inner emotions. These uninhibited and haphazard movements are systematized over a period into specific symbolic gestures and movements and are used as a mode of non-verbal communication. With the advent of language, slowly the elements like music and literature are incorporated into dance bringing in cultural and artistic significance. Many tribal and folk dance forms evolved during this stage all over *Bhaarat* (India). Undoubtedly, the most significant contribution to the evolution of (*Bhaarateeya Nritya*) Indian dance can be attributed to the treatises like '*Natya Sastra*' authored by *Bharata Muni* and '*Abhinaya Darpana*' by *Nandikeshwara* which paved way to the emergence of (*Sastreeya Nritya*) classical dance – a dance that is highly scientific, systematized and stylised. (*Sastreeya Nritya*) Classical dance attached transcendental significance to dance by serving as a vehicle of spiritual advancement. Many classical dance forms flourished in different regions that came a long way from catering to the lower level social needs to much higher level spiritual needs of human beings. It educates accuracy, self-discipline, and spirituality. It is a confidence booster. It is an excellent process to learn how to interact with others.

Dance is the most fundamental of the arts, involving a direct expression through the body. Thus, it is an intimate and powerful medium for therapy. Research study on individuals attitudes over learning says that an individual generally remember 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they hear and see, 70% of what they say and write and 90% of what they do². So retention is best done when the learner is involved, because what we hear - we forget; what we see - we remember and what we do - we understand. Based on this dance is one of the best ways to practice as it can also be the best medium of therapy.

A dance movement supports healing in various ways. Physically, dance therapy offers the benefits of an exercise. It improves health, comfort, harmonization, and muscle tone. Emotionally, it gives bliss and confidence, and allows handling anger, frustration, and disappointment which can be very difficult to explore verbally. Dance therapy improves cognitive skills, communication skills, motivation, memory etc. Dance is therapy.

Nowadays, going beyond these aesthetic and transcendental purposes, exploration of its therapeutic significance is gaining momentum. While few initiatives in understanding the therapeutic value of dance were noticed in the later decades of twentieth century, an active exploration in this arena began only at the dawn of 21st century. Thus, comprehending the therapeutic purposes of dance can be assumed as the contemporary phenomena in its evolution which is steadily heading towards establishing dance as an alternative therapy. As a drop of contribution to the ocean, the present study makes a modest attempt to investigate the therapeutic values of '*Hasta Mudras*' or hand gestures which are an integral aspect of dance.

Before we go into the details of *Hasta Mudras* and their scope of therapeutic values, let us review and study therapy especially dance therapy in brief.

¹ Tripura Kashyap, *My Body, My Wisdom a hand book of creative dance therapy*, Penguin Publications, 2005, p.3

² Chi, M.T.H., Bassok, M., Lewis, M.W., Reimann, P., & Glaser, R. (1989), Self-explanation: How students study and use examples in learning to solve problems. *Cognitive Science*, 13, 145-182.

Therapy:

The word “therapy” comes from the Greek word “*therapeia*” meaning “a service, an attendance” which, in turn, is related to the Greek verb “*therapeuo*” meaning “I wait upon”. Therapy is a service done to the sick³. The term ‘therapy’ largely refers to treatment of physical or mental illness through remedial, curative or rehabilitation processes, usually following a diagnosis. Therapy can broadly be categorized into two types – Conventional Therapies and Alternative Therapies. Conventional Therapies are again classified into two general groups – 1) Biological Therapies such as Pharmacotherapy and Surgery and 2) Psychological Therapies such as Psychoanalysis, Cognitive Behavioural Therapies and Humanistic Therapies. Alternative Therapies, also popularly referred as complimentary therapies, on the other hand include theories and practices that try to prevent the development of illness through lifestyle changes that promote overall wellness and health. Quite a few therapies are identified under this category the prominent of which are *Ayurveda*, Homeopathy, Naturopathy, *Yoga*, Meditation, Dance Therapy, Music Therapy, Hypno Therapy, Acupressure, Aroma Therapy, Art Therapy, Crystal Healing, Hydro Therapy etc.

Therapy provides different ways to express feelings, understand patterns of problems and ailments, draw treatment methods, set remedies, and attain results. Therapy can reduce pain and distress and gives comfort and relaxation to life.

Dance Therapy:

Dance is recognized as having potential therapeutic effect and is considered as an alternative therapy for many physical and psychological ailments. The therapeutic process applied on an individual through dance is “Dance Therapy”. Dance has long been fundamental to man’s existence as an expression of life itself, and has been used therapeutically for thousands of years. Although dance therapy is a relatively new profession, it is based on the assumption that the body and mind are interrelated and in constant reciprocal interaction.

Dance therapy is a vehicle that helps people deal with and overcome their emotional and physical ailments. It is therapeutic and offers a journey of self discovery and appreciation. The theory underlying dance therapy is that, the healing process commences by holding the body movement or a stance within a therapeutic framework. The inner ailments and issues of the person are dealt physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Dance therapy or Dance movement therapy has always been proved efficient, effective and supports an individual to overcome both physical and mental illness. It is a tool to understand the body as a whole.

Dance therapy, or dance movement therapy (DMT) is the therapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral and physical conditions. Dance or movement therapy strengthens the body / mind connection through body movements to improve both the mental and physical well-being of individuals. Let us now explore the origin and history of Dance Therapy.

Origin, History and Development of Dance Therapy:

The concept of Dance therapy is well established and is highly accepted in USA, UK, Australia and European countries. The origin and evolution of Dance Therapy took place in the 1940s in America by Marian Chace (1896-1970), who is often referred to as the “Grand Dame” of Dance Therapy, who came to the field from the world of dance⁴. Originally Dance Therapy has its roots in modern dance from 1920 onwards. Dance as a mode of Therapy came into existence with the amalgamation of modern dance and psychiatry. Until the 20th century, both the classical and folk dances have flourished. The early 20th century gave birth to Modern dance when Isadora Duncan appeared on the stage barefoot. Marian Chace, the lady behind the birth and evolution of Dance

³ Payne. Helen, *Dance Movement Therapy: Theory, Research and Practice* (2nd edn). Tavistock / Routledge Publications, 2006, p.19.

⁴ Payne. Helen, *Dance Movement Therapy: Theory, Research and Practice* (2nd edn). Tavistock / Routledge Publications, 2006.

therapy is referred to as the founder of Dance Therapy. In 1942, through her work, Dance was first introduced to western medicine.

Dance therapy gained professional recognition after the American Dance Therapy Association (ADTA) was founded in 1966 by pioneers of Dance Therapy with Marian Chace as its first president. Today the ADTA has nearly 1,200 members in 46 states and 20 countries around the world⁵. The efforts of various modern dancers gave the basic foundation to Dance Therapy and the pioneers include Isadora Duncan⁶, Martha Graham⁷, Doris Humphrey⁸, Ruth St. Dennis⁹, Ted Shawn¹⁰, Mary Wigman¹¹, Rudolf Laban¹², Sigmund Freud¹³ and his followers, Alfred Adler¹⁴, Carl Jung¹⁵, Wilhelm Reich¹⁶, Alexander Lowen¹⁷, Margaret Morris¹⁸, Veronica Sherbone¹⁹, Mary Starks Whitehouse²⁰, Trudi Schoop²¹, Hanya Holm²², Liljan Espenak²³ and so on.

⁵Boughton, Barbara, *Dance Therapy*, Gale Encyclopedia of Alternative Medicine, 2005, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc>

⁶ Isadora Duncan (1878 - 1927, U.S.A. - France) Modern dance history describes Isadora as an emblematic figure of freedom. This is not only because she refuses to follow academic dance education but because she has the courage to break dance traditions and social codes with her aesthetic propositions. She constructs her thought by studying other artistic languages or ideological fields (like poetry, sculpture, music and philosophy).

⁷ Martha Graham (1894 - 1991, U.S.A.) Graham entered the Denishawn school and company in 1916 and became the most famous and monumental pupil of this seedbed. In 1923 she moved to New York. She develops her own training technique; she creates an original choreographic vocabulary focused on the movement of the pelvis for the expression of the feminine libido. Her company was exclusively for women until 1938.

⁸ Doris Humphrey (1895 - 1958, U.S.A.) Doris Humphrey joins the Denishawn in 1917, being already a dance teacher in her native province. She works for Saint Denis as a teacher and dancer, participating in the company tours around America and Asia till 1926. Humphrey develops an original dancing technique by observing the relationship between gravity and the human body. She establishes a main physical principle for dance: Fall and Recovery.

⁹ Ruth Saint Denis (1879 - 1968) was a modern dance pioneer, introducing eastern ideas into the art. She was the co-founder of the American Denishawn School of Dance and the teacher of several notable performers. Her dance technique and the costumes are closer to Hinduism and especially Indian.

¹⁰ Ted Shawn (1891 - 1972), originally Edwin Myers Shawn, was one of the first notable male pioneers of American modern dance. Along with creating Denishawn with former wife Ruth St. Denis he is also responsible for the creation of the well known all-male company Ted Shawn and His Men Dancers. With his innovative ideas of masculine movement, he is one of the most influential choreographers and dancers of his day. Even he had Indian shades in his dance technique and costumes.

¹¹ Mary Wigman (1886 - 1973) was a German dancer, choreographer, notable as the pioneer of expressionist dance, Dance Therapy and movement training without pointed shoes. She is considered one of the most important figures in the history of modern dance.

¹² Rudolph Laban (1879 - 1958, Hungary - U.K.). Rudolph Laban is considered by modern dance history as one of the most productive of them. As a choreographer, dancer, teacher and researcher, he achieves to spread his name and ideas widely: first through Europe, then to the United States and nowadays around the whole world.

¹³ Sigmund Freud (1856 - 1939) was an Austrian neurologist and the father of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for treating psychopathology through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst.

¹⁴ Alfred W. Adler (1870 - 1937) was an Austrian medical doctor, psychotherapist and founder of the school of "Individual Psychology". His emphasis was on the importance of feelings of inferiority - the inferiority complex.

¹⁵ Carl Gustav Jung (1875 - 1961), often referred to as C. G. Jung, was a Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist who founded analytical psychology. His work has been influential not only in psychiatry but also in philosophy, anthropology, archaeology, literature and religious studies.

¹⁶ Wilhelm Reich (1897 - 1957) was an Austrian psychoanalyst. Author of several influential books - most notably *Character Analysis* (1933), *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933) and *The Sexual Revolution* (1936) - Reich became known as one of the most radical practitioners of psychiatry. Reich's idea of "muscular armour" - the expression of the personality in the way the body moves - influenced innovations such as body psychotherapy, Gestalt Therapy, bio energetic analysis and primal Therapy.

¹⁷ Alexander Lowen (1910 - 2008) was an American physician and psychotherapist. A student of Wilhelm Reich in the 1940s and early 1950s in New York, he developed bioenergetic analysis, a form of mind-body psychotherapy, with his then-colleague, John Pierrakos (1921 - 2001). Lowen was the founder and former executive director of the International Institute for Bioenergetic Analysis in New York City.

¹⁸ Margaret Morris (1891- 1980) was a British dancer, choreographer and teacher. She was the first proponent of the Isadora Duncan technique in Great Britain. She founded the Margaret Morris Movement, Celtic Ballet, and two Scottish National Ballets in Glasgow (1947) and in Pitlochry (1960).

¹⁹ Veronica Sherborne (1922-1990). She was educated at Berkhamstead School for Girls. She trained initially to be a teacher of physical education and dance at Bedford College of Physical Education in 1940 - 43 and later as a physiotherapist. Her first teaching post was at Cheltenham Ladies College 1943-46 followed by her return to Bedford as a lecturer in Dance 1947-49.

²⁰ Mary Starks Whitehouse is a student of Martha Graham and Mary Wigman pioneered expressive movement therapy with her knowledge of dance and following Jungian principles.

²¹ Trudi Schoop, a Swiss born comedic dancer, pioneered the treatment of mental illness with Dance therapy

²² Hanya Holm (1893 - 1992) is known as one of the "Big Four" founders of American modern dance. She was a dancer, choreographer, and above all, a dance educator.

Since its birth in the 1940s, Dance Movement Therapy (DMT) has gained much popularity and has been developing from time to time by various professionals. Over the years, the practices of DMT have progressed; however, the main principles that founded this form of therapy have remained the same.

The history of Dance Therapy is not properly documented in Britain than in the United States. Throughout history, the origin and development of DMT can be divided into two waves. Prior to the first wave of DMT in America (1940), the idea and the main theories of dance therapy was first developed in the UK far back in the nineteenth century. These two waves indicate the significance of Dance movement therapy and its development since its pilot research in the United Kingdom.

The first wave includes the inspirational works of Marian Chace from 1920 till her death in 1970. It also includes the works of few other pioneers and the formation of American Dance Therapy Association in 1966.

The second wave started after 1970 that inspired the world from American therapists. Therapists started experimenting with the psychotherapeutic applications of dance movement which was categorized as psychotherapy and today it is evolved as Dance Movement Therapy or Dance Therapy.

Organizations supporting Dance Therapy:

The National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) has recognized dance therapy as a specialty of counseling since 1998. Since the origin of Dance therapy, there are many organizations and associations which have been established and working for the development and propagation of Dance Therapy. Among them American Dance Therapy Association, Academy of Dance Therapists Registered (ADTR), Association for Dance Movement Therapy, Dance-Movement Therapy Association of Australia (DTAA) are the pioneers. These associations were found to uphold the high standards of the Dance Therapy profession and education.

Apart from these organizations and associations, there are many Universities across the globe, which are offering Dance therapy courses at different levels, starting from Certificate, Graduation, and Post-Graduation to a Doctorate level. They even certify the professionals as Dance therapists if the practitioners fulfill the set rules, regulations and guidelines framed either by ADTA or a University. These organizations and universities play a very important role in connecting between the clients and Dance Therapists. They set the aims and objectives and monitor them on a regular basis by conducting seminars, workshops etc.

Dance Therapy, since its development, is practiced across the globe in various models and approaches both in academics and practice; however, as a profession it is still challenging, as it is still growing and attaining awareness in most of the countries. Since many organizations, associations and universities have adopted the up hold of dance therapy, they have opened doors for employment too.

Research in Dance Therapy:

During the period when the potential therapeutic aspects of dance were recognized and explored in European countries, the American countries considered dance as a mere source of entertainment and the idea of dance as a therapy met with lot of skepticism initially. However, much later, after years of research, using dance for therapeutic purposes gained momentum. Quite a number of research studies were reported establishing dance as an effective therapeutic measure for various kinds of physical and mental ailments. The application of dance therapy has attained a stage of acceptance and has achieved significant results worldwide. After such significant efforts to establish

²³ Liljan Espenak (1905-1988) was a dancer, instructor, dance therapist and author. Espenak was born in Norway. During the 1920s, she moved to Berlin to study under Mary Wigman. Espenak established her own dance school in Berlin. In the 1930s, Espenak left Germany and eventually established herself in the United States and resumed her career. She opened a dance studio and developed a second career as a dance therapist in New York City.

the therapeutic effects of dance, dance therapy gained momentum worldwide and currently it is widely exercised in many countries throughout the world with significant positive outcomes.

Benefits of Dance Therapy:

Practicing dance or implementing dance therapy has resulted in many benefits. Dance therapy does not have any adverse effects (side effects) and is always beneficial to the individuals rather than creating problems and increasing their illness further, however it might be time consuming. Dance therapy is effective with all age groups and can be administered to a wide range of physical and mental ailments.

Dance therapy is suitable even for a non-dancer or a budding dancer. The emphasis in dance therapy is on free movement, not restrictive steps, and expressing one's true emotions. Dance therapy can be implemented on individuals and also in groups. The individual therapy helps in expressing the emotions, whereas the group therapy provides emotional support, enhanced communication skills, and appropriate physical boundaries. Therapy can address and resolve a large number of specific concerns, issues, and symptoms. Dance therapy has various academic, personal and a broad range of health benefits.

Dance therapy can be implemented for both physical and mental well being and can be executed either on individual or in group sessions. These sessions can be of various modes. Some of the common modes of therapy include - Individual Therapy and Psychotherapy, Marriage Counseling or Couples Counseling, Family Therapy, Group Therapy, Coaching, Distance Therapy or Phone Therapy, Residential and Retreat Based Therapy, Home-Based Therapy. Besides this, it can also be practiced in various locations like rehabilitation centers, hospitals, educational, institutions, forensic labs, nursing homes, day care centers, disease prevention centers, health promotion programs, prisons, special schools, private practice etc.

Dance Therapy in *Bhaarat* (India):

Bhaarat (India), the birth place of *Ayurveda*, has many healing methodologies. Dance and Music have always been a medium of medication for certain disorders from time immemorial in *Bhaarat* (India). We have roots for this explanation in our *Puranas* and *Vedas*. In *Bhaarat* (India), Dance therapy in the modern era is very young and not as established as an alternative therapy. But, when we look at the divine origin theory of dance as mentioned in various texts, we do get certain clues about why and how dance was created. According to this theory, dance is said to be created by Lord *Brahma* to protect the humans from awful activities and to remove the evil spirits in the common man. This is the beginning of dance which has probably been used as therapy on humans to protect them from illness (evil spirits). Thus it can be assumed that dance as therapy was first initiated by Lord *Brahma* and executed by Sage *Bharata*.

Going into the details, as accounted by *Bharata* in his *Natyasastra*, in the beginning of the *Treta Yuga* the world had become steeped in greed and desire, in jealousy and anger, in pleasure and pain. This can be observed from the below sloka.

“*Graamyadharmapravrtte tu kaamalobhavasam gate I*
*Irsyaakrodhaadisammudhe loke sukhitudhkhite II*²⁴”

This appalled *lokapaalakas*, the rulers of the universe. Lord *Indra* and the other gods approached Lord *Brahma*, the creator of the universe to create an amusement which could be seen and heard by all, that which gives knowledge and divinity. Lord *Brahma*, the Supreme one, the knower of truth, mediated on the four *Vedas* (Scriptures) and extracted the fifth, *Veda* as *Natya Veda* - the scripture of dance, presenting moral and spiritual truth. The creator of the world, *Brahma* procured *paathya* (words) from *Rigveda*, *abhinaya* (gestures) from *Yajurveda*, *geet* (music) from *Samaveda* and *rasa* (emotions) from *Atharvaveda* to form the *Natyaveda* (body of knowledge about

²⁴ Pushpendra Kumar, *Natya Sastra of Bharatamuni*, Vol. 1, New Bharatiya Book Corporation, Sloka 9, p. 8.

dance)²⁵ for fulfilling the higher requirements of life, viz. *dharma* or righteousness, *artha* or wealth, *kaama* or love and *moksha* or liberation. Lord *Brahma* tried to impart to the people the diversity and the encompassing nature of this new creation and said that “This art is not purely for your pleasure but exhibits *bhava* (emotion) for all the three worlds”. Thus *Bharata’s Natya Shastra* explains the emergence of this divine art form.

Therapy, in the broadest sense, is a term that can be applied to any form of treatment for any illness or disorder. The origin of dance explains that dance has been evolved for therapeutic cause as a remedy to cure the illness (greed, desire, jealousy, anger and pain) of the people. Hence, it can be said that, according to *Hindu* mythology, Dance Therapy is as old as the origin of dance itself that took birth in the heaven.

Dance Therapy has always been a challenging topic in terms of selecting it as a career apart from performance for dance practitioners. Though the topic of Dance Therapy is not new to Indians, it took quite a long time with respect to its implementation. The dance practitioners in *Bhaarat* (India), who are working on Dance Therapy and who have converted Dance Therapy as their career include *Ambika Kameshwar*, *Tripura Kashyap*, *Sohini Chakravarthy*, *Arpita Benargy* and *A.V Satyanarayana*. In the process of Dance Therapy evolution, I have tried to explore Dance Therapy in a different perspective. Until 2008, Dance Therapy was explored with dance or dance movement as a whole that prompted me to explore the therapeutic effects of *Hasta Mudras* as all the Indian classical dances (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityams*) use the *Hasta Mudras* in its repertoire. *Hasta Mudras* play a very important role in Dance, which are used to communicate. Let us now explore the *Hasta Mudras* in brief with a view on *Hasta Mudra* Therapy.

***Hasta Mudra* Therapy:**

Hasta Mudra Therapy is a new concept in the domain of Dance therapy. Before we go into *Hasta Mudra* Therapy, it is very important to investigate and enrich the knowledge on *Hasta Mudras*.

***Hasta Mudras* an Introduction**

Communication through gestures of the hands is said to be one of the most ancient forms of communication in human evolution. Much later, after the use of gestural communication for a long time, the spoken language is developed. Even after the invention of spoken language, the gestural language has never lost its importance and thus gesticulation is a universal feature. In fact, speech without gesticulation is often incomplete. Signaling or sign is the first and foremost means of communication. It involves the hand signals, head movements, eye movements, body postures etc. An infant starts using signs and signals before he or she could speak to communicate. Besides children, the deaf and the dumb, the traffic police, crew in the flights, army, navy and air force, also use the hand gestures to communicate. In fact we all use the hand gestures often to communicate certain things in spite of speech. Thus using the hand gestures is the fastest way of communication added with speech. In Indian context from the *Vedic* times, the hand gestures have always been a part of sacred rituals like recitation of *Mantras* (hymns) and dance performances. These hand gestures used in rituals and performances are referred to as *Mudras* or as *Hastas*.

The origin of the word ‘*Mudra*’ is uncertain, however, it is derived from the *Sanskrit* words ‘*Mud*’ and ‘*Dhra*’, meaning ‘bliss’ and ‘dissolving’. The word *Mudra* in *Sanskrit* refers to a seal, sign, mark, gesture, imprint, passport, badge, mystery, code, language, signet-ring and lock. *Mudra* is the term used to indicate a sign with different parts of the body and mind. Such *Mudras* include *Hasta Mudras / Kara Mudras* (Hands), *Kaaya Mudras* (Body), *Shira Mudras* (Head), *Aadhaara Mudras*, *Bandha Mudras* (to unite / arrest), *Chakshu Mudras* (Eyes), *Swasa Mudras* (Breath), and *Mano Mudras* (Mind)

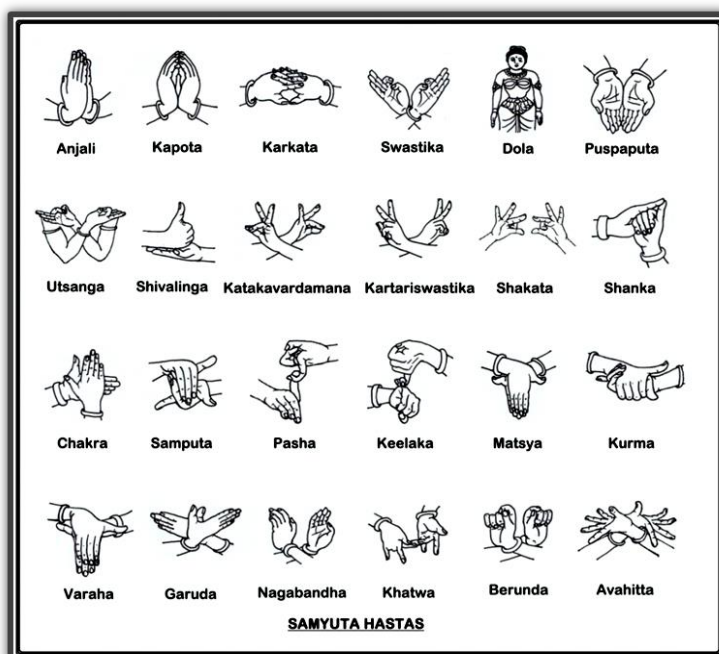
²⁵ Sinha, Aakriti (2006). *Let's know dances of India* (1st ed. ed.). New Delhi: Star publications. ISBN 978-81-7650-097-5.

There is no proper evidence on the origin of the hand gestures but they have been in use for millenniums by people of all religions and sects throughout the world. *Hasta Mudras* are used in *Yoga* and in the iconography and spiritual practices of *Hinduism*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism* besides *Dance*.

Hasta Mudras – Dance

The hand gestures are referred as *Mudras* in *Yoga*, *Mantra* and *Tantra Sastras* whereas in Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*), the term “*Mudra*” which means a ‘sign’ or ‘*chinha*’ is not the terminology used for expression of gestures. In Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*), the term “*Hasta*” “*Abhinaya Hasta*” “*Abhinaya kaara*” or “*Hasta Mudra*” is used. The literal translation of *Hasta Mudra* in Sanskrit is hand (*Hasta*) symbol (*Mudra*), though *Hasta Mudra* can be interpreted in English as hand gestures or sign language. Hence it would be more appropriate to use “*Hasta Mudras*” for general reference of the hand gestures as a substitute of *Hastas* or *Mudras*.

Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*) communicates expressions (*Abhinaya*) through the *Hasta Mudras*. The language of communicating a particular meaning through the *Hasta Mudras* in dance is known as ‘*Sharirabhasha*’ and the specific language to name the hand gestures (*Hasta Mudras*) is known as ‘*Akshara Mustika*’. According to the available literature, *Hasta Mudras* in dance are first conceived by *Bharata* in the first known treatise on dance “*Natya Sastra*”. The *Natya Sastra* by *Bharatamuni*, *Abhinaya Darpana* by *Nandikeswara*, and *Nrityaratnaavali* by *Jayaprasanna*, are the basic sources of *Hasta Mudras*. Most of the texts on dance divide the *Hasta Mudras* into two categories *Abhinaya Hastas* (*Asamyuta Hastas* and *Samyuta Hastas*) and *Nritya Hastas*.



The texts which deal with the *Hasta Mudras* include, *Natya Sastra* of Bharatamuni, *Abhinaya Darpanam* and *Bharataarnavam* of Nandikeshwara (3-4 Century AD), *Abhinava Bharathi* of Abhinavagupta (980 – 1020 Century AD), *Nrutta Ratnaavali* of Jayapa Senani (1253-54 Century AD), *Nrutya Ratnakosham* of Rajakumbakarnadeva (1449 Century AD), *Sree Hastamuktaavali* of Shubhankara (1500 Century AD), *Telugu Anhinayadarpanam* of Matrubhutaiah (16-17 Century AD), *Hasta Lakshana Deepika* of Somanarya, *Balaramabaratham* of Balaramavarma Kartikatirunal (1724-98). Apart from these the *Hasta Mudras* are also mentioned in the ancient literature of dance, drama and music which include *Maheswara Mahapatra's Abhinaya Chandrika*, *Simhabhoopala's Laasyaranjanam*, *Vishnudharmottara puranam* (500-600AD), *Raja Someshwara's Maanasollasam* (1131 AD), *Sharadatanaya's Bhavaprakasham* (1175-1250AD), *Sarangadeva's Sangeetaratnaakaram* (1230 AD), *Sudhakalasha's Sangeetopanishat Saaram* (1324-1354), *Asokamalla's Nrutya Adyaayam*, *Pundareeka Vithala's Nartananirnayam*, *Subhankara's Sangeeta Damodaram* (1500AD), *Vipra das's Sangeetachandram* (1450AD), *Manavalli Ramakrishna Kavi's Bharatakosham* (1951AD), *Vedasuri's Sangeetamakaram* (17th Century), *Parshwadeva's Sangeeta Samayasaaram* (13-15 Century AD), *Utakae Govindachary's Natya sastra sangraham* (1800AD), *Ilango Adigal's Silappadikaram*, *Someshwara's Abhilasitarta Chitamani*, *Srikantha's Rasakowmudhi* (1575AD), *Chandrashekara Pandita's Bharatasaaram*, *Chillakuri Diwakarakavi's Bharatasaara Sangraham*.

Bharata has explained certain basic *Hasta Mudras* and some detailed *Hasta Mudras* for different usages. However, he says that the hand gestures should be devised for their form, movement, significance and class according to the personal judgment of an artist. This can be clearly observed from the following *slokas*²⁶.

“Aakrtyaa cheshtayaa cihnaih jaatyaa vignyaaya vastutah I
Svayam vitarkya kartavyam Hastaabhinayanam budhah II”
“Noktaa ye ca mayaa hyatra lokaad graahyastu te budhah I”

The similar idea is also explained by *Sarangadeva* in *Sangeeta Ratnaakara* and is clear from the below *sloka*²⁷.

“Lokavruttaanusaaraatteppyuhyantam anayaa dishaa I
Netrabhrumukharaagaadyair upaangair upabrmhitaah II

Scholars have explained the hand gestures (Single and double hand gestures) and have also mentioned their usage in different ways. The technique of holding the *Hasta Mudras*, their placement of holding, movement, positioning, significance, other subsidiary *Hasta Mudras* and many more details of *Hasta Mudras* are explained in the dance treatises written by different scholars as mentioned in the above para.

The *Natya Sastra* describes 24 *Asamyuta Hastas*, 13 *Samyuta Hastas* and 30 *Nritta Hastas* 67 varieties in all²⁸.

According to *Sarangadeva*, the total number of the *Hastas* of *Bharata* is 67. He splits the *Nritta Hastas*, *Alapadmolbana* into two, namely *Alapadma* and *Ulbana* and thereby enumerates 30 *Nritta Hastas*. He also gives explanation on the 64 *Hastas* mentioned by *Bharata*²⁹.

According to *Jayapa Senani*, the *Hasta Mudras* - single and combined and the *Nritta Hastas* are just those given by *Bharata* in name and number which would total to 66 in all. He gives a more satisfactory explanation for *Bharata's* statement of the number of *Hastas* as 64, by emphasizing on the word “*Naamatah*” means by name. The *Suchasyam* among the single hand gestures and *Svastika*

²⁶ Bharatamuni, *Natya Shastra IX*, p 161.

²⁷ Sarangadeva, *Sangeeta Ratnaakara*, VII, p. 287.

²⁸ Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 3.

²⁹ Appa Rao PSR, *Hastabhinayam*, op.cit, p. 4.

among the combined hand gestures are included in the *Nritta Hastas* also. Therefore, the names are 64 and the gestures are 66³⁰.

Bharatarnavam mentions 27 *Asamyuta Hastas*, 16 *Samyuta Hastas* and 22 *Nritta Hastas*. On the authority of *Brihaspati*, it further gives a list of 27 *Hasta Mudras*, many of which are included in the first list³¹.

Hasta Laksana Deepika gives 24 Alphabetic hand gestures almost closely following the terminology given by *Bharata*, with some changes affected in their definitions and applications³².

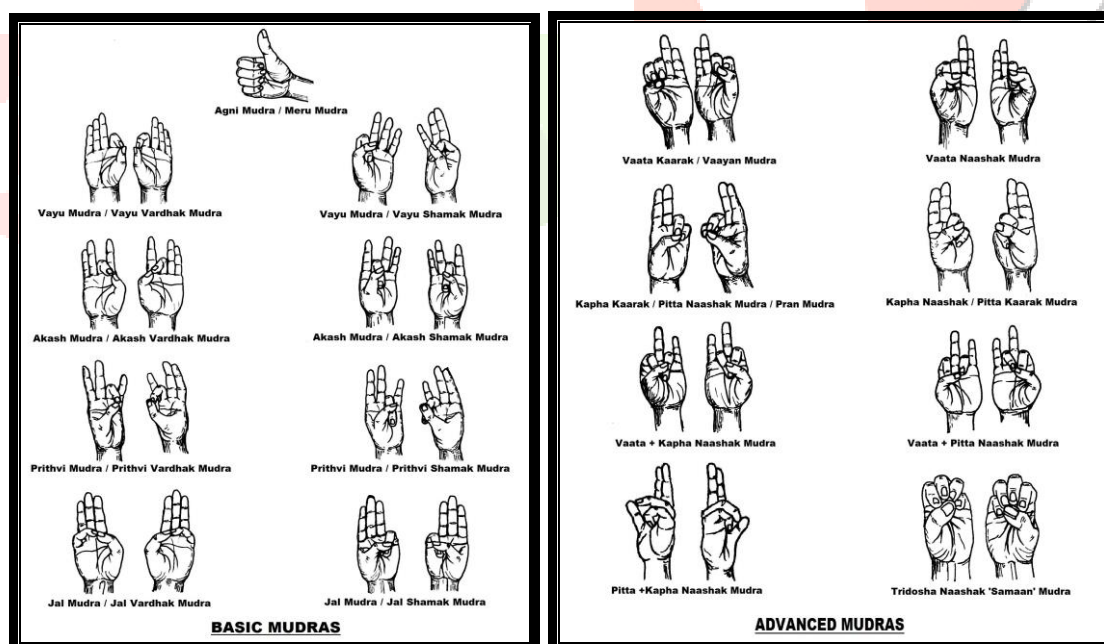
Balaramabharata mentions 40 *Asamyuta Hastas* and 27 *Samyuta Hastas* totaling 67 in number. Among the 40 *Asamyuta Hastas*, the 24 names are from *Bharata's Natya Sastra*, 7 are based on *Abhinaya Darpanam* and the remaining nine are based on other sources. He does not enumerate all the *Nritta Hastas* of *Bharata* but mentions that some of the *Hasta Mudras* can be used as *Nritta Hastas* also not in the context of *Hasta Mudras*, but in the context of '*Bahupracharas*'³³.

There are over 250 *Hasta Mudras* in the Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nritya*) forms especially *Kathakali*, *Mohiniattam*, *Kuchipudi*, *Bharatanatyam*, *Odissi* etc.

The *Hasta Mudras* are static in *Yoga* and spiritual practices (*Hinduism*, *Jainism*, *Buddhism*), whereas they are dynamic in dance and spiritual practices (*Hinduism*, *Jainism*, *Buddhism*).

Hasta Mudras used in Yoga:

The sources for the *Yoga Mudras* are the *Gheranda Samhita* and *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika*. *Yoga* has abundant varieties of *Hasta Mudras* which explains various benefits and therapeutic effects of practicing them. *Yoga Mudras* can broadly be divided into *Basic Mudras*, *Advanced Mudras* and *Other Mudras*.



³⁰ Jayaprasenani, *Nrutta Ratnavali*, op.cit, p. 87-88.

³¹ Nandikeshwara, *Bharatarnava*, Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saraswathi Mahal Library Society, p. 1-92.

³² Somanarya, *Hasta Laksana Deepika*, p. 1-89.

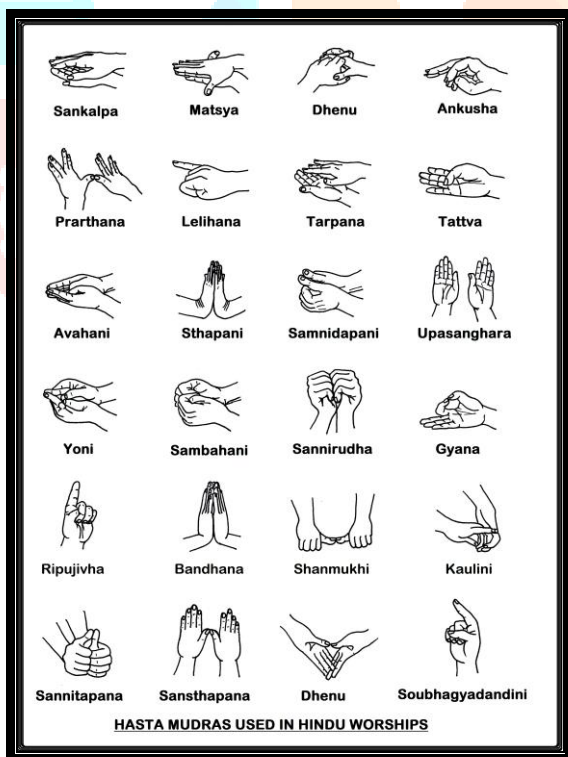
³³ Karthika Thirunal Bala Rama Varma - Maharajah of Travancore, *Balarama Bharatam*, p. 249.

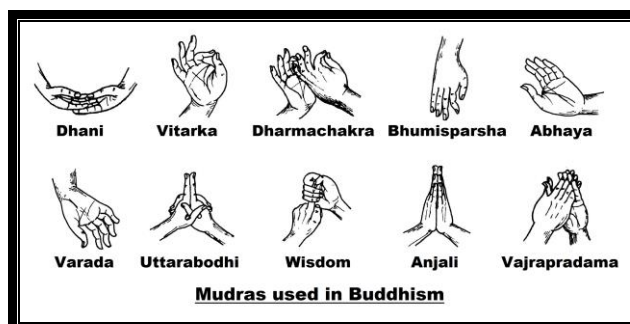
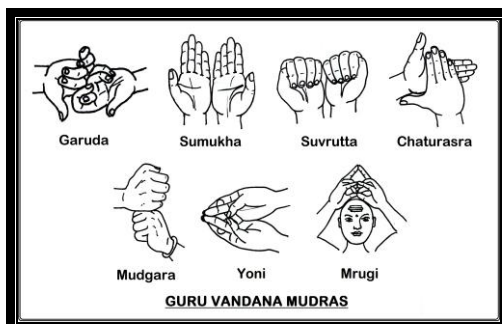
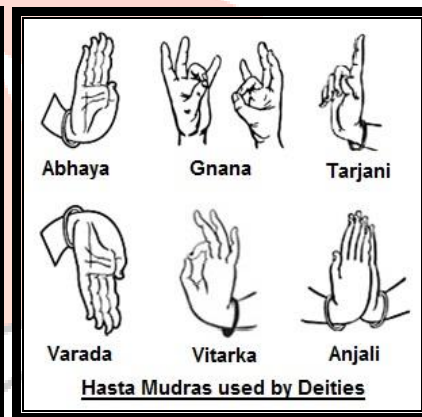
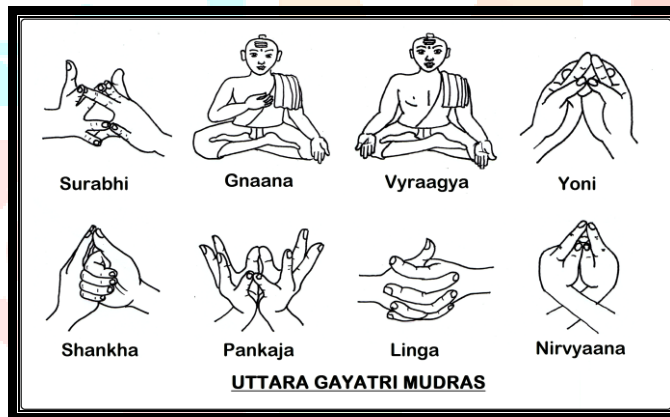
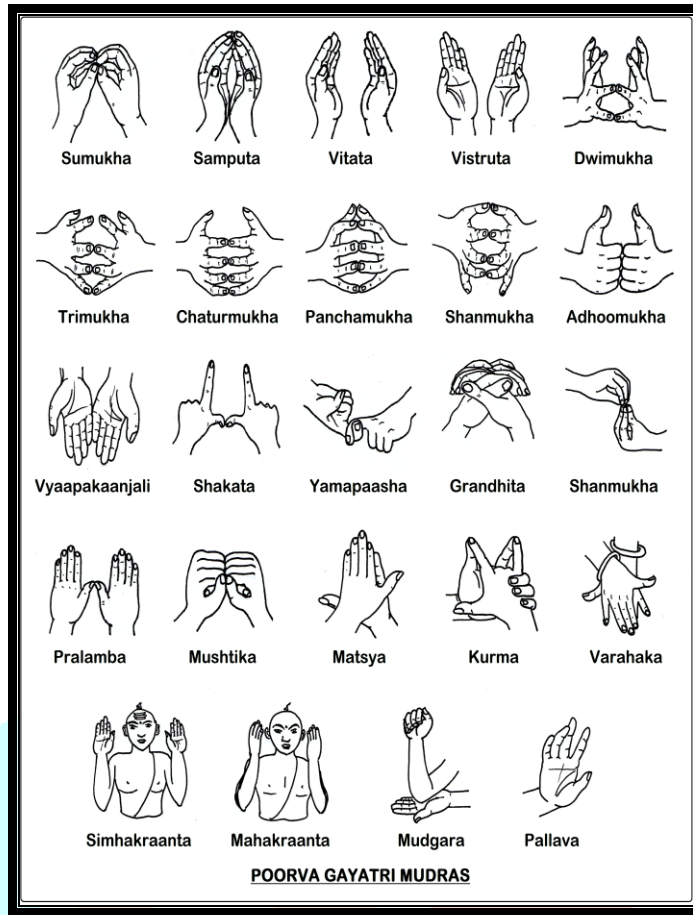


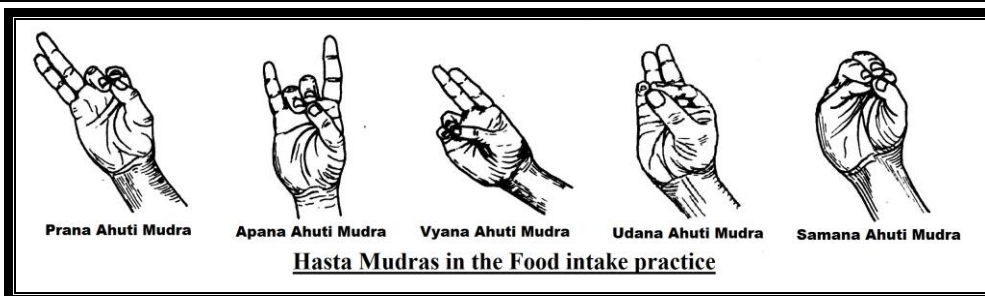
Hasta Mudras used in Hindu, Jain and Buddhist religious Practices:

Its origin, according to the scholars, lies in the tantric text. According to *Hinduism*, *Mudra* is a medium which dissolves duality and brings together the deity and the devotee and brings delight or extreme joy. *Kalika Purana* has an elaborate description of various *Hasta Mudras* of spiritual importance. In *Hindu* rituals, we can find the *Hasta Mudras* used in prayers, *Surya Namaskarams*, *Gayatri Mantram*, *Homam*, sculptures of Gods and Goddesses etc.

Below are some of the *Hasta Mudras* used in the *Hindu, Jain and Buddhist* religious practices.







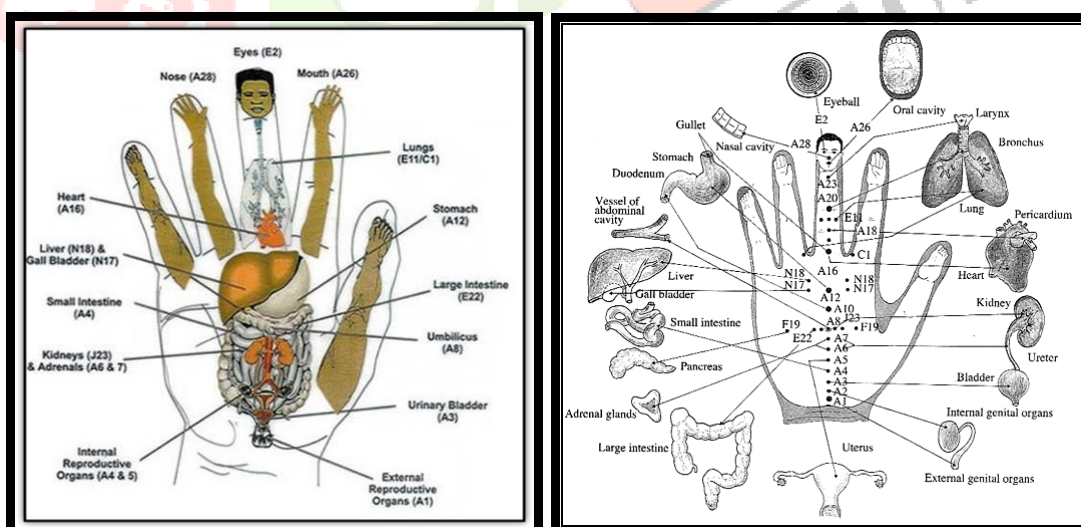
The *Hasta Mudras* used in a classical dance (*Sastreeya Nrityam*) are holistic and every *Hasta Mudra* has its specific meaning and usage. The *Hasta Mudras* of dance are used not only to express or communicate a particular meaning, but it is also therapeutic in nature. Research has been undertaken by me to study the therapeutic effect of the *Hasta Mudras*. The *Hasta Mudras* of dance have been correlated to the *Hasta Mudras* of *Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism* and *Buddhism* practices, besides the acupressure points. As we have seen the analytical view of *Hasta Mudras* used in Dance, *Yoga, Hinduism, Jainism* and *Buddhism* practices, now let us explore how they can be correlated to Acupressure points.

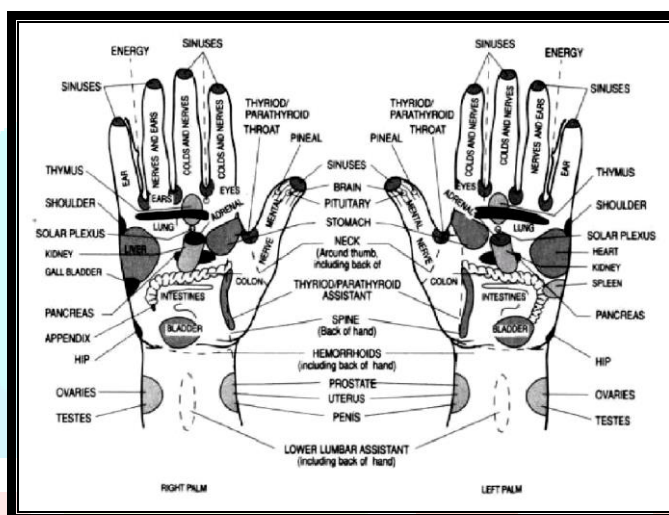
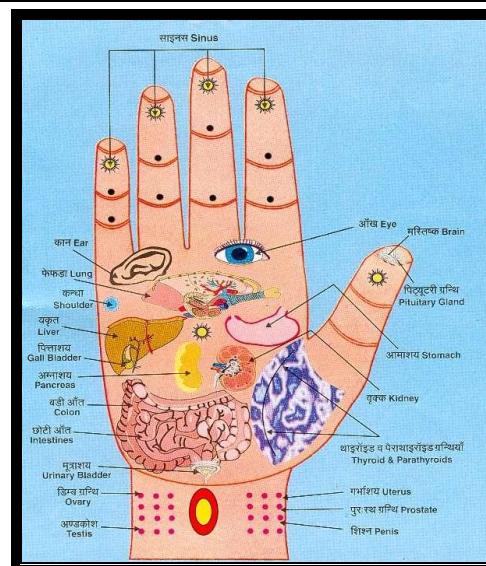
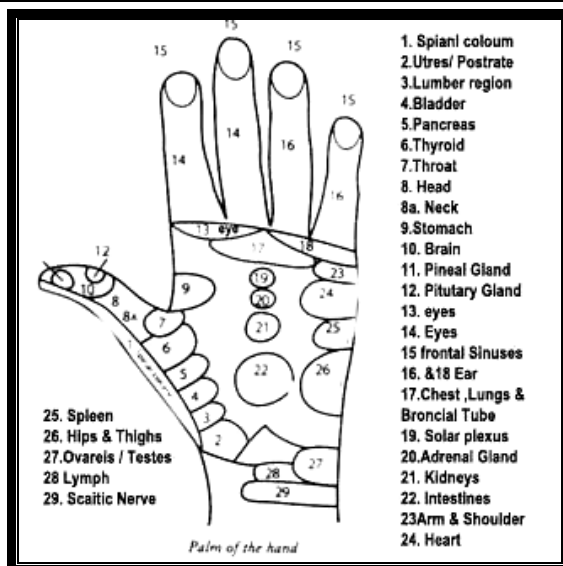
Acupressure

While getting into the details of the well being of the health, besides understanding the effects of the *Hasta Mudras*, let us explore the concept of Acupressure points which is a different science of healing.

Acupressure is an ancient healing art which was developed about 5000 years ago in Asia, practiced in China and *Bhaarat* (India). It is observed that *Yoga* and Acupressure points in the palm have already been proved therapeutically effective, individually and is under practice worldwide. The *Hasta Mudras* used in *Hindu* and *Buddhist* rituals are believed to have spiritual benefits besides some social and health benefits. Dance has its own benefits of communication.

The Acupressure points are represented through the below pictures. The Acupressure points in the palm can be related to the pressure applied between the finger tips while holding a particular *Hasta Mudra*.





To map the art of Dance to science, a comprehensive study of the physiology (skeletal, muscular and nervous system) of hand is also undertaken along with an analysis on pharmacokinetics. This gives a scientific approach to the critical analysis of the *Hasta Mudras* with the allied disciplines.

Physiology of Hand:

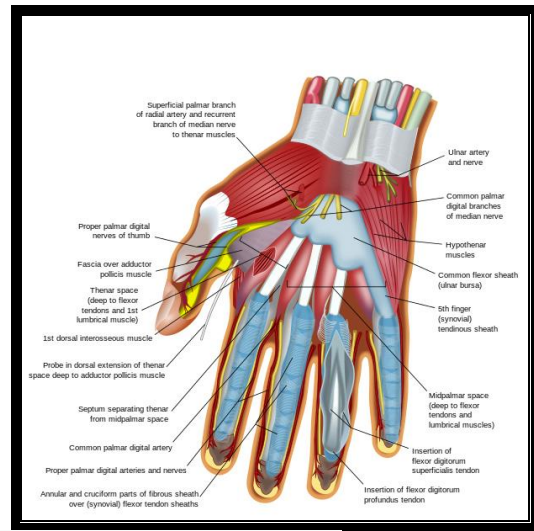
A hand is a multi- fingered extremity located at the end of an arm or forelimb of primates such as humans, chimpanzees, monkeys and lemurs³⁴. Fingers are some of the densest areas of nerve endings on the body, the richest source of tactile feedback and have the greatest positioning capability of the body; thus, the sense of touch is intimately associated with hands. Like other paired organs (eyes, feet, legs), each hand is dominantly controlled by the opposing brain hemisphere, so that handedness, or the preferred hand choice for single-handed activities such as writing, reflects the individual brain functioning.

The hand also must be coordinated to perform fine motor tasks (*Hasta Mudras*) with precision. The structures that form and move the hand require proper alignment and control for a normal hand function to occur. To understand the *Hasta Mudras* and their effectiveness, a brief study of the hand anatomy which includes the skeletal, muscular and nervous system is necessary. The Physiology of the palm can be represented from the below pictures in terms of its Skeletal, Muscular and Nervous systems along with the sensory and motor cortex of the brain.

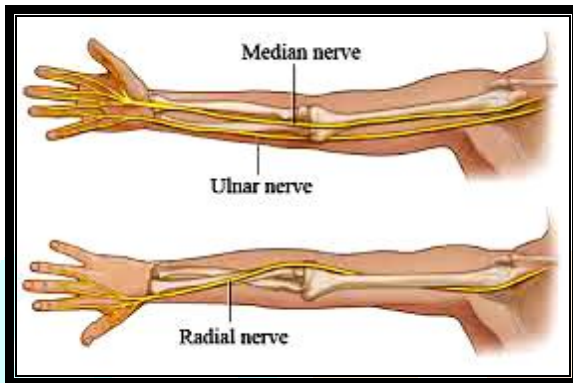
³⁴ Schmidt & Lanz, *Human Physiology*, 2003, p.105.



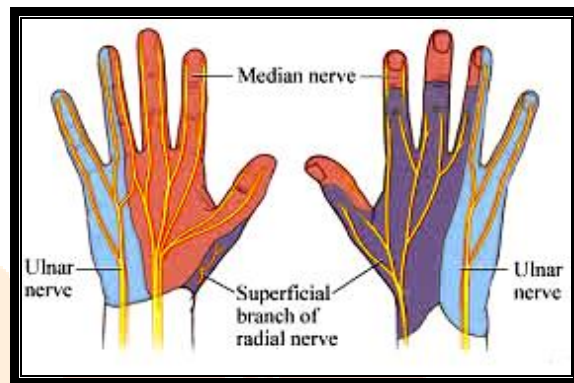
Skeletal System of the human hand



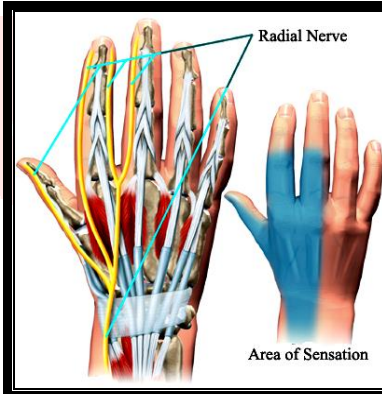
Muscular System of palm



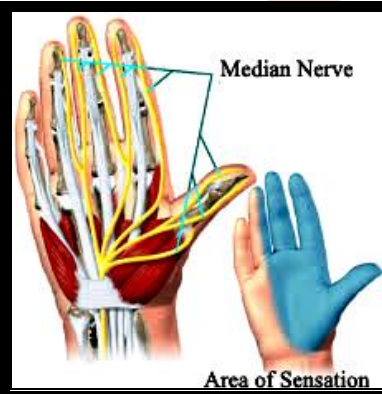
Nervous System of Hand



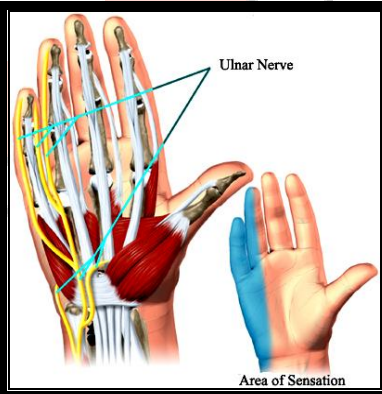
Palmar and Dorsal View



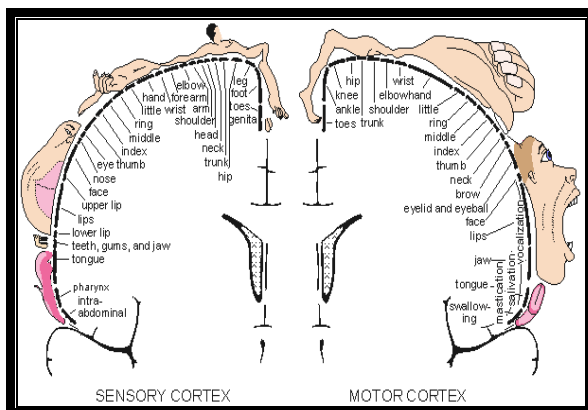
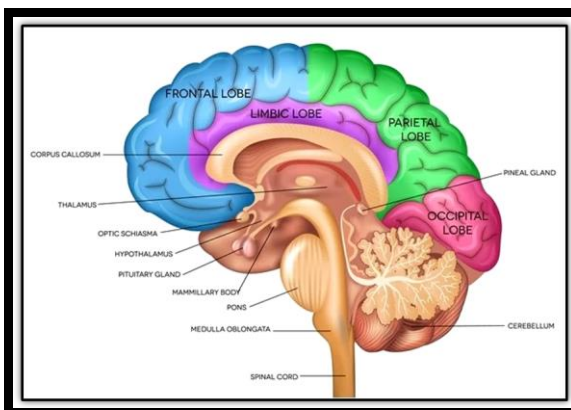
Radial Nerve



Median Nerve



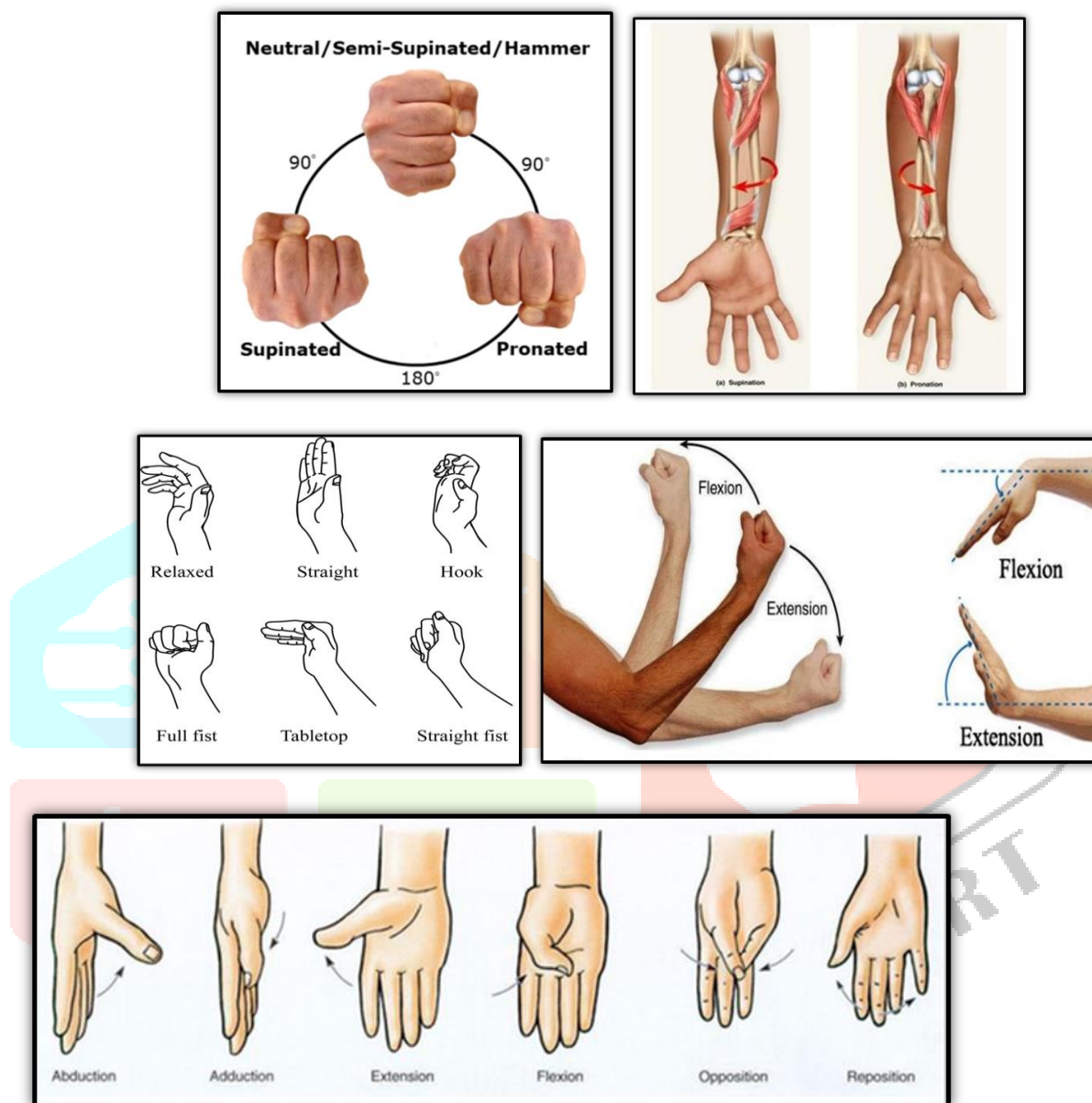
Ulnar Nerve



Sensory and Motor Cortex of Cerebral hemisphere

While studying the Physiology of palm, it is observed that the nerves in the palm travel to the brain via spinal cord which are further interconnected to the nerves of various body parts. Hence, the nerves in the palm play a significant role in stimulating and controlling various body parts. Besides

Physiology, the scientific analysis of the hand and palm with respects to its positioning, movements, articulations, structure is also explored to add value to the research work. The hand and palm positioning, movements, articulations etc can be viewed from the below pictures. They are referred as Pronation, Supination, Flexion, Extension, Abduction, Adduction, Opposition, Reposition, Relaxed, Straight, Hook, Full Fist, Table Top, Straight Fist etc., which can be noticed in the below pictures.



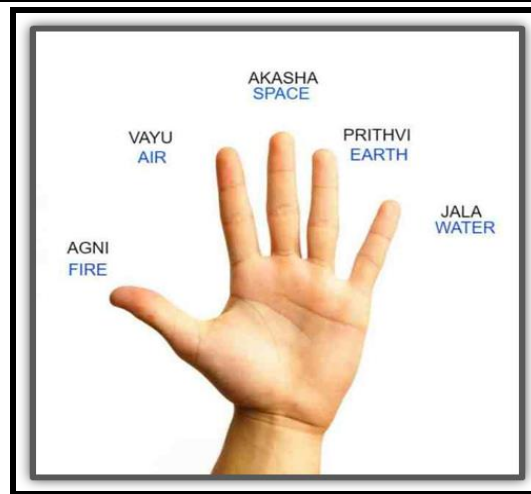
Besides Physiology, it is also analysed, compared and established the connection between Pharmacokinetics and the therapeutic concept in healing the ailments.

Pharmacokinetics:

Pharmacokinetics is the study of the process of absorption, distribution, metabolism, and excretion from the body.

Therapeutic Analysis of *Hasta Mudras*:

The human hand in general has 5 fingers *Angustha* - Thumb Finger, *Tarjani* - Fore Finger, *Madhyama* - Middle Finger, *Anamika* - Ring Finger and *Kanishtha* - Little Finger. These five fingers represent *Agni* (fire), *Vaayu* (air), *Aakaash* (space), *Prithvi* (earth) and *Jal* (water) respectively according to *Ayurvedic* terminology.



A comprehensive analysis of *Hasta Mudras* used in Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*), *Yoga*, *Hinduism*, *Jainism* and *Buddhism* religious practices, Acupressure, Physiology and Pharmacokinetics is done in correlation with the five elements, to investigate the healing capacities of *Hasta Mudras*. After a structured critical analysis, the major section of the research is to substantiate the study that involved identifying the effective *Hasta Mudras* used in Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*); study their therapeutic effect by relating them to the above mentioned disciplines with a scientific approach; check their scope of therapeutic effect by experimenting them on individuals with ailments; record the therapeutic effects and draw the results. Hence, to substantiate the therapeutic benefits of these *Hasta Mudras*, certain common ailments are chosen and the effective *Hasta Mudras* are implemented on individuals to heal the ailment and prove the therapeutic benefits. Keeping in view of the above analysis of the *Hasta Mudras* and their therapeutic effects, two different age groups and mental conditions are selected. Differently abled school children with age group 3 to 12 years and adults with age group 20 to 60 years. The adult group is scattered in different areas and occupations, whereas the children group is a fixed group from *Sanskriti School, Madhapur, Hyderabad*. The mode of therapy applied on the adult group is individual or psychotherapy, whereas for children it is group therapy.

The *Hasta Mudras* are implemented on these groups and results are drawn through survey (Questionnaire) over a period of time. The therapeutic approach on children group involved implementation of the effective therapeutic *Hasta Mudras* with the combination of a concept, theme or a game. A playful atmosphere was created for better involvement of children in the sessions. The children showed steady improvements in terms of concentration, activeness, memory and communication. Very common and often effected ailments and problems like cold, cough, headache, throat infections, motions, vomiting, sleeplessness and lack of concentration are selected for *Hasta Mudra* therapy for Adults.

While analyzing the therapeutic benefits of the *Hasta Mudras*, inferences were drawn accordingly and it is observed that, they can be proved therapeutically effective and hence can also act as a mode of healing. It can cure the ailments and keeps the body in perfect fitness.

CONCLUSION:

Dance Therapy is a new domain in Dance that is gaining acceptance across the globe. It is being offered in academics and many chose it as a profession too. Many research works on movement analysis are undertaken and its therapeutic benefits are proved in USA, UK, Europe, Australia and few other countries. However, the research on Dance Therapy in *Bhaarat* (India) is still in the budding stage. *Hasta Mudra* Therapy is a new concept in Dance Therapy and is one of its kind researches undertaken by me. The *Hasta Mudras* used in Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*) has various therapeutic values besides a communication tool. Hence it can be used both as therapeutic and entertaining.

It is observed, proved and concluded that the concept of *Hasta Mudra* Therapy can be an effective alternative therapy as it proved therapeutically effective. The term *Hasta Mudra* Therapy is used for the first time in the present study and an explanation is substantiated. *Hasta Mudra* Therapy is a new domain and the present study is first of its kind in this domain, the finding of which can be explored further by future investigators. Finally the study concludes that the *Hasta Mudras* are effective therapeutic agents and being a part of one of the popular performing art forms i.e., dance can be used without much effort, boredom and also in a meaningful manner. The *Hasta Mudras* can be executed by everyone, irrespective of the age and ailment. It can be practiced independently and does not need any external aiding factors. It is one of the easiest and simplest therapeutic concepts which can be implemented on any individual, caste and creed. It saves both time and money. It establishes a new domain in Dance therapy especially *Hasta Mudra* Therapy. It opens new doors in dance therapy research. It can be a quick relief for various common ailments. It has no known side effects.

To further expand this we can substantiate the statement by quoting the thematic songs written by the famous poet and an expert in *Telugu* literature *Arudra* while using the characteristics and usages of a single *Hasta Mudra* in each of these concepts which are choreographed and performed by *Bharatanatyam* Dance exponent, *Dr. Padma Subramanyam* brilliantly.

Beyond this study different other ailments can also be cured with the implementation of effective *Hasta Mudras*. Along with the common physical ailments mentioned earlier, *Hasta Mudras* can also be effective in controlling various mental states like aggression, depression, dissatisfaction, fear etc which can be caused by physical or mental disorders. The study proves that it is effective in healing sleeplessness and helps enhance concentration and memory. This is achieved as the *Hasta Mudras* helps in balancing of the tension and redirection of the internal energy effects that effects the changes in veins, tendons, glands and sensory organs and thus brings the body and mind back to a healthy state. Further exploration on this topic is required to substantiate the research either individually or combining with other attributes like movement, expressions of emotions, music, colour etc. Similarly there is need to pursue further research on Dance movement therapy in Indian context and *Rasaabhinaya* therapy which is the soul of Indian classical dance (*Bhaarateeya Sastreeya Nrityam*).

As the study is restricted to *Hasta Mudras*, research can also be conducted with regards to the footwork in dance, as it is observed in the study, that the nerves in the palm and foot play a major role in stimulations. While medication is considered as a quick remedy to most of the ailments, it has its own side effects in many cases. Alternative therapies especially '*Hasta Mudra* Therapy' as evidenced in this study can be more effective, less expensive and relatively safer method of cure. Thus '*Hasta Mudra* Therapy' can be further researched upon and promoted as an effective alternative therapy.

From the above discussions and conclusions drawn, it can be finally concluded that '*Hasta Mudra* Therapy' can be an effective aspect of Dance Therapy.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

Conflict of Interest: Author is an independent writer working as a faculty in a University in *Bhaarat* (India) and has no conflict of interest.

Ethical approval: All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

Informed consent: Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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