

MOHINIYATTOM

department of public relations
government of kerala



MOHINIYATTOM

a classical dance of kerala

MOHINIYATTOM

a classical dance of kerala

Prof. C. K. MOOSAD

DEPT. OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
GOVT. OF KERALA

mohiniyattom
a classical dance of kerala

author
prof. c. k. moosad

publisher
director of public relations
govt. of kerala trivandrum

december 1986

printed at
the kerala books & publications society
at the text book press, cochin–30

1–5,000
not for sale

design and lay out
p. v. krishnan

production
v. k. narayanan

CONTENTS

Mohiniyattom—Origin and early history
Decay and revival
Mohiniyattom today in Kerala
Single hand gestures
Double hand gestures
Spiritual Halo—to be reserved



FORWARD

The art forms of Kerala present our cultural heritage which is but a part of the common Indian tradition. They grew out of common myths, legends, beliefs and aesthetic concepts. While the express the totality of the response of our ancestors to this world and their experience in it, they become the inevitable part of bigger totality.

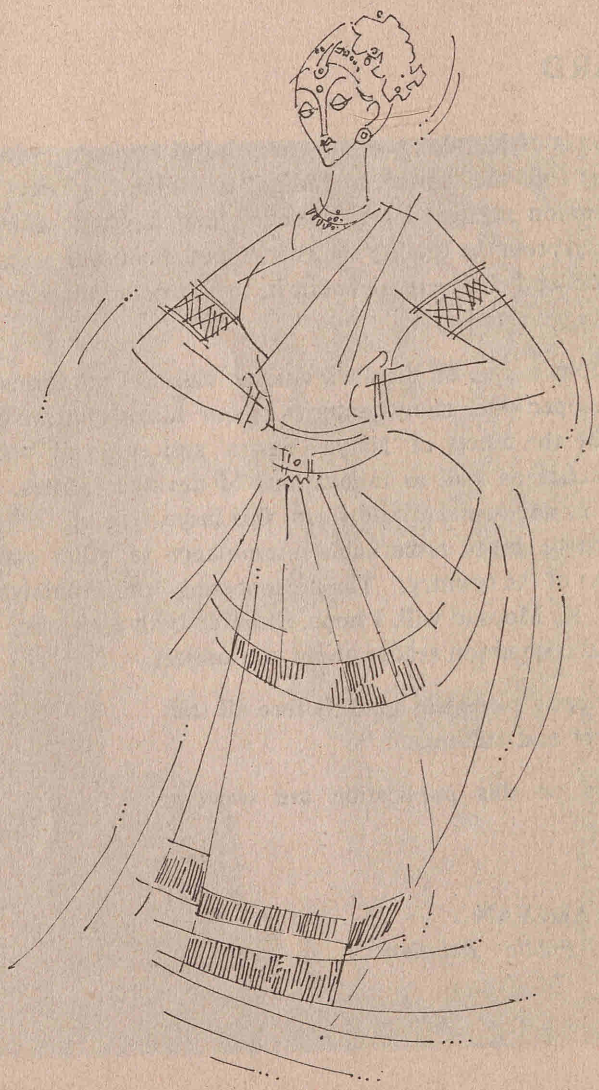
Mohiniyattom is one of Kerala's unique classical art forms. It has developed over many centuries of our history drawing on from the the tenets of 'Natya—Sastra' and enriched by the practice as well as innovations of devoted artistes. In its origin, development and form, this lasya type of classical dance bears remarkable resemblance to other classical dance forms of the country. The present study on Mohiniyattom by Prof. C. K. Moosad will, I hope, illumine both a serious student and a common reader about the subject.

I would happily place this book before all the lovers of art and culture.

Suggestions on this publication are welcome.

T. N. JAYADEVAN
Director of Public Relations

Trivandrum
– –1986



A WORD ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the Bhagavat Gita there is a reference to human body as a temple with the spark of Divinity enshrined in the heart. All faculties do function only as long as there is heart-beat. It means that life is divine and all human beings are to be treated with brotherly affection. We often speak of human brother hood and not of equality.

The whole of humanity is pictured as Virat Purusha of which the intellectual class is looked upon as the head; the valiant section is pictured to be the hands; the commercial section forms the pelvis, the organ for sitting and stability; the working class corresponds to legs or limbs for forward motion. All these classes function not for themselves but for the welfare and well-being of humanity as a whole, and in the language of Vedanta for the glorification of Paramatman or universal soul or God.

In the human body, the heart is situated in the inner apartment of the body protected by the ribs, head is located above; hands on either side, the pelvis and legs lower down. It is the heart that pumps the life blood to different parts of the body. Food is taken as an offering with mantra chanting at the commencement and at the conclusion. At the commencement we recollect the Prana or life; the udaana or inhalation; the atana, the exhalation; the vyana or spread-out of the energy; the samana or the harmonious assimilation. Food-taking is treated as Yajna. Major Yajnas are arranged for the welfare and well-being of all classes of people: the intellectual, the valiant, the commercial and the service class in general.

Temples are erected as a helipad for individuals to lift themselves to higher levels of human experience or inspiration. It gives moral strength and forges a link with the community. God is described as Parameswara or Parama Purusha. Ordinary purushas through devotion get

attached to God. Sometimes we accost God as Jagat Pitha. Fatherhood of God is a concept meant to ensure the brotherhood of man and in that sense it is a laudable idea in the best interests of all.

Dance is looked upon as worship, like any other fine art in India. We can make it attractive by embellishments but the purpose should not be lost sight of.

In North Kerala, the Zamorin of Calicut developed Krishnanattam; in Cochin a full-length play of Ramakatha called Maharamayana used to be prsented for the Maharaja to be worthy of wearing the crown. Since that was difficult of achievement the Maharaja kept the crown only on his lap during ceremonial functions of a religious nature. It indicates the importance attached to the enactment of Ramanattam. In Travancore, Swathi Tirunal Maharaja composed several Padams for Mohiniyattam enactments. It combines the essentials of Bharatha natyam and the principles of Kathakali. It is essentially a temple art developed as an offering to a diety. Any attempt to popularise it should not end in vulgarisation to suit the tastes of the backward section. It is to lift people to higher reaches of aesthetic and divine experience that Mohiniyattom has been conceived. This book is only to remind the elite of the need to nurture and embellish the art as an act of worship in its best sense.

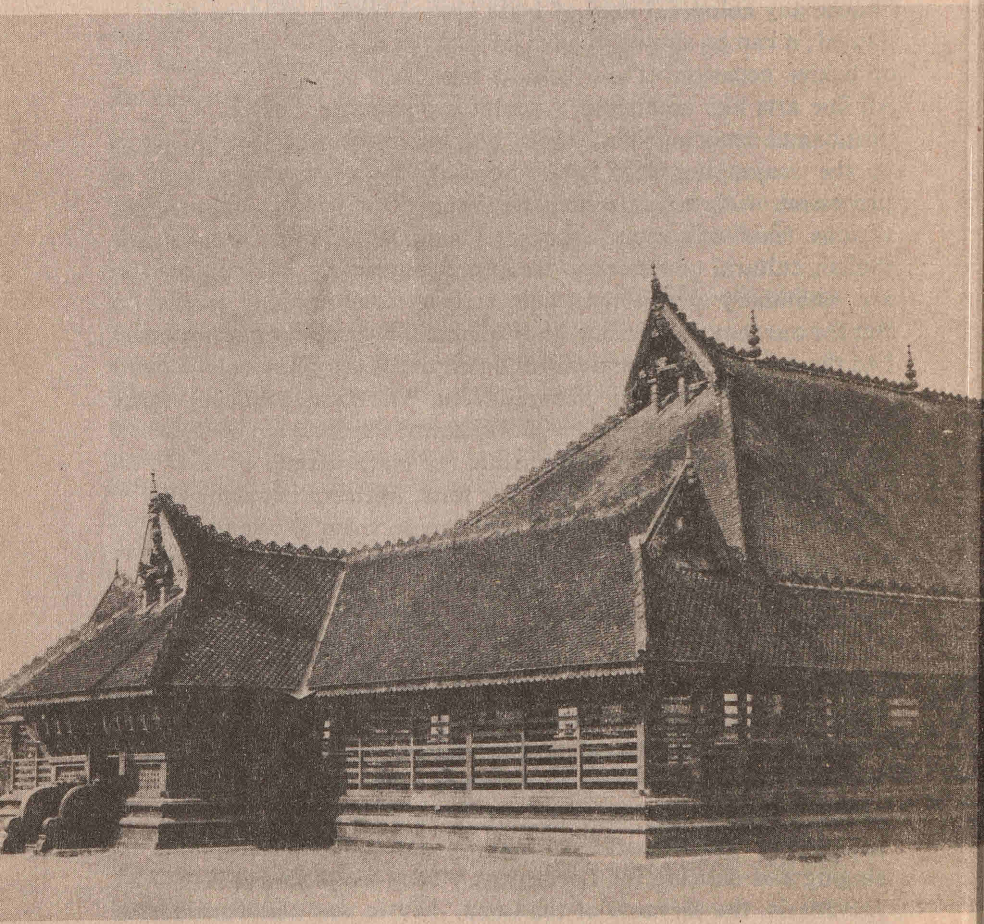
I am specially thankful to Artist Sri K. Chandrasekharan Nair who prepared the various sketches used in this publication.

Thycad, Trivandrum
28th Feb. 1985

Prof. C. K. MOOSAD

MOHINIYATTOM
ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

Choose any colourful item of mass appeal from a modern art festival; it can be shown to have its roots in the daily ritual or festive occasion of our Hindu temples.
All fine arts like architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, music and dancing find their heights of perfection in the major temples. Flag hoisting as a ceremony, procession with caparisoned elephants, fire works, illumination, various feats of valour, panchavadyam, kathakali, ottom thullal, cultural conference, poets meet etc.
are essentially connected with temple celebrations.
But for our temple worship and spirituality, India would not have had the soaring spires and imposing gopurams of Tanjore, Srirangam, Trivandrum, Sucheendram, Mathura, Madurai, Puri, Konarak and Gangai Konda Cholapuram; the Sivayogi of Harappa, the Trimurti of Elephanta, the Nataraja of Chidambaram, Krishna playing the flute, Mahakali dancing the Dance of Death, the Dancing girl image from Mohanjodaro, the poetry of Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidasa, the music of Jayadeva, Purandara Dasa, Thyagaraja, Dikshithar, Syamasastri and Swati Tirunal. Sri. A.S.P. Iyer, former Judge of Madras High Court and famous art critic held that the soul of Indian art is Bhakti or devotion.
Time was when classical dances by specially ordained people formed part and parcel of temple rituals.
Women dedicated to the Lord, were also to do many pleasant duties like keeping the temple premises clean, beautifying with decoration, making garlands for Lord, and singing and dancing for Lord's joy. They were known as Devadasis, the servants of the Lord. Music was also considered



a devotional item and hence it was that musicians came to be called Bhagavatar i.e, devotees of God.
Flower is an essential item of worship and Saivite temples of South India were noted for this. The Word Pooja derived from the Tamil equivalent for flower, found acceptance in Sanskrit. In Kerala, the worship in the sanctum sanctorum is conducted through Mantra and Tantra. Along with recital from the Vedas, expressive gestures are introduced in the worship to add to the spectacular element. Simultaneously at the sopanam there was the instrumental music played, and on the Mandapam in front, Devadasis conducted dances to the tune of Sopanam music. They were looked upon as the descendants of Urvasi, the legendary dancer in Devendra's court. Mohiniyattom of Kerala traces its origin to the Dasiattom conducted strictly within the holy premises like those of the temples. The Manipuri of Assam, Odissey in Orissa, Kathak in North India, Kuchipudi in Andhra and Bharata Natyam in Tamil Nadu are the counterparts of our Mohiniyattom in the respective regions. Difference in language and life style has influenced the art but everywhere the devotional aspect is the dominant note.

Presenting the key-note address at the recently held National Seminar on Mohiniyattom Sri M.K.K. Nayar, the renowned art critic of Kerala placed the origin of Mohiniyattom at two thousand years back when Kerala had its long sea-coast from Gokarnam to Kanyakumari.
At Gokarnam the presiding deity is Lord Siva whereas at Kanyakumari we have the very rare feature of Parvati

guarding the southernmost tip of the land, as a Virgin, independent of Siva. As Sri K.P.S. Menon points out, she has taken a very attractive form with all the unspoilt charm of a Virgin. The Virgin Goddess seems to bless with her eyes the evergreen stretch of coastal strip with coconut palms waving gaily to the sea-breeze from the Arabian Sea. Babylonians, Greeks and Romans braved the perilous sea for the purchase of the rare products of Kerala.

Due to this long contact with the Greeks, we find a close resemblance between the Greek mythology on the one hand and the Hindu mythology on the other. According to our mythology Gandharvas are divine singers and to their celestial tunes Apsaras danced with heavenly joy. Corresponding to the Gandharvas, Greeks have Centaur. Both ride on horseback and are proverbially fond of perfumes and flowers and also lovers of music and dance. They recognised Varuna as their God and followed Adharva Veda. Our dance and music are supposed to be modelled after performances before Devendra in Heaven under ideal condition so that our dances including Mohiniyattom could serve as a connecting bridge between the earthly beings and celestial beings. Dance and its handmaid music in India, whether Aryan or Dravidian, have been entirely spiritual in tone too, and for an excellent reason. The quest of India through the ages has been God, and all art, all vidya is mobilised and concentrated on Brahma-vidya, the Science of the Absolute or the Infinite. When they want to invoke childhood they sing of the eternal baby Krishna. When they want to

revel in the love of the beloved they have the episodes connected with Radha and Krishna. When they want to sing of man's helplessness, as babies they look to the Mother. Our artists see everywhere in the universe that All-pervading Being, that Abode of love, the Paramatman in his thousand forms of indescribable beauty and charm. Who can concentrate on the fire-fly when there is the blazing mid day Sun, wondered one of our poets!

Dance coupled with music found a very congenial soil in Kerala for one additional reason. Kerala enjoys two monsoons, the south west monsoon in the months of June and July and the north east monsoon in October and November. Corresponding to these, we have two harvest seasons, the Kanni crop and the Makara crop. After the close of each of the monsoons and before the respective harvesting, Kerala enjoys a festival. Onam festival is celebrated on a wide scale through outdoor activities in August and Thiruvathira before the second crop mainly as an indoor festival for womenfolk. During Onam, Kolkali and outdoor games gain momentum in both of which menfolk play the leading part. In Kolkaly dancers themselves do the singing. After the on slaught of the Aryan Culture, sophistication set in and the result is Kathakali done by the menfolk. During Thiruvathira the group dance of Kaikottikali of women is a feature of every home in Kerala. Under the impact of Aryan culture, this art form developed from its Temple off-shoot of Dasiattom and blossomed into a sophisticated lasya type of solo dance.



Sri M.K.K. Nayar says that before the dawn of the Christian Era, Kerala was inhabited by casteless rural folk who were farmers by profession and their festivals were invariably linked with harvesting. The women, pretty with long dark tresses were the envy of the poets. They were fanatic about their personal cleanliness. With more than 40 rivers flowing westward, Kerala is virtually a river-state full of pools and lakes. It was a time when there was no codified approach to religion and people worshipped the Sun and the Serpent. Every village had its own Kavu and people fired with imagination suggested possible forms for the Mother Goddess. They drew Kalams depicting the deity, others dressed themselves up as deity and danced to the tune of hymns. This is the origin of Theyyam which meant Daivam or God. Hymns are called Thottam or Sthothrams. This is centred round Vishu, the first day of the month of Medam or Mesha (April 14). This Vishu sankranti is what Assamese called Bishu. All the major temple festivals of Kerala are in this season before Vishu.

It may be noted that Onam corresponds to the Sravanam and in Kerala there is no much religious significance attached to this. It falls on the full moon day of the month of Sravana when the moon is usually in the Sravana constellation. This day is a religious one for all except Keralites. On the Upakarmam day all Brahmins put on a new sacred thread in place of the old and take to Vedic studies. Thus it is the festival of initiation into the study of Vedas. The Rigvedins

prefer the month of Sravanam and the moon in the Sravana constallation. They also take the Panchama Hasta constellation. On this very day the bright half of the Sravana month Rakshabandhan is performed. The house is to be specially cleansed. A place is selected and cowdung is smeared and is decorated with various coloured designs, and the pot full of water is with solemnity placed on the spot. The people have Rakshabandhan on the sister through the priest. The priest is given Dakshina for tying you with thread by which the powerful demon king Bali was tied. "O! Raksha do not move away!" This is the meaning of the mantra chanted then. In Kerala both these religious rituals are done away with and in their place, there is the Onam decoration with flowers and men do gymnastics and Kolkali. The musical instrument used is Villu (bow). It speaks of the time when bow and arrow could be converted into a musical instrument. No Rakshabandhan is called for as menfolk are sturdy and well-trained physically and mentally to defend their hearth and home. "During the reign of Maveli there was equality among men and theft was unheard of"—is the gist of a popular song sung during Onam in Kerala

The observance of the festivals was very conducive to the flowering of cultural activities. With the immigration of the Aryans from the North, Sanskrit became popular among the elite. People who could welcome the visitors coming from across the sea had a cosmopolitan nature and could easily understand and absorb all that was best. The Brahmin immigrants

were given land and entrusted with the administration of Kavus. Temples were erected; Kootiyattam gradually evolved to stage Sanskrit dramas in a stylised manner. The core of Kootiyattam was satvik abhinaya of the highest order. A special section of temple believers was entrusted with the celebration and dramatisation of epic stories so as to make the people more and more attached to the temples and puranas. They were christened Chakyars or laudable people as they were doing the laudable work of introducing the masses of our people to the highest reaches of epics and puranas. The performance was called Koothu or dance as it had the same object as the dance before the sanctum sanctorum. Chakyar had the license to criticise any malpractice in society by connecting it with a suitable puranic situation that came in handy for the gifted. Nambiar was to play on the mizhavu and their women were to sit on the side of the stage to mark time by playing on the cymbals (kaithaalam). They were called Nangayars or Nangiars in short.
It means a lady good at playing kaithaalam. As Chakyar explained the puranic story he was expected to use accepted gestures and produce appropriate expressions on the face. The Chakyar was enjoined to abide by five stipulations:
(1) The net result of the performance should be the enhancement of the devotional mentality of people.
(2) He should have the requisite grounding in Sanskrit texts.
(3) Wit and sarcasm could be used to make the narrative tellingly interesting. (4) Suitable instruments could be utilised to make the performance appealing. (5) Actions, costumes and facial expressions should conform to Natya Sastra. As in



the case of Mohiniyattam, Chakyar Koothu is confined mainly to Saivite temples. Stipulations were introduced and venue shifted to a corner away from the sopanam in the light of the degradation that Mohiniyattam suffered at a later stage.

As for Devi temples there were the Theyyam and Thottam. The actor as we have earlier hinted, gets transformed into the Divine and is possessed by the spirit. In other words, gods emerge as humans in the dark of the night and the human actors become possessed of by gods.
The attempt to recreate the mythical by the ritualistic performance is accompanied by music (Thottam) and dance. Kathakali and Mohiniyattam serve to recreate the mythical by ritualistic recreation. It is an attempt to relate the human to the divine by juxtaposing the mythical and the histrionics and of creating in specific lines and place a microcosm of sound and movement, line and colour as symbol of the macroscopic. In other words, Mohiniyattam is evolved as a solo dance as part of the temple ritual. the purpose being entirely aesthetic and devotional.

As hinted earlier, Mohiniyattam had its counterparts in Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Assam. Temple architecture and temple rituals were there to decide the content, form and technique of the art, which should serve to raise the moral stature of people through Bhakti. It is one among the several offerings like water, food, lights, incense, music and so on. Dance as a ritual was popular in Orissa in second century B.C. This popular performing art found abundant

expression on the mellow walls of the temples at Bhuvaneswar and Konarak. The evidence of dance sculpture in Orissa is a fascinating study. The Hati Kumbha inscription in Udayagiri near Bhuvaneswar, of the famous Kaling Kharvel in the second century B.C. is the earliest record of historical importance in that regard. The Jain King had arranged a performance of Darpa Natya and Vaditra for the pleasure of his people. The frieze in Ran Gumpha depicts the king seated in a dancing hall watching a female dancer's performance to the accompaniment of music. That this dance was not unknown in 2nd century B.C., stands established beyond any shadow of doubt.

The lady dancers were called Moharis like Mohinis or Devadasis in the south. There was also a class of boy dancers known as Gotipuar who have also contributed to the maintenance of the classical dance in Orissa. This class came into existence during the time of Bhoi King Ramachandra of 1600 A.D. By that time Vaishnavism had developed deep roots in Orissa and under the influence of Sakhi bhava cult, services were offered by donning women's clothes and treating Lord Krishna as the only Purusha, the devotees being sakhis doting on their Lord Divine. They enjoyed royal patronage. The king built gymnasia or Kalari called Akhada-ghars where advanced training in dance was imparted.

It was in the 11th century AD that Moharis came to be employed in Jagnath Temple. The daily chronicle known as Madla panji maintained to this day in Puri lends support

to this. Dance was part of the temple ritual atleast from 12th century AD in Orissa. Natan Mandapa at Jagnath temple was built in 1194 AD. Geeta Govinda came to be sung and put to dance in the temple.

What happened in Orissa on the east coast of central India, happened in Kerala on the west coast too. Orissa was comparatively free from the attacks of Muslim marauders from the north west. Thus Jagnath temple could without interruption encourage the ritualistic dance for nearly nine centuries. Only Devadasis were called Moharis. In the Konarak temple of the 13th century we find an extensive Natan Mandapa with walls richly decorated with dancing figures. Moharis like Devadasis performed dance in the classical style in front of the sanctum sanctorum. Every night they had to sing lullabies to put the Lord to sleep.

It is very clear that women dedicated to the Lord were to sing and dance in the temple precincts and were called Davadasis, the servants of the Lord. Urvasi was supposed to sing and dance in the court of Devendra. Devadasis were once looked upon as descendants of Urvasi, and so a privileged class like Chakyars.
Kerala is a land of many deities. People worshipped Vishnu, Siva and Brahma. Vishnu lived in Vaikundtham; Siva on Mount Kailas and Brahma in the world of Truth. Brahama is four-faced and created Natya Veda when he found that the four Vedas were not within the grasping reach of all people. Rigveda supplied information regarding



the play of musical instruments, Yajurveda conveyed meanings of words and ideas through gestures, Samaveda has specialised in music and melody. Atharvaveda is useful in depicting various expressions like sorrow, joy, anger and so on. This belief is proof positive that Natya Sastra is of divine origin to be used for devotional purposes. Every morning the day appears like a damsel from the east to be among newly blossomed flowers with the same message retold and the same assurance renewed that death is not the reality; the waves of turmoil are a surface phenomenon and the sea of tranquillity below is fathomless. The curtain of night is drawn aside and truth emerges without a speck of dust on its garments, without a furrow of age on its lineaments, as Tagore puts it.

In the evening when the sun sets, Lord Siva is supposed to dance. During the Siva Tandava the Lord's consort Parvati would be seated on her jewelled throne to witness the performance. All the angels of heaven will form the seers. Brahma played the tal, Vishnu played the mrdunga and Indra played the flute. Saraswathi would be busy with her veena while goddess Lakshmi would do the recital. Gandharvas and Kinnaras will fill the gallery of spectators.

Vishnu is believed to have danced once as Mohini after the churning of the Milky Ocean, to rescue the Ambrosia from the grips of Asuras for the sake of Devas. Mohiniyattam probably took its name from this concept. During dance, there is stipulation, that the palms

should be kept in the folded position when offering pranams. When the salutation is addressed to God, the folded hands should be held above the head. When accosting a teacher the Anjali should be in front of the face; and if an ordinary elder is to be received the Anjali should be held in front of the chest.

Dasiyattom used to be done, at first, only in Siva temple. It got access to Vaishnavite temples when Geeta Govinda and Asthapadiyattom became popular. Sri K.P. Narayana Pisharadi has opined that Geeta Govinda was sung in Guruvayoor temple for what is called Kottippadi seva at the Sopanam or the steps to the sanctarum sanctorum. Manaveda Kavi elaborated Geeta Govinda into Krishna Geeta, a poetic composition of thrice the lenth and more suited for the stage. My own view is that the very word Kottippadi seva implied the three-tier level of the performance—instrumental, vocal and dance levels. It was King Manaveda of Calicut who did away with the restriction that in Vaishnavite temples Chakyars alone could do the dance. True to the name Ashtapadiyattom, the new Krishna Geetiyattom came to be performed in eight nights beginning with the incarnation of Krishna and ending with his ascent to the Heavens. Kaliya-mardanam offered opportunity foi the Tandava type of dance on the hood of the king cobra Kaliya, and Rasakreeda offered ample scope for the display of lasya aspect. The Krishnanattom came to be performed by all classes of Hindus and Krishnanattom troupe consisted of fifty to sixty artistes. Masks were also permitted for certain characters

like Brahma, Yama, Jambava, and so on. A climate conducive to artistic renaissance came to be created with the advent of Krishnattom staged in all important temples under the Zamorin of Calicut.

Lord Krishna was fond of playing on the flute and to that magical melody Gopikas danced in joy around him. Even here the discerning critic never fails to appreciate the spiritual implication. The individual souls hankered for the universal soul. This corresponds very well with the development in Odissey dance by the end of the 12th century, when Geeta Govinda got enacted as a ritual dance, with the efforts of Anand Bhima Deva who ascended the throne in 1194 AD. Whatever be the exact course of the early history of Mohiniyattam, our artistes felt the living presence of God everywhere. They see everywhere in the universe Paramatma in his thousand names and forms. For them there is nothing obscene or vulgar.

The spiritual overtones of the Indian classical dances are partly due to their temple origin and partly due to spiritual outlook of the people, and so are indeed very difficult for the Westerners to appreciate. Sri A.S.P. Iyer recounts an interesting incident during a Dasiyattom performance. Watching the Kalaithuki dance of Nataraja Natya, a European lady sitting by his side asked Mr. Iyer why the artiste kept one leg high up and one leg down which was obviously against nature and inconvenient to the artiste. Mr. Iyer replied, "If both legs are up the dancer will



fall down and if both legs are planted on the sordid earth, it won't be dance at all. So the dancer by necessity kept one leg up and one leg down. To the Indians it also indicated that human life is best balanced when they have their hold on both the worlds, material and spiritual. According to the Hindu, the here and here-after aspects of life are equally relevant like a stick dipped half in water and looking disconnected. The cosmic dance of Nataraja was indicative of motion in repose and repose in motion. To use western science terminology, it indicates the possibility of statics in dynamics and dynamics in statics. The parallelogram law is relevant to both". With this explanation the lady appeared satisfied.

In Kerala Dasiyattom was at the height of its glory during the Perumal regime round about A.D. 209. They had their headquarters at Kodungallur known then as Thiruvanchikulam which remained for long the capital of the Chera kings. When a new perumal arrived from Tamil Nadu, the parties that accompanied him included the favourite Devadasis too. Mostly they came through Palghat gap. Perumals during the course of their visits to different places had the Devadasis settled in important temples. For many centuries Devadasis like Moharis of Orissa flourished at places like Pazhyannur, Korattikara and Peringottu kurussi. After the Perumal regime, Kodungallur and Trikkanamathilakam got desecrated partly due to internal feuds between Tekkedath Nair and Vadakkedath Nair families who were jointly in charge of the administration of

the temple and mainly due to onslaught and pillage of fanatics from the West. According to Kodungallur Kunhikuttan Thampuran the temple at Trikkanamathilakam was like Jagnath temple of Puri.
It was the most important Siva temple common to all the 64 gramams and thus more important than Panniyur and Sivapuram (Chovvara). There was an effort to rebuild it on the model of Srirangam temple. But in its worst days after desecration, the idol of Parameswar was taken away and used in Cochin ferry for tying up fishing boats and later in fixing a flagstaff.

Just as after the fall of Constantinople the artists moved to the West and caused indirectly the renaissance in Europe, the flight of Devadasis to the East of Kodungallur had a beneficial effect. They joined the Nangairs and developed Nangair Kuthu. Devadasi Nritya was full of gyrations and swift movements where as the limbs of Nangairs did very little dancing. They concentrated on Abhinaya mostly using their eyes and face.
Devadasis absorbed the art of eye-movements and facial expression technique of Nangairs and thus led to the development of Mohiniyattom exactly in the line in which Manipravalam attained its development through the fusion of Sanskrit and Malayalam words.
Satvika Abhinaya, gentle enticing movements and full exploitation of the sringara bhava became its hall marks.

During the Perumal regime Dasiyattam flourished and to this fact

the twin epics Chilappatikaram and Manimekhalai bore ample testimony. Elankoadigal, the younger brother of the ruling Chera king is the author of Chilappatikaram. As we have seen, the Chera King had his headquarters at Tiruvanchikulam or Kodungallur. The tragic story is woven round the magnetism of Madhavi, a dancer par excellence, whose charm captivated the hero of the poem to such an extent that a sequence of tragic events followed leading ultimately to the self-immolation of the chaste and loyal wife, Kannakgi. Manimekhalai, the daughter of Madhavi, too was a dancer and heroine of the second classic. It can be safely inferred from these classics that in Kerala we had hereditory dancing well established by the 7th and 8th century A.D., for, the epic Chilappatikaram is believed to have been written sometime between the 5th and 8th century A.D.

Again, Chilappatikaram describes Madhavi as an avatar of the celestial dancer, Urvasi. To get an idea of the intensity of training undergone, and her various accomplishments, it is enough to go through the 3rd chapter of Chilappatikaram. Describing Madhavis' arangettam or debut before the Chola king, the epic refers to the seven years spent by her from the age of five, at the feet of her Guru and how she learnt the eleven types of dance including the basic aspects viz. artha, yoni, vritti, sandhi, rasa, gati, bhava, abhinaya, vakya, vakya bheda, varna, raga and cheda. These aspects are closely related to the mudras or hand gestures used to indicate the sense of the stanzas sung







for the dance. Madhavi was an adept at four varieties of hand gestures, ekahastha-24 in number, dwi hasta-13 in number beginning with anjali, samana hastha and misra hastha. Madhavi at her debut, gave scintillating performances covering all the three forms namely Natana (tandava), Nritta (pure dance) and Nrittya (expressive dance) on the lines prescribed by Bharatha Muni. The standard expected of a dancer was quite an exacting one.

With the development of Kerala as a distinct region, dancers came to be called Nangairs or Nangayachis as could be discerned from epigraphic records of AD 932 in a village about 25 k.m. beyond Calicut. It refers to a Chentrayil Nangair who had donated land to the temple. She was a rich Devadasi dedicated to Chokkur temple. Another record of AD 934 of Nedumpura Tali near Shornur mentions payments prescribed for Nangiars and Nattuvars of the temple. Yet another 11th century document of Shornur mentions the names of Sreedharan Nangayachi known also as Tribhuvana Mahadevi Nangayachi who held a very respectable position in Kerala society. Tiruvalla temple too had its quota of Devadasis as can be seen from the records of 11th century when four of them received special payments for the performance during Onam. A Kandiyur temple record of A.D. 1215 refers to a Devadichi called Unni who was the wife of the ruling king of Odanad Ravi Kerala Varma. She had her say in matters of administration too. It was at her

behest that the shrine for Subramania was built in the Suchindram temple.

As in Konarak we find exquisite sculptural dance poses and musical pillars in Padmanabha Swamy temple in Trivandrum and Sucheendram temple. Entering the imposing Padmanabha Swamy temple gopuram of height more than one hundred feet erected as a seven-floored structure, one reaches the Sreebalippura 25 feet in width with 324 granite pillars. On either side of the corridor are granite pillars, each with a Devadasi figure carrying oil lamp. At the four corners are erected mandapams to be used for Chakyar Kuthu and Padthakom performance and also Puranam recital. Reference has already been made to Subrahmania prathishta in Sucheendram temple at the instance of the dancer-wife of a ruling prince. The imposing tower at Sucheendram 135 ft. high can hardly be missed by any traveller on the Nagarcoil Kanyakumari route.
It is the only temple in Kerala dedicated to the Trinity called Sthanumalaya Swamy. Sthanu is Siva, Mal stands for Vishnu and Ayan for Brahma.
The Sthalapuranam confirms that the Trimurtis, in response to the prayers of sage Atri and his devoted wife Anasuya, appeared in their hermitage in the form of a Linga.
The top, middle and base of the Linga in the temple represent Siva, Vishnu and Brahma respectively. It is said that the name of the sage Atri itself is significant. It literally means, "not three", meaning three in one.

In the temple are several Mandapams. Kulasekhara mandapam contains the famous musical pillars; Chittira Sabha houses several stone idols of several deities and sages. It is situated on an elevated part in the temple and it contains a mirror with the image of Nataraja the cosmic dancer in the midst of various sculptures of the Hindu pantheon. The secret underlying it is the high philosophy that the body is the temple and the dweller in it is God. The temple is one of the store-houses of the richest specimens of art in stone. The colossal monolithic image of Anjaneya, 18 ft. in height, is one of the biggest images of Anjaneya in the whole of India. Every newly married couple would visit the temple and witness the festivals to have the blessings of Lord Sthanumalaya. Tradition goes that Indra was purified at this place. Suchi means purity and anyone coming there is sure of being cleansed of dark thoughts and base emotions. The name of the Sage, as has been pointed earlier, embodies the idea contained in the Rig Vedic hymn, "Ekam sat Viprah bahudha vadanti".

Famous dancers like Unniachi and Unnichiruthevi were expert exponents of Devadasiyattom. Because of their long and close association with temples, they were held in high esteem almost on a par with musical composers and saints. To see a Devadasi when one sets out on a holy mission was believed to be a good omen. Till very recently in the ceremonial Athachamaya procession of Tripunithura, Devadasis were made to stand in front rows of the Royal procession. In Karnataka and Andhra,

Devadasis were called Bhasavis – dancers of the court of Bhasava or Devendra. When a girl reaches the age of 13 years, a token marriage to a god was prevalent.

Devadasis congregated at several places in Kerala like Tiruvanvandur, Tiruchambaram, Pallikunnu in Malabar area; Mathilakam and Kodungallur in former Cochin area and Odanad and Kandiyur in Travancore area. They assumed titles like Manomenaka and Marilekha. About the quality of their dance the only work that throws light is Damodara Chakyar's Sivavilasam according to which the sculptured gods in the dancing hall of Kandiyoor temple seemed to be real gods who were spell-bound by the beauty of the dances performed that very night. The God seemed unwilling to vacate the ring-side seats even during daytime for fear of losing them to the Dasis. Suka Sandesa also refers to daily practice of dance in temples. Even Marco Paulo's travelogue of the 13th century and Barbosa's of the 11th century confirm this.

It is also significant that the dancer wife of a ruling prince suggested the installation of Lord Subramanya's idol at Sucheendram. Lord Kartikeya is a Vedic god. He is specially mentioned in the Vedas as the supreme Manifestation in respect of divine knowledge. Kartikeya lore in Tamil is legion. Sankaracharya has poured out immortal songs in praise of Kartikeya in poems like Subrahmanya Bhujanga.

Karthikeyam mahabhagam
Mayooropari samsthitham
Tapta kanchana varnabham
Sakti hastham varaprabham
Dwishat bhujam satruhantharam
Nanalankara bhooshitam
Prasanna vadanam devam
Sarva sena samavalam

"Adorations unto Lord Kartikeya, the glorious seated on the peacock, shining like molten gold, holding the sakti in hand, bestower of boons, twelve-armed killer of foes (internal and external) adorned with all kinds of ornaments, smiling and surrounded by all the armies". This is the dhyana sloka quite suited to abhinaya through hand gestures. At the same time the adhyatmic meaning should not be missed by the discerning critic. Karthikeya is looked upon as the embodiment of Brahma vidya as per Sankara Bhagavatpada. His characteristic weapon, the sakti is a spear-like weapon representing the power born out of the knowledge of Brahmavidya. The three asuras Soorapadma, Simha mukhasura and Tarakasura may be said to symbolise the evil qualities of Ego, Illusion and Lust. When it is said that the Lord killed those three demons by means of sakti, one is to note that the forces of evil could be destroyed by forces of virtue. For that matter all our festivals like Diwali, Dusserah etc. are allegories depicting the triumph of virtue over vice. The Lord is said to have married two spouses Devasena and Valli. They represent the Ichcha Sakti

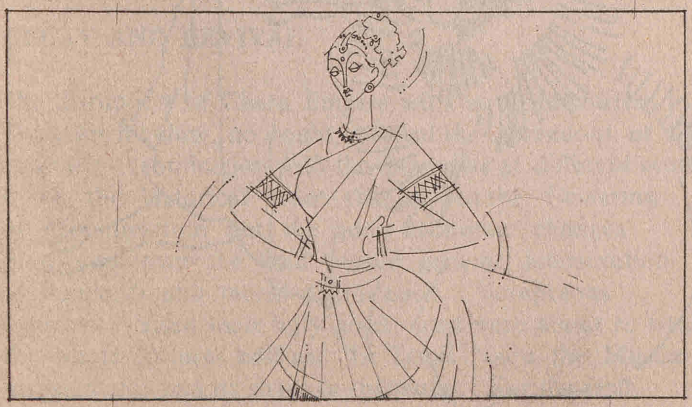
and Jnana Sakti of the Lord. Devasena represents the Satwik quality and Valli which literally means a creeper, may have reference to the Kundalini sakti running along the spinal cord. Peacock which Lord mounts, is symbolic of Pranava as the bird can spread its multi-coloured feathers like the rainbow across the sky. One of the Lord's name Guha suggests his being seated in the cavity of our innermost being. His six faces and twelve hands make him the Lord of Time or Kala, in as much as the year is composed of six seasons and twelve months. South India is dotted with hills where Lord Kartikeya takes his abode. He is claimed by the Tamil as the presiding deity of their language. All deities are symbolic of spiritual concepts meant to elevate man from his sordid drudgeries and mutual bickering. Fatherhood of God implies the brotherhood of man to which even the atheist can have no objection. Dasiyattom, likewise, is a ritual performed in temples and got nurtured to hold aloft moral values. One of Sankara Bhagvadpada's adorations to Lord Kartikeya is as follows:

Visāleshu karnanta deerkheshwajasram
Dayā syandeshin dwā dasa surekshaneshu
Mayeeshal ka takshassakru'pathi thasehed
Bhave the dayāseela kā nāma hant

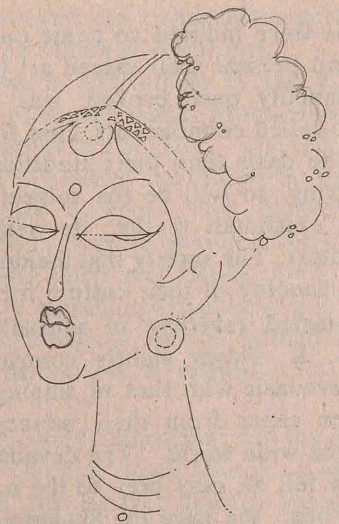
"O compassionate one, in what measure do you stand to lose if, out of these twelve large eyes, each extending to the ears each over flowing with compassion if a small part this side-glance



of but one eye be directed towards me for a short-while?"
This prayer addressed to Lord Subrahmanya can as well be one
directed to the art of Dasiyattom itself, in view of the
divine origin, spiritual aroma, moral values and aesthetic splendour
that go with it. Unfortunately we find a growing tendency
for art to be vulgarised in the name of popularisation.
It is worth while in this connection to remember
Ananda Coomara Swami's opinion about the high ideals of
artistes. "It is the Dharma of the artiste to present to
us the timeless vision of the universe, conceived
not as an external phenomenon but as a picture within".
At the same time art also must live and meet the needs of time.
So it is imperative that we should be prepared to adapt
and adopt appropriate movements, poses and themes that
will give the artform grandeur, completeness and acceptability.







DECAY AND REVIVAL

The disruption of Chera Empire with its headquarters at Thiruvanchikulam, no doubt, caused the spreadout of Devadasis and their identification with the Nangiars at different centres. It was this historical event that helped the flowering of Mohiniyattom but the socio-economic changes that swept over the land caused general deterioration of standards and moral degradation. Voluptuous tendencies raised their ugly heads and were about to weaken the whole cultural edifice. In Tamil Nadu the Muslim invasion also had its share in the game. For the first

time the Devadasis were induced to come out of temple precincts and present their sacred art to please the war lords. The sanctity once broken, was difficult of mending. The so-called connoisseurs soon found themselves to be more after the dasis than their traditional duty. As is the king, so will be the subjects, "Yadyadacharatah sreshdtah thatha de vetharo janah" is true in social context. The society that assiduously protected the pristine purity and sanctity of their culture for its own stability and well-being started revelling in sensuality and license. Sri M. K. K. Nayar rightly compares the condition of the devadasis with that of singing birds kept long in golden cages from their infancy thrown suddenly out into the wide world. The devadasis in their new-found freedom fell an easy prey to the naked lust of their so called patrons. We have the Shakespearean dictum that lilies when foul smell worse than weeds and it came true of devadasis. The result was that the term devadasi; or thevadichy became synonymous with prostitution. The British during their occupation were forced to ban dasiyattom in areas under their control. We know in Travancore during the Regent Maharani's regime, dasiyattam was banned.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the situation was not that bad in Orissa and North Eastern States. Moharis continued to observe the traditionally strict code of behaviour and life-style. Except a few privileged persons the laity meaning all and sundry

was not allowed to witness the dance as the performance was closely in front of the sanctum sanctroum.
From the Brahmeswara inscriptions of the 9th century AD, we see that the reign of Kesari Kings, Moharis were attached to all the major temples of the state. The temple of Jagnath at Puri did not suffer the fate of Somanath temple during Ghazni ravages. Puri blossomed into a great religious institution of varied cultural activity. The various kings who ruled over Orissa saw to it that the rituals were maintained regularly and they contributed liberally so the maintenance of the Moharis, who continued to be models of exquisite art.

The technique of Odissey dance met all the four requirements of the classical dance school. The abhinaya continued the satwik, angika, vachika and aharika aspects according to Natya Sastra.
Some manuscripts deal with hand gestures employed; some refer to poses and some maintain that Moharis could use Geeta Govinda or Ashtapadi as in Kerala.
Moharis danced on several festive occasions like Chand Jhalia and Jhoolar Jhalia the two major festivals of the year in Orissa. As in Nangiar Kuthu of Kerala a class of boy dances known as Golipuras also joined the Moharis to enhance the mass appeal of the art. This class was inducted during the time of Bhol King Ramachandra on the eve of the 17th century. Vaishnavism had by that time laid deep roots under the impact of Sakhi Bhava cult. Services were offered by donning women's

clothes and treating Lord Krishna as the only Purusha, all the devotees being the Sakhis. The system was later on maintained by different Zamindari professional parties who practised the art of dancing, generation after generation.

It is also interesting that the two major festivals of Orissa correspond to the Onam and Thiruvathira of Kerala. Onam, no doubt, represents the subjugation of Mahabali at the hands of Vamana avatar of Vishnu. The emphasis is not on the subjugation but on Mahabali's opportunity to visit Kerala every year as permitted by Vishnu. The celebration involved the worship of Mathevar or Lord Siva. Onam is mainly a festival of men folk who can do well at Thandava dance. Thiruvathira is the art festival with a Vaishnavite overtone of womenfolk. The group dance performed in houses retained the pristine purity of the art. The solo dance of Mohiniyattam happened to decay.

One redeeming feature noted in Kerala was the fillip that Sanskrit study enjoyed at the hands of Nambudiris and native princes. Pandit Nehru has rightly emphasised the importance of Sanskrit or Deva Bhasha in the preservation of our culture in his 'Discovery of India':

"Sanskrit is a language amazingly rich, and efflorescent full of luxuriant growth of all kinds and yet precise and strictly in keeping with the frame work of grammar which Panini laid down two thousand years ago.....Sanskrit like the classical

laguages is full of words which have not only poetic beauty but a deep significance, a host of ideas which cannot be translated into a language foreign in spirit and out-look. Simply spoken, Sanskrit is not difficult to follow either to those who have a smattering of any present day Aryan language like Hindi, Bengali, Mahrathi and Gujarati. The South Indian languages are entirely different in origin and have borrowed and adopted so many words that nearly half the vocabularly is from Sanskrit". Geetam, vadyam, nataka, nritta, natakadarsam and even the lay-out and the requirements of the green-room cover a very large area of Sanskrit literature. The concept of navarasa, its description and exploitation, is a pointer to the perfect masters of the intricacies of aesthetic requirement and satisfaction.
Unlike Greek drama Sanskrit plays, though abounding in Soka rasa, do not end in tragedy, the conclusion being always with a mangalam or prayer with an optimistic note.
The Hastha Lakshana Deepika which is followed widely in Kerala for the requirements of Kathakali and Mohiniyattom is in Sanskrit. With this Sanskrit learning and versification prevalent among the elite, the revival of classical arts became comparatively easy in the West Coast.

It may be noted that the North Eastern region of India also escaped unaffected by alien culture. Thus the people of the region had many things in

common with Kerala. Their tufts reminds one of the Nayar chieftains of our region. The ladies had long ears decorated with ear rings. We had occasion to speak of their Bihu corresponding to our Vishu. There was no high and low in the social set-up. All were Vaishanavites. Manipur is also a land of rivulets and there is heavy rainfall in June and July. The fields echo and re-echo with the songs of agricultural labourers. They had their harvest season coinciding with our Kanni harvest. There was hardly a village without a temple dedicated to Govindaji. For all the festivals they danced; temporary pandals were erected and decorated wth flowers. Young maidens gathered to watch Radha-Krishna dance. Unmarried young men could select their partners of life and the wedding used to be solemnised the very next day. Polygamy was not a taboo there. Any way dance was an integral part of their community life. Rasaleela is based on the legendary love of Lord Krishna and his consort Radha. In Kerala, Siva temples are common and Tandava type of dance became a festive item wheras in the North East, Krishna worship was common and Rasaleela songs and dance items became their chief cultural heritage.

Rasaleela Dance is something like a dance drama, with the following items. 1. Krishna appears dancing; 2. Radha appears dancing; 3. The two dance together; 4. They have a love-quarrel and for a time refuse to dance. 5. Then there is the union of Radha Krisha when they get

together with the Gopis. 6. The last phase is where Radha and other Gopis without exception take a pledge of eternal devotion to Lord Krishna. Every one decides to treat the respective husband as Lord Krishna. This is only the dramatisation of the attachment of various individual souls to the Absolute Soul.

The play of emotions in the Rasa Leela is vipralamba with the crisis of separation and reunion appealing to all.

The variegated colour of the landscape of the locality have found themselves expressed in the costumes worn by artistes in Manipuri dance. Spectators have the emotional urge fully satisfied. Radha and Krishna are shown as ideal lovers both during the Basant Festival and during the Dusserah Festival. As we have seen earlier they have the Bihu or New Year Day too having its share of celebrations with dances prior to the sowing season. Nataraja Puja is held in honour of Siva invoking the Lord's blessing to subdue evil forces within and without. It is highly significant that the God of Destruction in India is given the name Siva meaning giver of happiness!

All these aspects were taken into consideration when Swati Thirunal who ascended the Throne of Travancore State in 1829, took up the rejuvenation of music and dance in Travancore. He knew a number of languages like English, Sanskrit, Tamil,Telugu and Kannada.

He was one of those who believed in the value of arts for the prosperity and well-being of the state. "Kalaanam grahana deva soubhagyam upajayate" was a dictum of Manasollasa a well-known Sanskrit work; the Maharaja chose this dictum as his



motto in life.
He was aware that the law of numbers did not count much in the art. Popularity is not always propitous to the cultivation of right tastes and standards.
Harikatha in South India was fostered and maintained by Meruswamy an artiste brought by Swati Thirunal from Tanjore. The Rajas of Tanjore, upto the time of Sarbhosi, were great and discerning patrons of art, dancing, painting and music.
It was Meruswamy who popularised Harikatha in South India, as it was practised only in North India. Like all good things there was the danger of Harikatha, being vulgarised.
It became sometime the last refuge of the incompetent.
Swati Tirunal was alive to this danger and was very cautious in the matter of popularisation of Mohiniyattom and took positive steps to develop it as a popular art suited to Kerala genius.

Sri T. M. B. Nedungadi, the Chairman of Kerala Kalamandalam, in an article on "Thoughts on Mohiniyattom" has made special mention of the careful way in which Swati Tirunal tried to develop Mohiniyattom as an art form distinct from Bharatanatyam of Tamilnad. "Meanwhile a few dancers in and out side Kerala made some attempts to learn Mohiniyattom. These pioneers were practitioners of Bharatanatyam and their efforts, however sincere, resulted in the mixing of the two forms. This was inevitable, for Bharatanatyam and Mohiniyattom have much in common. The Sadir dance which

was refashioned through the dedicated efforts of the late Shri Krishnayyar as well as Rukmini Devi of Kalakshetra under the name of Bharatanatyam, and the earlier form of Mohiniyattom which earned the royal patronage of Swati Tirunal in his Court had a common identity in the traditional Dasiattom.

The fact seems to be that all forms of classical dance like Bharata Natyam, Kuchipudi and Odissei are based on Bharata's principles of the Geeta Nritha Kaviya Prasthana'. This type of dance has been clearly enunciated in the Natya Sastra as having various sub-divisions based on various factors ranging from pure dance to pure abhinaya. Each of the above traditional types of solo dances is based on one of these subdivisions giving importance to a particular factor accepting the others as sanchari to embellish the form. The original variations, together with historical and political influences, account for the differences as we see them today. However, all these forms had one thing in common, namely Natyadharmi—mode of Abhinaya—in contrast to the Lokadharmi interpretation adopted to hold out the stage as a mirror of life as a whole. In other words, it is the presentation of individual works in poetry of an extremely high order by a solo dancer as different from the presentation contained in a dramatic performance. The difference is made very clear in the Natya Sastra and such a presentation wherein an individual dancer interprets a higly superior type of poem or song before Divinity or King

is the 'Geeta Nritya Kavya Prasthana'.

In Mohiniyattom the maximum importance is given to abhinaya while accepting the other common factors generally but never intensively. Its graceful movements are grand arabesques of beauty; its steps mingle with and elevate the charm of such graceful movements but do not run into too fast a tempo that might break the flowing vision of grace; all that is intended is to bring out the Bhava essence of the composition contained in the couplets of the songs rendered and above everything else, there is concentrated abhinaya on the face. These are the most important factors in the successful rendering of the Mohiniyattom. For this reason one may not come across in Mohiniyattom the intriguing foot-work or the regorus movements as in other related dance forms. On the other hand, by way of compensation, hastas and stances in Mohiniyattom are invested with stress on grace and beauty. The focal point is abhinaya and special importance is attached to the eye movements which is not one of the ingredients of expressions but its forte. That is why there is relatively lesser emphasis even on costume—a white sari with zariga on it flashing like golden rays of the morning sun.

Many compositions (padams) of Swati Tirunal are suited to Mohiniyattom. It is possible that these reflect the influences of the Nattuvanars and the charming and expert dancers who found a place amongst the vidwans of the royal court. It is clear that these masters must have had a hand in refashioning the form and content of the Dasiattom then. Thus

perhaps from Dasiyattom emerged Mohiniyattom—the "Dance of the enchantress".

Thus Swati Tirunal did pioneering work successfully in nourishing Mohiniyattom preserving the spiritual basis of the art. Vadivelu was invited from Tanjore to tone up the dance form of Kerala. The Maharaja himself and Irayimman Thampy composed a number of Padams and Varnams suited to Mohiniyattom. Just as Sopana style became popular on the Kathakali stage, special types of songs were composed for Mohiniyattom. He opined that the costumes of Mohiniyattom artistes could very well be white clothes with laced borders unlike Manipuri style of costume with deep colours. The Maharaja's attention was mainly directed to the revitalisation of music and Kathakali. If high standard was maintained in Kathakali, its solo conterpart Mohiniyattom with emphasis on lasya type of dance was also sure to follow suit.

In Kathakali, Thandava type of vigorous and majestic dance style is popular. There is scope for lasya type of graceful slow performance in Mohiniyattom. This puts us in mind of what is called ugra prathishta side by side with soumya prathishta. In Gokarnam in the North there is ugra prathishta of Siva. At the southern tip there is the virgin goddess Parvati ever ready to shower her choicest blessings on all in Kerala upto Gokarnam. Thus our art arena is as it were, protected on one side by thandava vigour and on the other by lasya grace. In

Assam there is the Radha Krishna Dance worship and also tiger worship practised. The Lushai tribes of Assam are known to be hero worshippers. They place the tiger on the ranks of the warriors and respect them, just as we in Kerala think it a sin to annoy a tiger in Sabari Hills. Hero is addressed as Narasardoola. In Assam when a tiger is killed the whole village observes mourning and offers sacrificial rites in a ceremonious style. Sacrificial dance with the mask of a tiger on the head is common there. This can be compared wtih Pulikkali. Thus there is scope in Kerala for lasya and thandava types. In both, bhakti is the source of inspiration.

Following the lead given by Swati Tirunal, the palace patronised Kathakali on the one hand and Mohiniyattom on the other as a lasya type of dance.

Poet Vallathol had got scent of Natana mandapa of the old Konarak temple with walls full of sculptured dancing damsels. The very name Mohari of Orissa would have convinced him of the need to retain the name Mohiniyattom in Kerala. The Jagnath Research Committee of Puri might have suggested itself as a model for the formation of Kerala Kalamandalam. Just as there are palm leaf manuscripts available about the details of Mohari dance like Abhinaya Chandrika of the 17th century and Abhinaya Darpana of Nandikeswar in Oriya, in Kerala we have Attaprakarams and Krama Deepika of Chakyar familes and Hastha Lakshana Deepika in



Malayalam script with a Malayalam explanation by Kadathanat Udaya Varma Raja. In Kerala it becomes our duty to see to our traditional dance forms being properly nurtured to their full blossom.

Poet Vallathol with his unerring eye on artistic matters would have recollected the services rendered by the dedicated brothers Ponnaiah, Chinnaiah, Sivananda and Vadivelu in the rescue of Dasiyattom to its respectable form as Bharatha Natyam. It was with a missionary zeal that they set to work on lasya dance. They did not get much encouragement at the early stage. With assiduous efforts they could evolve a presentation form keeping in mind its traditional sanctity as a temple art, at the same time having an eye on the modern technique of stagecraft and showmanship. Bharatha Natyam performance was to begin with an Alarippu or invocation corresponding to the Thodayam of Kathakali and Nandi of Drama. It is conceived as an item of pure dance depicting the movements of the eyes, the neck and the limbs in a prescribed order punctuated by the Natuvanar, the dance director. This is to be followed by Swarajati, again an item of pure dance. Here the artiste could elaborate her steps with culmination each time with a kalasa. The third item, sabdam involves abhinaya for interpreting the words contained in the song. All these are intended to lead to a climax in varnam, the most exacting item in Bharata Natya performance. It



consists in a judicious combination of pure dance and abhinaya with all its intricacies and exquisiteness treating the spectators to a thrilling experience of un-mixed delight. Once the varnam is over, the artiste is more relaxed to render various padams. The performace would close with a thillana, a pure dance piece, in which every segment will close with a sculpturesque pose.
This pattern set by Tanjore school got universal acceptance over a period of time. However it failed to attain respectability although quality was of a very high standard. The main reason was that artistes were recruited from the old Devadasi group. Only in the twentieth century when Rukmini Devi of Kalakshetra (Madras) and Udaya Shankar of Santiniketan could supply respectability to the profession by their participation. It was clear to Vallathol that the art required not only patronage but participation too of aristocratic noble families. Then only the art would cease to be the private preserve of Devadasi fold. The word Thevadichi should be rid of the stigma.

Vallathol recollected that Tanjore quarte who did signal service, became targets of jealousy in its home-land. The king Sharbhoj often paid heed to gossip and scandal. In one of his drunken moods he exiled the Tanjore quarte. They found a patron luckily for us in Maharaja Swati Tirunal. At this time the Maharaja and his gifted associates Irayimman Tampi and Kilimanoor Koil Tampuran were engaged in finding out ways and means of developing Mohiniyattom. The Tanjore set was

welcomed by the Maharaja. They had brought a young artiste of rare dimensions called Sugandhavalli. The Maharaja used her to try the adavus and improvisations he had in view for invigorating Mohiniyattom. Sugandhavalli actually danced herself in the Maharaja's private precincts. She was only thirteen years of age at that time. She died a year later. But during that period the Maharaja and his colleagues could do a marvellous job. As we have seen the Maharaja hismself got inspiration to compose over 50 Padams and a number of Varnams specially suited to Mohiniyattom. Swati Tirunal himself drew up the costumes, movements and rules of Abhinaya. At the hands of the Maharaja, Mohiniyattom became a real art worthy of its name and high traditions of Kerala art culture.

After Swati Tirunal's lamented demise in 1847, Maharaja Utram Tirunal who ascended the throne, was so fond of Kathakali that he got disgusted with lasya type of dance. Sri Parameswara Bhagavathar, the chief Musician in the Palace moved out of Trivandrum. He was back in his native village in Palghat and started a class for training girls for Mohiniyattom. The dominance of Kathakali and the royal patronage it enjoyed left Mohiniyattom to the tender mercies of the landed gentry. Mohiniyattom was about to sink into disrepute. It came to such a pass that even families who took pride in their rare ability

to perform Mohiniyattom were inclined to disown their connection with the art.

It was at this critical juncture that poet Vallathol stepped into the scene. He had the help of Manakulam Mukunda Raja while deciding to revitalise the art. They had to tour throughout the State for a suitable Nattuvan. At last they had Korattikkara Krishna Paniker as Nattuvan and Mankurussi Kalyani Amma to do the actual teaching. A lot of persuation was required to get respectable parents to send their girls to join the class. As sri T. M. B. Nedungadi has recorded "the poet's deep love and interest in the art succeeded in discovering a couple of surviving experts who could be depended upon for imparting instructions in the authentic form of the art". The poet's love of the art and the influence of Mukunda Raja jointly worked the wonder. They could create a halo round the institution of Kalamandalam.

At that time there were on the staff, Pattikanthoti Ravunni Menon, Kavalappra Narayanan Nambiar, Guru Kunchu Kurup, all big names, in the field. Sri K. M. Kuttikrishna Marar was appointed to give the artistes the required grounding in Sanskrit for following Natya Sastra and other connected books of reference.





MOHINIYATTOM TODAY IN KERALA

Any casual observer can accept that Kerala is ideally situated for the flowering of art forms in all their variety. Coconut palms thrilled and excited swing their heads like Nattuvans at the sight of the waves rushing incessantly at the shore while the cloud-capped peaks of Sahya hills on the east stand in a trance over the sight. There is the Lord of Gokarnam to bless us from the north while the Virgin Goddess in the south stands attired gaily in splendour to have a glimpse of her Lord. From the natural group dance called Thiruvathirakali to the sophisticated solo Mohiniyattom there is a yawning gulf of difference. In Kaikottikkali, we have uniformly waving gestures and singing songs all in the line of well-known ragas. They dance like the waves of the Arabian sea with the natural grace of the swaying palms. Mohiniyattom is of a sophisticated type of mono dance done in simple costumes but with jewellery and other make-up tricks. It reminds us of the Virgin Goddess with all the attractive charms of perpetual youthfulness. In the evening the Goddess is gorgeously draped in a golden dress and decked in golden jewels, the light of which mariners could see from afar, for the foot of the Temple is washed by the waves of the Indian Ocean. She is divine and all too human. There is hardly a dance item of the classical type, without a spiritual note and mention of the Goddess.

Kaikottikkali is classical in form only, not in details. Excepting the clap of hands and periodicity of step movements as per the melody of the song sung together,

there is no Abhinaya or musical accompaniment. Facial expression also is not insisted on. But in Mohiniyattom the situation is totally different. A girl of exquisite physical charm will do Mohiniyattom. Her tilting pair of feet will carry jingling bells which produce a melodious rhythm when the steps are taken. There is the Kaithalam made of bronze played by the Nattuvar and to his rhythmic beats the dance is to be attuned. Flute also is used. Mrdungam is a must everywhere; Veena is an instrument used by Goddess Sarswati and can find a place among the accompaniment. Tamburu gives the necesary melody.

Nrtta, nrtya and bhava abhinaya are the three essential components of a Mohiniyattom performance. Let us imagine ourselves to be seated awaiting the screen to part and eager to see the dance. We firstly hear the jingling sound of bells and melodious music behind the curtain. The screen parts into two and we see the girl standing on the stage dressed invariably like the Virgin Goddess in white sari with laced border and decorated fully with shining jewellery. She stands still unmoved for a minute– a meaningful minute of silence, the actor standing almost like an idol in the Sanctum Sanctorum. Then the drum beat is heard. A sound of veena comes out, a female voice sings: 'Taa Tai, Taa Tai'. The nattuvar gives the musical notes with his bronze hand bells. Life is instilled in the idol. The eyes of the human idol move to one side and then to the other. There is no break in the song already in motion (Tau Tai, Tau Tai; Taka Tai; Tau Tai). The dancer sways her head in



different positions. The bells of her feet give out a melodious musical chime: Chana–Chana. She dances now moving forward, now moving backward, now gracefully bending sideward, now slowly, now speedily. We may not know why she dances in that manner. But we are feasted with pleasure when we see the positions of her head, feet and neck with jingling sound of the bells. This type of performance is known as Nrtta. There are no songs in this pure dance. There are only musical notes as Tau Tai, Takata or sa - re - ga- ma- re - ga - ma - pa. The dancer moves the hands, feet, neck and eyes gracefully, to the tilting rhythm. This type of dance is Nrtta, pure and simple.

Then there is the Nrttya, something very different and more complex in a way. Very many ideas are conveyed by the movement of palms and fingers as per an accepted code. The same is the case when we arrange alphabets in a particular sequence to form words and sentences for conveying and idea. Suppose the songster visualises a beetle hovering over a lotus, then descending, settling on it to taste the nectar with wings motionless and then getting away fully satisfied. The idea is no doubt conveyed by the lines recited. To make it further picturesque and spectacular to those innocent of language the two palms are folded into a 'kapota' mudra to present a lotus bud coming up and blossoming with the fingers gently spreading with grace. Then it assumes the form of a fully blossmed lotus (padma kesa mudra) with both hands. Then the dancer's eyes are directed to the lotus. The joy of seeing a lotus is spread all over

the face. Slowly the right palm is separated and by gently shaking the fingers shaped into mukura mudra. Simultaneously the palm moves gracefully turning and tilting and lifting itself. The eyes are suitably directed. All these produce the effect of seeing a beetle alighting on the lotus. The left palm remains in the form of a fully blossomed lotus. The right palm by convention is moved to produce the effect of a beetle hovering over. The movements of the eyes, the changing form of the eye lashes, produce the impression of the beetle sucking nectar and getting away. Thus the dancer with her gestures give meaning to the words in the song. Now folding the hand, now moving the fingers and the eyes directed suitably produce the expression. This indicative dance like annotated poems, will be better appreciated than otherwise. This is Nrtya.

One important idea is that the movements of the limbs should be fully co-ordinated into harmony with reference to one another.

Netre bhru mukhe ragaadyai
Roopam gairope brunhi thai
Prathyam gaische karah kuryah
Rase bhave pradarsakah
Yato haste sthato drushti-
Ryto drushti stato manah
Yato manah sthato bhavo
Yato bhava sthato rasat

The eye, eyelashes and facial expressions should help the indications of the desired rasa through the movements of limbs and body. Again the movements should be suitably co-ordinated into a harmonious sequence. The hand should be turned to the eye and the eye to the mind and the mind should express the bhava suited to the desired rasa.

It was only in 1977 that Kerala Sangeeta Nataka Akademy organised a workshop for the dance-teachers of Kerala. All the exponents of the art available at the time took active part in the workshop. Complete details of acting, stage-direction, choreography, costume and make-up pattern for the actual staging of the various dances came in for thread-bare discussion.

Sri T.M.B. Nedungadi, Chairman of Kerala Kalamandalam, is not very happy over attempts made in and outside Kerala to modernise the art. "These dancers in and outside Kerala, who had included Mohiniyattom in their repertoire, have made sincere, though sometimes misguided, attempts to improve the art on the fringes". The tendency to equate it with Bharata Natyam for stage presentation has not been healthy. For the dance in spite of a common origin with Bharata Natyam has acquired its own individuality. The present repertoire in Mohiniyattom is restricted. Study and research are required to bring to fore old compositions as well as those of Swati and Irayiman Thampi. It may be necessary to have new padams. Mere borrowing of techniques from Bharata Natyam will instead of helping its growth, mar its identity. Only those refinements emphasising the abhinaya technique,

typical of the Kerala visual arts, should be adopted to revitalise the art. In this context, let it be emphasised that while in respect of the structure of the dance foot-work etc. Mohiniyattom has much in common with Bharata Natyam, it has adopted the richer mode of abinaya which is in vogue in a much more developed manner in Kathakali. The result is a certain suppleness and a fine harmony.

In Bharata Natyam, as we have already seen there are six segments for any performance, beginning with alarippu and ending with the sixth thillana. The intermediate items are jatiswaram, sabdom, varnam and padam. Of these the second and the last items are performed as Nrtta or pure dance to the accompanying rhythmic beats and musical notes (Sa - re - ga - ma - ga - ma - pa and Ta—Tan—Taka Tan). In Mohiniyattom however, we have seven items with cholkkettu in the place of alarippu, sabdam being pushed to the last with an additional item called slokam immediately before the last. As Mohiniyattom consists of seven items and as saptam is pushed to the last, the word gains an additional significance of being the seventh. It may be remembered that white light too representing satwika bhava which is emphasised in the Mohiniyattom consist of seven colours of the rainbow. We have also the sapta swara of Bhagavatars. Thus the music and dance stand like two maidens standing in attention to the divinity. The symbols of sun and moon on the head of the artiste suggests that performances are on a celestial model and should find celestial appreciation.

It might be asked why in this age of science and technology, the dumb primitive modes of communication should be revived. Mohiniyattom is no doubt for human appreciation. At the same time we are forced to recollect that Mohiniyattam has its roots in temple rituals and the ritual will cease to be so if it is not based on custom and popular belief. "In every great religion, ritual is as necessary as creed. It instructs, nourishes and often begets belief; it brings the believer into comforting contact with his God; it charms the senses and the soul with drama, poetry and art, it binds individuals into fellowships and a community by persuading them to share the same rites, the same songs, the same prayers and at last the same thoughts," Says Will Durant a great Western authority, a man who has spent his life time to the detailed study of human civilization and whose work 'History of Civization' contains the above remark about the importance of rituals as an integrating factor in society.

Any way the present day Mohiniyattom consists of seven items, namely cholkkettu, jatiswaram, varnam, padam, thillana, slokam and saptam.

1 **Cholkkettu:** Any performance would start with the item called cholkkettu, corresponding to the alarippu in Bharata Natyam. This consists of stylised rhythmic syllables or jatis in line with the raga and appropriate to the rasa of the dance. Chol means syllable and kettu means stringing together. The syllables are so stringed together like an offering before the deity, in sequence as to help the dancers to act

in tune with the rhythm and time beat. A sloka in praise of the devi will be sung and at the end a verse in praise of Lord Siva too. This is indicative of the traditional connection between the art form and Saivite worship. Most of the adavus will be brought into play and gestures would serve the dancer, as instrumental accompaniment does the musicians, in as much as the hand gestures are to echo the sense of the words of the song.

2 Jatiswaram: The second item is also an assemblage of jatis (syllables) and swaras (notes) within the framework of a rasa and in line with its tala or time-beat and the dancer presents a Nrtta. Hence the scope for abhinaya is limited. In line with the talams a pattern of movements of body and limbs is the dominant feature here.

3. Varnam: This consists of a harmonious combination of a nrtta (pure dance) and nrttya (expository dance). There is great scope for abhinaya with sringara as the chief rasa. Hand gestures and facial expressions would be pressed into full utilisation.

4. Padam: In the choreography of Padam, abhinaya exposition assumes great prominence. Pure dance is totally absent. Any number of padams may be included according to the capacity of the dancer, endurance of the audience and availability of time. The well-known keertana of Irayimman Thampi "Karuna cheivaanentu taamasom Krihnaa" is a Padam of great popularity. Lyrics from Geeta Govindam also

comes in handy for the artistic exposition. Swati Thirunal's Dasavatara Stotram is also a favourite piece for Padam in Mohiniyattom

5 Thillana: It is a pure dance item with adavus involving intricate foot-work of a stylised nature. Body movements and sculpturesque poses all in tune with rhythmic 'Vaitharies' in quick tempo is the speciality. The steps should be in quick tempo in sharp contrast with the immediately preceeding item of Padam. Hand gestures and appropriate body movements enhance the artistic charm of this pure dance item.

6. Slokam: The singer for variety sings a few lines in praise of a god or goddess so that abhinaya talents could be exhibited. Here the chief sentiment should be bhakti or devotion.

7. Saptam: This again will be a harmonious blend of pure dance and music. The dancer performs some adavus according to the recitation of the rhythm and vaitharies. The actor chooses two or four lines of the recital for abhinaya and then reverts to pure dance. Since this is the seventh item the term sapta is very apt. Any religious offering among Hindus will be of odd number like three, five, seven and so on. We have Panchakshara and Saptakshara mantras. Again Pradekshinam or devotional circummoving in temples would be in odd numbers. Thus Mohiniyattom performance aptly ends with the seventh item.

The repertoire of Mohiniyattom is not exclusive. Most of its

original repertoire has been lost or gone out of use. The champus and the kavyas composed in the 13th and 14th centuries show that performances were carried on for hours together at night as in the case of other dances like Bharata Natyam.

Regarding costumes, white sari with laced border is used with proper foldings. The fringes at the waist could be of three inches width and the lower foldings should reach the ankles. Hair could be heaped up to present the look of a serpent's hood towards the left side with decorations of jasmine garlands. The hair can as well be braided and left flowing backwards as in Bharata Natyam. Seemantha chutti and netty alukku would add to the sanctity and charm. The sun and moon symbols would adorn the head on either side. Palms and edges of the feet should be painted red with designs usually of chempanhi-charu or mailanchi. Eye lashes and eyes should be blackend with anjanam. Lips should be painted red. The jingling anklets in five rows should adorn the lower legs. As the dancer appears on the stage body should be neat, mind devotionally bent and full of self confidence born of devotion. She should bow before the gurus and deities in the prescribed style so that the performance evokes full throated applause of the audience. She should bow also to the accompanying musical instruments. Her face should be like lotus facing the morning sk and beautified with pleasing smile. Voluptuous darts of eye-lashes and erotically suggestive expressions should be scrupulously eschewed. The feet should be set on the floor $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches apart. The right

foot should be turned to the right corner and the left to the left corner. The space prescribed between the toes is 12 inches.

Postures are four in number viz. aramandalam, mukkaal mandalam, kaalmandalam and full mandalam. The prefix ara, mukal and kaal means half, three fourth and one fourth respectively. In aramandalam, the lower portion of the body from the buttocks to the feet should be shaped like a pot and so it is also called pot-posture. If the body is further lowered by two inches it becomes 3/4 mandalam, a mukkaal mandalam. If the body is raised by 2 inches it becomes kaal mandalam. If the buttocks are to touch the heels then it becomes full mandalam. These are four postures with reference to the pelvis.

Firstly the palms are held four inches away in front of the chest and two inches below the shoulder level with the inside of the palm downward and they are moved to the right "Thi, thi, tha thi, than" and then to the left in the aramandalam posture. Secondly the legs will be raised and the hands moved in the curved position. Thirdly the hands will be taken circuitously. Thus we have the Adavu in half pot posture. There are four adavus namely thaganam jaganam, dhaganam and samasta. Details of the adavus are beyond the scope of this book.

In Chilappatikaram there is detailed description about the the intensive training given to dancers. In Mohiniyattom too training involves ability to make meaningful movements of the neck, pelvis, legs and hands. Then only the body

and limbs will be conditioned to the requirements of this exquisite art form.

1. Neck: Resting on the knee-cap with the lower legs bent backwards and the hands resting on the hips, the head is bowed forward to make the chin touch the chest and then the head is thrown backwards so as to touch the back, the neck is to be bent slowly. The head is then turned to the sides to make the earflap touch the respective shoulders. Thirdly the head is to be turned back leftwise and then right-wise so as to see the backside.

2. Pelvis: There are exercises prescribed for the pelvis too. With the two arms thrown up, and the breath inhaled, the rear side of the belly is bent so as to see the backside. After inhalation the body is bent forward so that the arms reach the ground. Thirdly the body turns either side so that the heel is touched by the palms. Fourthly with the right foot stretched at an angle to a distance of one foot, the head is made to touch that foot. Then the artiste bends to the opposite corner and repeat the process. Now with the left leg to the left side corner, the process is repeated.

3. Legs: With the palms on the hips and the feet forming a triangle, the body is lifted so as to rest on the toes. The knees should be bent to the sides with the buttocks resting on the heels. With the feet apart and the pelvis unbent, balance is kept on the right knee and then on the left knee. Squatting on the feet, the chest and face are to be turned so as to see the heels of the opposite leg. With the palms fixed on the wall,

lift the knee one after the other above the head as far as possible.

4. Hands: Stretch out the arms and swing them to both sides. Swing the arms horizontally. Swinging the arms, bend to either side and come back to the first position. The shoulders, elbows, wrists, the base, middle and tips of the fingers are to be swayed as per the movements of a serpent.

These exercises affecting the body from head to foot will make the belly, and pelvis narrow, chest expanded so that the body of the artiste becomes pliant; the blood circulation will improve and the mind will turn active and smart. For Mohiniyattom artistes bodily exercises are thus indispensable.

The expression of the feelings of the mind in full is bhavabhinaya. This aspect acquires added importance in Nrttya items. According to our shastras there are nine rasas. They are srngaram, karunam, raudram, hasyam, adbhutam, veeram, bhayanakam, beebhatsam and santam.

1. Srngaram or Love: This is expressed by the brightening up of the eyes with a smile playing upon the lips, flush on the cheeks unsteadiness of the eye-lashes and slight tilting of the neck. This is the first and foremost of the navarasa as love theme is a material that has found favour with all artistes. We have the rasa leela of Gopikas of Vrindavan dancing in a trance round Lord Krishna to the magical melody of his flute. This has a spiritual interpretation as the unbreakable attachment of individual souls to the Universal Soul.

2. Karunam or Compassion: An equally important rasa according to the orientalists is karunam. The Ramayana, the first Kavya, came to be written by the compassion that Valmiki felt over the lament of one of a pair of birds on the sudden death of its partner at a hunter's shaft. Karunam is indicated best by wrinkles on the nose, downward tilt of the eye balls, the dimness of the eye, lifting up of the cheeks or sobs accompanied by the downward bend of the shoulders.

3. Raudram or Anger: It is indicated by Mohiniyattom artistes by the curving up of the eye lashes, forward thrust of the eye balls, the opening up of the eyes, eruption of the nostrils in the lifted position of the head with the lips tightened up.

4. Hasyam or Humour: This rasa can be best expressed by the upward curve of the eyeballs, wrinkles above the nose, jocular smile, head tilting to one side and the eyes also to one side.

5. Adbhutha or Wonder: It is conveyed by a curved lifting and forward movement of the eye lashes, the brightening up of the eyes. There will also be an expansion of eyelids and nostrils with the gentle opening of the mouth.

6. Veeram or Valour: Here the head of the actor will be titled back with the eye-lashes raised and eyes brightened up.

7. Bhayanakam or Fear: It is inspired with the eves protruded and eye lashes raised and the lateral two way tilts of the face.

8. Beebhatsam or Abhorrence: For expressing this rasa the lashes are to be curved and contracted with eye-lids closed, corners of the lips bent low and the head bent slightly forward.

9. Santam or Sorrow: The eye-lids of the actor should be tilted to the middle of the eye-lashes, with the eye-lids evenly poised and also with a vacant smile. It is imperative that an actor will be in a position to express various rasas she should be trained in the movement of the head, eye-lashes, eye-balls and neck in all possible directions.

Movements of the Head: There are 13 different movements of the head for the actor to specialize.

1. *Akampitham:* If the head is moved up once and down slowly, it is called akampitham indicating the grasp of a phenomenon accosting of anybody and granting accord for any outside suggestion.

2. *Kampitham:* This consists of quick movement of the head upward and downward more than once. This indicates anger, decision or a threat.

3. *Dhutha:* Gradual and slow turning of the head is called dhutha, useful in expressing wonder, negation, sorrow and partiality.

4. *Vidhutha:* Quick tilting of the head is the main feature. Fever, drunkenness, sudden fright, severe chill are all expressed by this.

5. *Parivahitham:* Rolling of the head to either side is involved here. This indicates fulfilment of deed, joy, wonder and good amusement.

6. *Aadhutham:* A slow and slight lifting up of the head is indicative of proud assertain of self.

7. *Avadhutham:* A quick downward movement of the head is implied here. It is useful in summoning anybody, expressing consent or directing to a particular action.

8. *Anchitham:* Lowering of the head to one side shows a state of illness, sorrow and stupor. The chin being supported by the palm the actor sits.

9. *Nikunchithan:* The face resting on the palm and the neck slightly contracted the actor sits. This is indicative of effeminate tendency.

10. *Paravrutham:* It means turning the head backward for seeing people at the back and for avoiding any unpleasant sight.

11. *Utkshiptham:* It involves a lifting up of the head and looking upwards. This is for seeing anything high, heavenly or divine.

12. *Adhogatham:* It means casting the look downward. This is used to indicate shyness born of inferiority complex.

13. *Parilokthan:* This is rolling of the head to all sides. Like Adhogatham this also is indicative of sleepiness, stupor, illness and excessive haughtiness.

Eye lashes: Some general directions are available for training in the expressive movement of eye-lashes of Mohiniyattom artistes.

1. Upper eye-lids should be lifted up with the thumb so as to admit plenty of air and the eye-balls should be rolled. Rolling is first done to the right-and then to the left, three times daily—morning, noon and evening.

2. Admit air as above and roll the eye-balls sidewards three times a day.

3. Turn the eye balls upward and downward a number of times thrice daily, that is morning, noon and evening.

4. Eye lids to be turned upward and downward at an angle.

5. Turn the eye balls in a semicircle.

6. Push the eyelids forward and withdraw inward.

7. Eye lids to be turned circularly in one plane.

Eye-sockets: With the eye-balls fixed and without moving the upper lid, push the lower lid upward and downward.

Neck: Exercises for the effective neck-tilt are also codified.

1. Press the chin and turn the neck to the left and to the right slowly.
2. The chin is to be turned upward and downward diagonally.

3. Pull the chin forward gently and allow it to rush back to its previous position.

Lips: With the lips tightly pressed the corner ends of the mouth are to be pushed down and allowed to resume their previous position.

The conditioning of the neck, eye-balls, eye-lashes and lips is very essential for an artiste to be effective on the Mohiniyattom stage.

Abhinaya: It is of four types–vachika, angika, satwika, and aharya.

1. *Vachika:* Here the action is as per words of the song. The songster from behind the curtain sings and the artiste should echo its meaning by gestures and expressions on the face.

2. *Angika:* Expression of feeling and ideas by hand gestures and movements of the limbs.

3. *Satwika:* Here the artiste is to fully identify with the theme and situation and make expressive gestures and facial expressions as a matter of course.

4. *Aharya:* This is accomplished by costumes and jewellery and other make-up techniques so that the action truly represents the mood of the character in the song.

It may be noted that in Mohiniyattom satwika type of action

is by and large insisted on. Hand gestures accepted in the Mohiniyattom are described in the following chapter. There also broad outlines are indicated and details should be filled in by the imagination of the artiste and by the directions of the Guru. Here self-study will not suffice, as a Guru is a must.

Hastha Lakshana Deepika – The language of Hand gestures.

Hand gesture conventions are also considered to be of divine origin. The four-faced Brahma is the source of Natya Sastra. As the four Vedas -- Rig, Yaju, Sama and Atharva are found to be not within easy reach of all and sundry, they failed to serve their mission. The Vedas should be studied in all their implications and not merely recited parrot-like. The process is likened to a donkey carrying a heavy load of kumkum little aware of its value. It can also be compared to one being in possession of a jewel box without the key for opening it. To facilitate the people at large to get at the harmony of the world, Lord Brahma composed a fifth Veda called Natya Sastra. Rig Veda tells us the ways of playing instruments; Yajurveda conveys the meaning of words and ideas through bodily gestures. In the performance of a Hindu religious ritual like Yajna, we see many gesturs being invoked, all pregnant with sense. Sama Veda emhpasises the ways of chanting with melody to make the recital effective. The Atharva Veda gets at the various feelings like sorrow, fear, joy and anger and the ways of presenting them. Lord Brahma, it seems, took the

essence of these four Vedas and prepared a popular summary called Natya Sastra. According to another belief Brahma taught the fine art of Nrttya to Bharata who in his turn composed a treatise on dance called Natya Sastra. All the aspects of dance and theatrics are fully discussed in it. Bharata demonstrated his proficiency in dance before Lord Siva in Kailas. The Lord Parameswara taught him Tandava through his attendant Thandu. Thandava is a vigorous and majestic dance. Parvati was an expert at lasya dance. Grace is the hall mark here and not vigour as in tandava. This also implies the supernatural origin of the Natya Sastra.

We associate the dusk with Tandava dance. We picture Lord Siva to be in a mood to do Tandava full of majesty and vigour, for Parvati to enjoy sitting on her bejewelled throne in Kailas. All the celestial beings assemble to witness the divine performance. Brahma would be playing tal; Vishnu is busy playing mrdunga; Indra is to play on the flute; Saraswati is to do veena; Lakshmy herself is to do the recital. Narada and Tumburu gave signal for refrain. In Mahabharata there is reference to Arjuna in the guise of Bruhannala teaching dance to Uttara, the daughter of King Virata. Arjuna combined in himself the qualities of an archer and the refinement of an expert in dance and music. Kalidasa has written three plays: Sakuntalam, Vikramorvaseeyam and Malavikagnimitram. Of these Malavika the heorine of the last play was a great exponent of dance. With her graceful dances in the court, she pleased the prince so much that

he offered to marry her. Kalidasa gives in the play a vivid description about Malavika's dance performance.

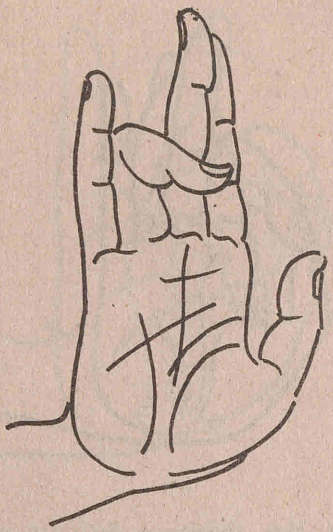
The Tamil epics Chilappatikaram and Manimekhalai are essentially books about dancers. Elanko Adigal wrote Chilappatikaram. The dance form practised in those days was called Dasiyattom. It was performde exclusively by the devotee class dedicated to temple services. Bharata Natyam is based on lasya the effeminate and subtle form of dance as opposed to the virile manly thandava. As the dusk is pictured as tandava by Lord Siva, the morning appears on the east like a beautiful damsel out to do lasya dance and spread joy and vigour all over the world.

Bharata's Natya Sastra and Nandikeswara's Abhinaya Darppana, and Hastha Lakshana Deepika by a Keralite, give details about hand gestures designed and approved for use in Mohiniyattom. Bharata speaks of 24 single hand gestures and 13 double-hand gestures and 28 dance gestures. In Abhinaya Darppana single-hand gestures themselves are 32 in number. Nandikeswara added eight more to the list of Bharata. In Hastha Lakshana Deepika also 24 single hand gestures are enumerated.





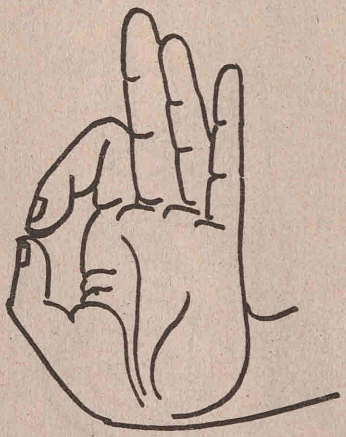
SINGLE-HAND GESTURES



1. Pathakam

Namitha namika yasya
Pathaka ssa kara smruthah

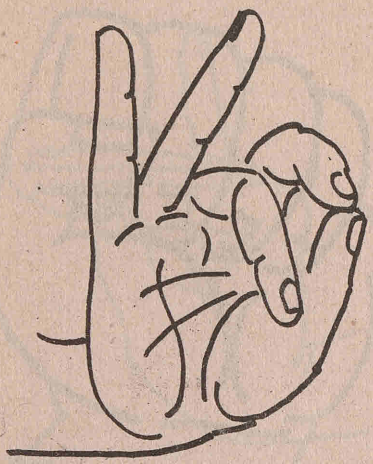
is the definition given in Hastha Lakshana Deepilka. With the palm lifted vertically and all the fingers erect, we fold the ring-finger alone slightly forward to present the Pathakamudra. It is used in indicating a variety of objects like the sun, bull, mirror, woman, crocodile, flag etc. (in all 36 objects) if presented with both hands. If however Pathakamudra is presented with one hand it would indicate day, travel, tongue, brow, body, sound, messenger etc (10 concepts).



2. Mudrakhyam

Angushtasya thu tharjanya
Yadyagro militho bhavet
Seshah visladhitha yasya
Mudrakhya ssa karo mathah
—H. L. D.

The thumb is made to touch the tip of the fore-finger with the rest of the fingers held firm, we show the gesture called Mudrakhyam. Heaven, ocean, death meditation etc. (13 concepts) are indicated by Mudrakhyam with two hands; mind, thought, desire, knowledge, memory, creation etc. (12 concepts) are shown by Mudrakhyan by single hand.



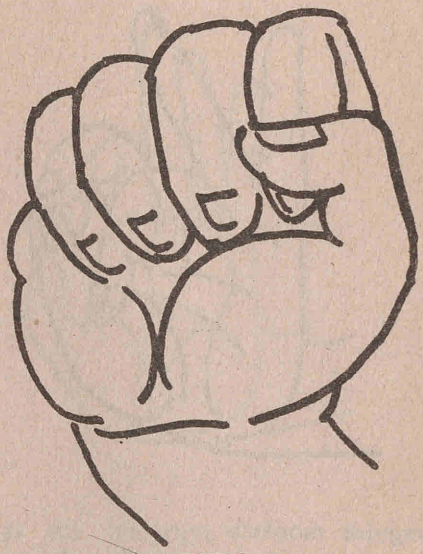
3. Katakam

Angushtamgulee moolath
Samsprusyedyati madhyamam
Mudrabhidhana hasthasya
Katakakhyam urasethada

—H. L. D.

Kataka mudra is formed if in Mudrakhya the tip of the middle finger is made to touch the base of the thumb.

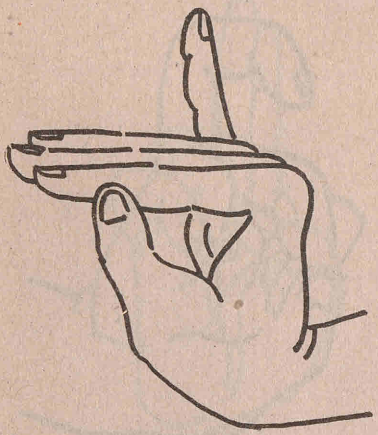
Narayana, Srikrishna, Balabhadra, arrow, gold, silver etc. (20 concepts) are indicated by two-hand Katakam, where as flower, mirror, lady, hunger etc (9 concepts) are indicated by single hand Katakam.



4. Mushti or Fist

Angushtastharjanu parswa
Masrithomgula yah parah
Aakunchithascha yasya ssa
Hastho mushtischa samjnekah

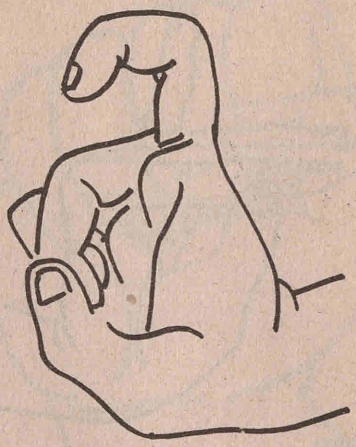
With the thumb by the side of the forefinger and other fingers folded we can show Mushti gesture.
Charioteer, boon, beauty, bondage etc. (25 concepts in all) are indicated by mushti with two hands. Minister, invasion, gift, consent, victory etc. (15 concepts) are shown by single hand mushti.



5. Kartharee mukham

Kanee yasyunnetha yathra
Thisthra syunnatha parah
Angushta stharjana parswom
Samspruset Bharathaarshabhah.
Kartharee mukha mithyahu
Hastham tham Nrtta Vaidurah.

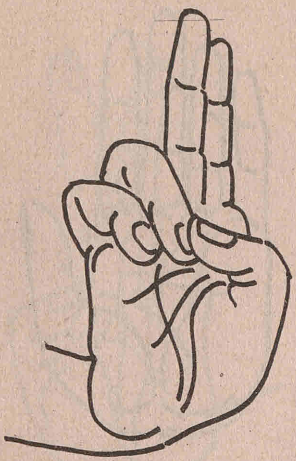
With the small fingers upward and the next three fingers folded slightly we make the tip of the thumb touch the tip of the forefinger for presentation of Kartharee mukha mudra.
Sin, exhaustion, Brahmin, fame, brow of an elephant etc. (16 concepts in all) are indicated by Kartharee mukha mudra by two hands; and,yourself, word, plural, number, man, face etc. (10 concepts in all) are represented by this mudra shown by single hand.



6. Sukathundam

Bhrulatheva yadah vakra
Tharjanya mamgushta samyutha
Namitha namika sesha-
Kunjitho danjitha tada
Sukathunda ka mithya hi
Rachanyah Bharatharshabha

The forefinger is bent like the eyelashes and the thumb put on the ring finger in the bent position and other fingers bent in the raised position, we can demonstrate sukathunda gesture. Elephant hook and bird are the only two concepts indicated by sukathundam to be done by two hands.

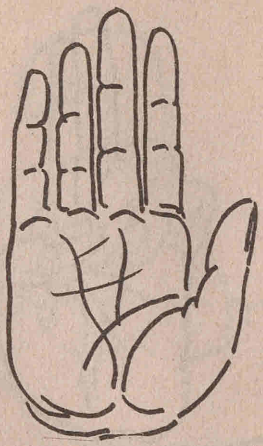


7. Kapidham

Namithanamika prushta-
Mamgushto yudisamspruset
Kanishtika su namracha
Yasmin sthu sakarasmruthah
Kapidhasdhyas cha vidwadbhi
Nrtha sasthra visaradaih

—H. L. D.

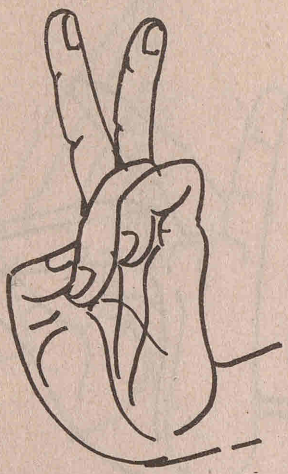
The thumb is made to touch the ring finger in the bent position and the small finger is totally bent and we have kapidham gesture. Net, doubt, touch, backside etc. (10 concepts) are indicated by kapidha mudra by two hands.



8. Hamsapaksham

Angulyascha yatha purvam
Samsthithah yadi yasyathu
Sahastho Hamsapakshakhyo–
Bhanyathe Bharathathibhi.

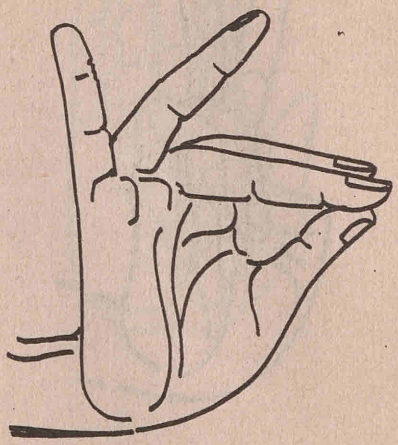
All the fingers including the thumb are to be retained in their respective positions slightly raised and then we have hamsapaksha. The moon, air, cupid, mountain etc. (42 concepts) get represented by hamsapaksha mudra by two hands. Yourself, sword, anger etc, (11 concepts) are shown by hamsapaksha by single hand.



9. Sikharam

Puratho madhyamam chapi
Prushta tha stharjana nuayet
Kapidha hasthasthu thada
Prapnuyet sikharabhidham.

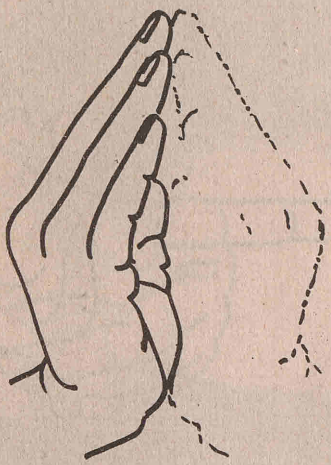
Assuming the kapidha hand, we bend the middle finger forward and forefinger backward, we have the Sikharam hand. Walking, eyes, legs, ears etc (8 concepts) are represented by sikhara by two hands.



10. Hamsasyam

Sannathascha lathagrasyu
Stharjanyamgushta madhyamah
Itharechomnathe yathra
Hamsasyam tha thuderitham.

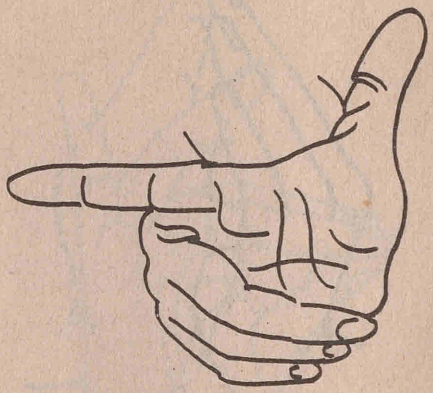
Sight, softness, powder, white colour, blue colour, redness, compassion etc. (8 eoncepts) are shown by two-handed hamsasyam. New year, hair line etc (4 concepts only) are known by single hand hamsasyam.



11. Anjali

Karasakhastu vislishita
Madhyam hasta thalasya thu
Kinchidakunchitham yasya
Sudithom sonjalee karah.

To form the anjali mudra the fingers are kept without one touching the other and the base of the palm slightly bent. If anjali mudra is shown by one hand, it would indicate either anger or branch of a tree. Leap year, vomitting, fire, horse, harsh sound, light, hair, ear ring, heat, confusion, river, bath, consistency, flow, blood--these 15 concepts could be conveyed by anjali mudra by two hands.



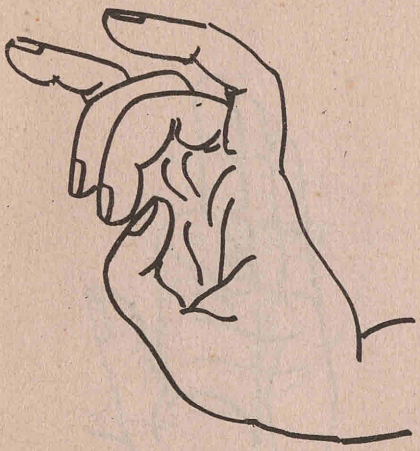
12. Ardha-chandra

Angushtam tharjaneem chapi
Varjayithwe thara kramat
Easha dakunchitha yathra
Sorha chandra kara sonruthah.

All the fingers barring the thumb and forefinger are to be slightly bent in order to show the ardha chandra mudra.

The 'if' and 'why' of a situation, God, sky, memory, grass etc. will be indicated by ardhachandra by both hands.
Smile, contempt etc. will be indicated by single handed ardha chandra gesture.





13 Mukuram

Madhyama namika namra
Amgushto pi parasparam
Yadyarabheran sparsaye
Mukura ssa karo mathah.

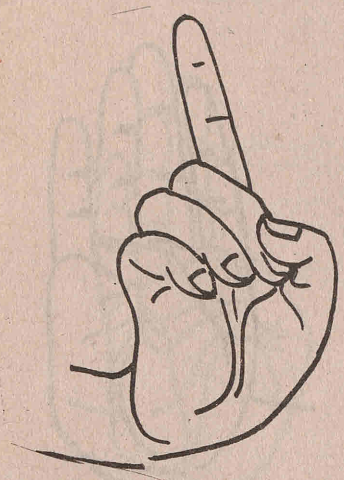
Middle finger, ring finger and thumb are to be folded so as to touch their tips and we have mukura mudra. Curved canine tooth, pangs of separation, mortar, girdle, veda, brother, pillar, swift footed man, devil, prosperity – these eleven concepts are indicated by mukura mudra by two hands. But single-hand mukura indicates one of the nine concepts - opponent, beetle, anger, goodness, bangle, neck, shoulder, ring, negation.



14. Brahmana

Namitha thaıjana yasya
Sahastho bramanahwaya

Forefinger must be bent at the middle to show bramana mudra. Wing, song, pot, elephants' ears – these concepts are indicated by brahmana mudra with both hands. Gandharva, happening, fear and weeping are the four concepts to be conveyed by the single hand bramana mudra.



15. Suchimukha

Madhyama namika prushtah
Mamgushto yadi samspruset
Kanishtika kunchitha cha
Suchee mukha karasthusah.

The thunb is placed on the middle finger and the ring finger in the folded pos.tion and the small finger is fully folded in order to present suchi mukha mudra.
Split state, upward leap, world, Laxmana, fall, another thing, meat, eyelash, splitting and tail are the ten concepts represented by suchi mukha by two hands.
Single man, sorrow, deadbody, another man, plural number, ear, art, ancient times, this man, these people, country, a little, witness, refusel, direction to come, direction to go – these 26 concepts get represented by single-handed suchimukha.



16. Pallava

Moolamcha namikamgulya
Amgushto yadi samspruset
Yasmin stu Nrtta sasthrajne
Pallava ssa kara smruthah.

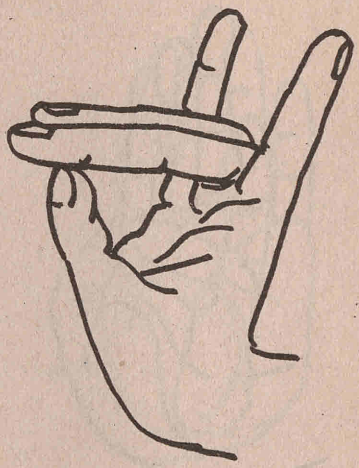
The thumb should be planted at the base of the ring finger to give the pallava mudra. Indra's vajra weapon, peak, cow's ears, length of the eyes, buffalo, sabre, spear, horns of animals, a cloth covering – these nine concepts get indicated by pallava by two hands. Distance, smoke, rubbish, tail, cane and corn are the six concepts indicated by pallava by single hand.



17. Thripathaka

Angushtakunchitha kara
Stharjanee moola masritha
Yathisyat sakarah prokto
Thripathake muneeswarath.

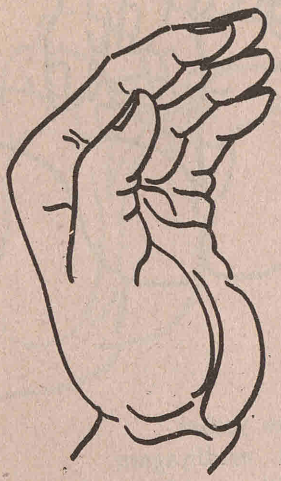
With the thumb slightly bent and planted at the base of the forefinger we show thripathaka gesture. Sunset, beginning, accosting, drink, body, begging – these concepts get conveyed through thripathaka shown by two hands.



18. Mrgaseershakam

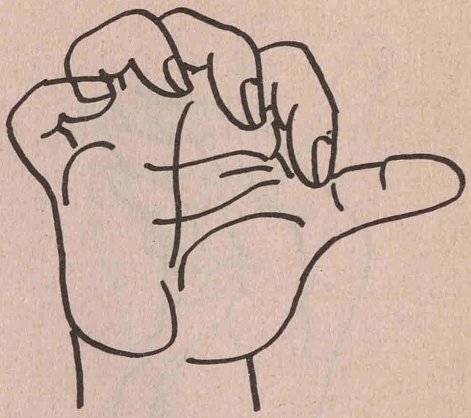
Madhyama namika madhya
Mamgushto yadi sumspruselt
Mrgaseershaka hasthayam
Kathithah kavipungavai.

With the middle finger and the ring finger bent slightly and the thumb well inside them so that its tip touches the central line we have mrgaseershakam indicated.
The only two concepts indicated by this mudra with both hands are animals and Paramatma.



19. Sarppa sirassu

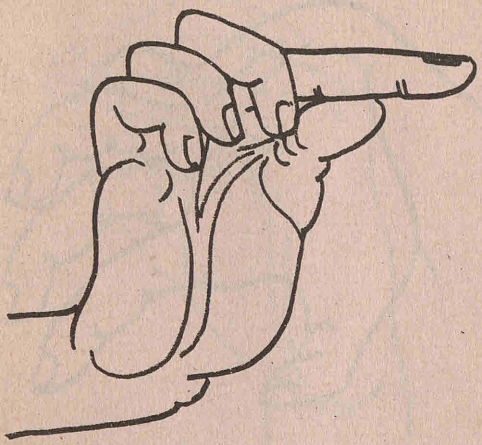
With the palm lifted at right-angles to the forearm and tip of the middle finger alone not bent and tips of other fingers slightly bent together we form sarppa sirassu mudra. Hastha Lakshana Deepika does not give a description of this mudra. Evidently this is only pathakam with the fingers slightly bent inwards.



20. Vardhamanakam

Spruset pradesinee yathra
Rekhamamgushta madhyagam
Kunchithodamchitha ssesha
Ssa hastho vardhamanakah.

If the fore finger is made to touch the central line of the thumb and other fingers get raised and lowered in turn, we have the vard hamanaka mudra illustrated. Ear rings of ladies, garland of pearls, knee cap, sage, battle drum, mahout – these six ideas are represented by vardhamanaka notation displayed by two hands. Foldings of the belly, lower belly, well –these are the three concepts indicated by vardhamanaka by single hand.



21. Araalam

Tharjanee madhyamam rekha
Mamgushto yadi samspruset
Kunchithodanchitha schanya
Araala ssamjna samsmrutha.

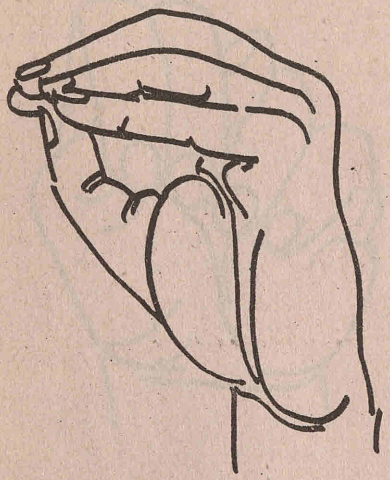
The thumb is made to touch the central line of the forefinger, and other fingers kept erected and folded in order to present araalam mudra. Araalam means bent. Fool, tree, peg, bud, bamboo–these five objects get represented by araalam with two hands.



22. Oornanabham

Oornanabha padaakarah
Panchangulascha yathrahi
Oornanabhabhidha prokta
Sahastho munipungavah.

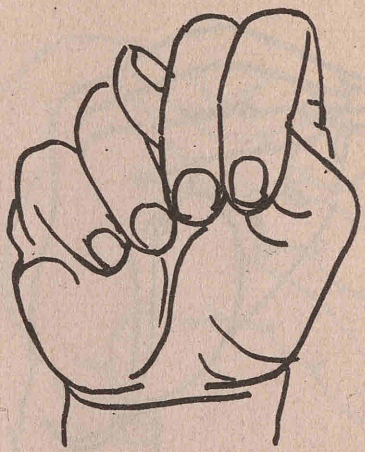
With the five fingers held so as to look like the legs of a spider, we show the oornanabha gesture. The seven concepts indicated by this mudra shown by two hands are horse, fruit, tiger, butter, snow, plenty and lotus.



23. Mukulam

Panchanamamgulee nancha
Yadyagro militho bhavet
Sushnu yathra cha vijneyo
Mukulakhya karo budhai.

By joining together all the five fingers we form the mukula mudra useful to indicate four concepts namely jackal, monkey, paleness and forgetfulness.



24. Kataka mukha

Madhyama tharjanee madhye
Mamgushtah pravisedyathi
Seshah ssanna militha yathra
Sahasthah kataka mukhah.

With the thumb joined to the middle of the middle finger and fore finger and other fingers folded, we form kataka mukha mudra. If shown by two hands this would indicate any of the following six concepts: coat, servant, man of valour, wrestler, arrow dart and lying up.

25. Sukathunda

Sambudhaa vapi hasthe cha
Hamsapaksha kara smrutha.

It may be noted that sukathunda shown by two hands would indicate decision, and hamsa paksha indicate a hand and also an act of accosting.

In Hastha Lakshana Deepika there is a second section on samana mudras and misra mudras. In the former the learned author gives a list of twin concepts and triple concepts represented by the same mudra.

1.	Time	and	distance
2.	Asurah	„	Rakshasa
3.	Pond	„	water
4.	Varuna	„	ocean
5.	Beauty	„	decoration
6.	Mind	„	intelligence
7.	Harshman	„	enemy
8.	Army	„	Sudra
9.	Saint	„	legs
10.	Sigh	„	throb
11.	Victory	„	strength
12.	Darkness	„	night
13.	Strength	„	willpower
14.	Nectar	„	wine
15.	Waterdrop	„	small quantity
16.	flame	„	smoke
17.	Elder brother	„	Bhima
18.	Nakula	„	Bharatha
19.	Arjuna	„	Lakshmana
20.	Satrughna	„	Sahadeva
21.	Deed	„	characteristics
22.	Stick	„	fiag mash
23.	Youth	„	haughtiness
24.	Exhaustion	„	stupor

25.	Pataala	,,	cave
26.	Month	,,	fortnight
27.	Assembly	,,	village
28.	Sound	,,	musical instrument
29.	saint	,,	mighty man
30.	Gold	,,	wealth
31.	Relative	,,	dependence
32.	Spy	,,	travel
33.	Cow	,,	southern side
34.	Washerman	,,	servant
35.	Eyelashes	,,	ladies' breasts
36.	Needle	,,	peg

A list of Triple concepts represented by the common mudra is also given:

1. Master, father and teacher
2. Play, dance and active nature
3. Similarity, courage and beginning
4. Saint, sign, and fruit
5. Belief, love and attachment
6. Sin, mistake, and wrong
7. Then comes the section on *Misra Mudras* or Mudra combinations. Two mudras shown simultaneously by the two hands are pressed into service to represent one and the same concept. They are tabulated below:

No.	For	By one hand	By other hand
1	Indra	Sikhara	Mushti
2	Priya	Hamsasya	,,
3	Brahma	Kataka	Hamsapaksha
4	Siva	Mrgaseersha	,,
5	Vidyadhana	Kartaree mukha	Mushti
6	Yaksha	Hamsa paksha	,,
7	Girdle or Madhya	Ardha chandra	,,
8	Sastra	Kartaree mukha	Kataka
9	Dawn	Hamsasya	Pathakam
10	Cow	-do-	-do-
11	Virgin	Kartharee mukha	Kataka
12	Srivatsa	Sikhara	Anjali
13	Lips	Vardhamanaka	Hamsasya
14	Himsa	Pathakam	Mushti
15	Jail	-do-	-do
16	Sugreeva Angada Bali	Pathakam	Mukula
17	Hanuman	Hamsa paksha	Hamsapaksha
18	House Ravana	Pathakam	Kartharimukham
19	Yaga	Anjali	Kataka
20	Satya, Dharma	Pallava	Mushli
21	Samsat Assembly	Kataka	Mudrakhya
22	Father	Mudrakhya	Mushti



23	Army chief	Katakam	Hamsapaksham
24	Mother	-do-	-do-
25	Sakhi	Katakam	Hamsapaksham
26	Symptom or Lakshanam	Mudrakhya	Pathakam
27	Essence of action (Karyam)	Mukula	Mushti
28	Wife	-do-	-do-
29	Wedding	-do-	-do-
30	Garuda	Sikhara with a modification	Mukula with a modification
31	Jewel	Vardhamanaka	Anjali
32	Play	Kataka	Anjali
33	Something unusal	Suchimukha	Anjali
34	Son	Karthari mukha	Mudrakhya
35	Grandson	-do-	-do-
36	Daughter	Katakam	Suchimukha
37	Amrut (Ambrosia)	Vardhamanaka	Hamsapaksha
38	Hand	Mudrakhyam	Pallava
39	Clever device	-do-	-do-
40	Good looking girl	Kataka	Mukura
41	Extinction	Mushti with a modification	
42	Middle	Sikhara	Hamsapaksha
43	Prince	Pathaka	Karthari mukha
44	Two	Sikhara	Suchimukha

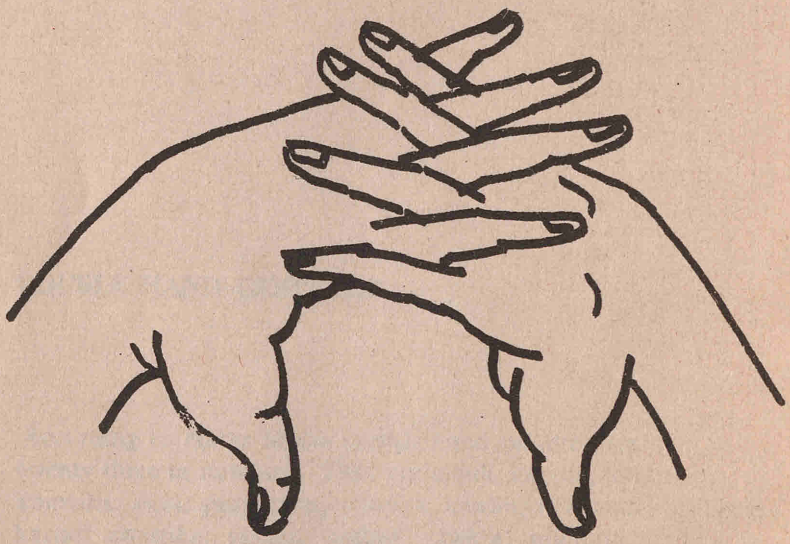
DOUBLE HAND GESTURES

According to Natya Sastra double hand gestures are twenty three in number. They are anjali, kapota, karkata, swastika, dola, puspaputa, utsanga, sivalinga, kataka vardhana, kartari swastika, sakata, sankha, chakra, samputa, pasa, kilaka, matsya, kurma, varaha, garuda, nagabandha, khatva and bherunda.

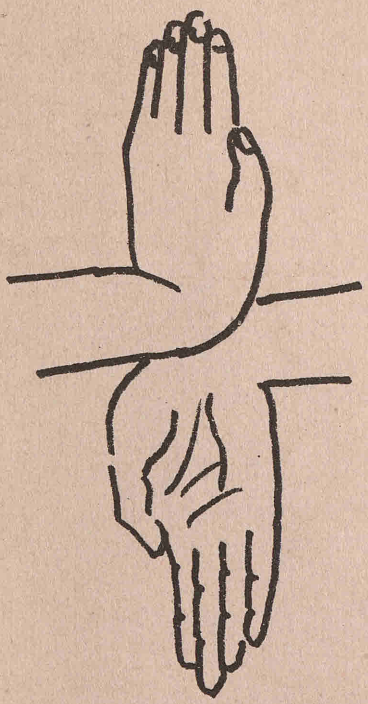
1. Anjali: This is shown by joining together two pataka hands. It is to be held on the head, in salutation of a deity on the face in the case of a preceptor and on the bosom for saluting a Brahmin.



2. Kapota: When the two pataka hands meet only at their base side and end, the anjali becomes transformed into Kapota. This gesture is used in the salutation addressing a preceptor and for respectful acceptance on agreement.



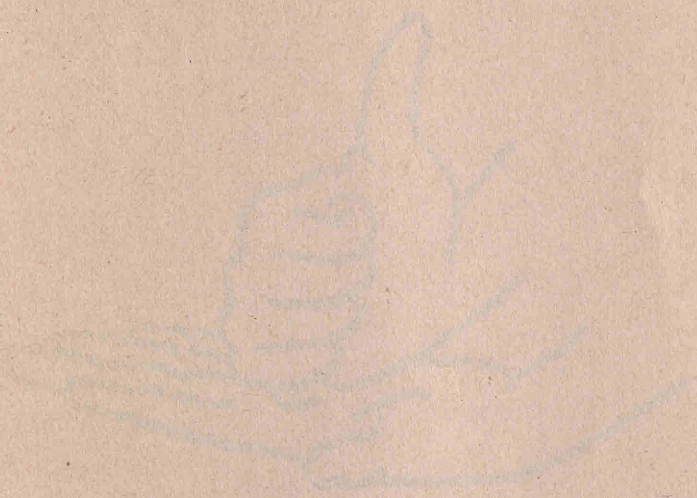
3. Karkata: When the fingers of one hand are run through the opening between fingers of the other (interlocked) and the fingers remain either inside (towards the palm) or outside (on the back of the hand) the gesture is called karkata used to denote the coming of a multitude, showing the belly filling, the conch shell with wind, twisting or stretching of limbs and pulling a branch down.



4. Swastika: When two Pataka hands are put across each other at their wrist, they form the swastika gesture. It is used to indicate a crocodile (makara).

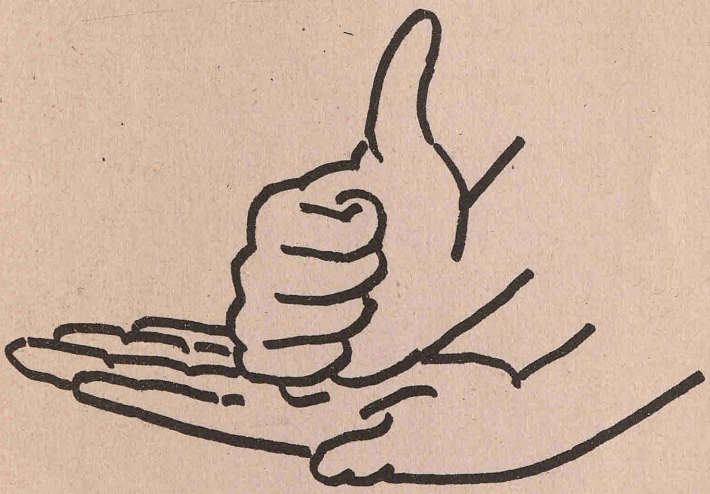


5. Dola: When the pataka hands are placed on the thighs the dola hand is formed. It is used in the beginning of Natya.



6. Puspa puta: When two sarppasirassu hands meet on one side very closely they form the puspaputa hand. It is used in waving lights before idols as an act of adoration, taking of water, fruit etc. giving evening offerings to gods, and a flower invested with magical power.

7. Utsanga: The hands showing mrgasirsa are placed on the upper arm of opposite hand we have the utsanga gesture used to denote embrace, display of armlet and such other ornaments and coaching of boys.



8. Sivalinga: When the ardha chandra is held by the left hand and the sikhara by the right, we have the sivalinga gesture. It is used in showing the Sivalinga symbol.



9. Kataka vardhana: When the swastika is made by placing the katakamukha hands at their wrists, it is called kataka vardhana, used in coronation, worship, marriage etc.

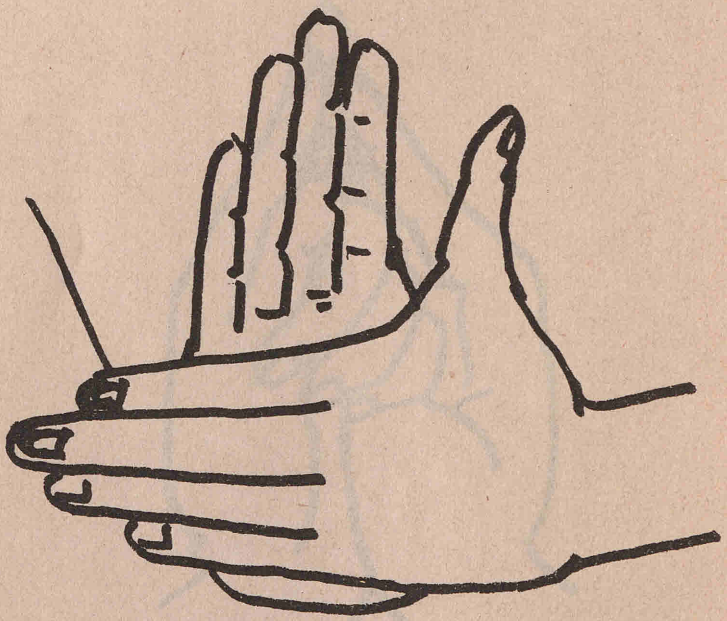


10. Kartari swastika: When a swastika is made by two kartari hands (placed at their wrists) it is called kartari swastika, used to denote branchs, hilltops and trees.

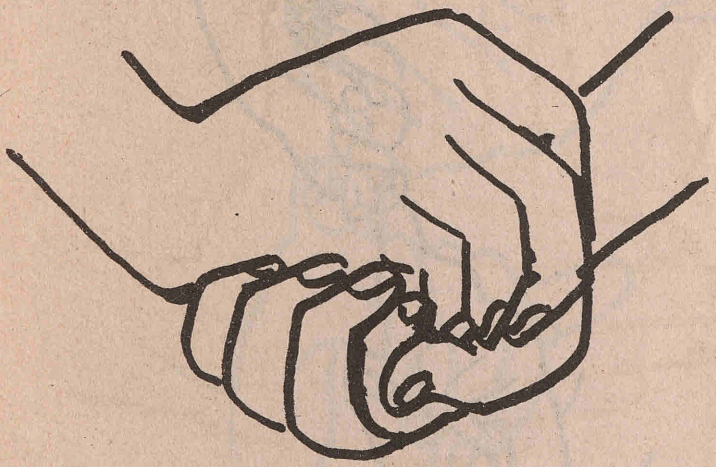
11. Sakata: When the middle finger and the thumb of the brahamana hand are stretched, it becomes sakata hand. This hand is often used in playing the role of a Rakshasa (demon).



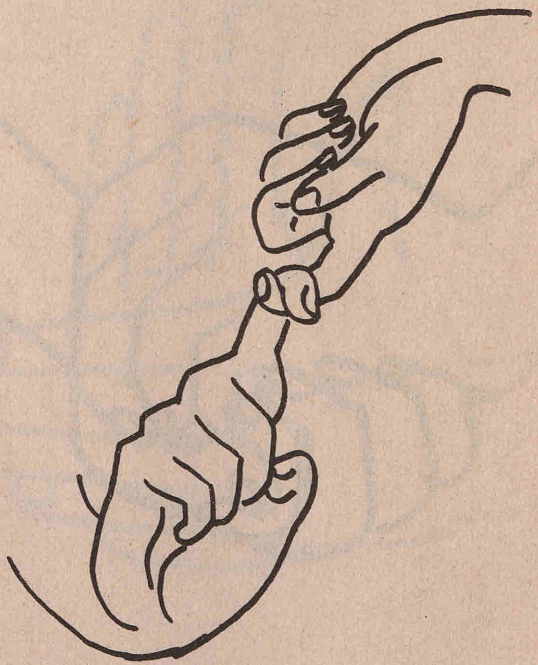
12. Sankha: When thumb of the sikhara hand meets the other thumb and is clung round by fingers other than the fore finger (close to the latter thumb) we have the sankha hand used to denote conch shell and such other things.



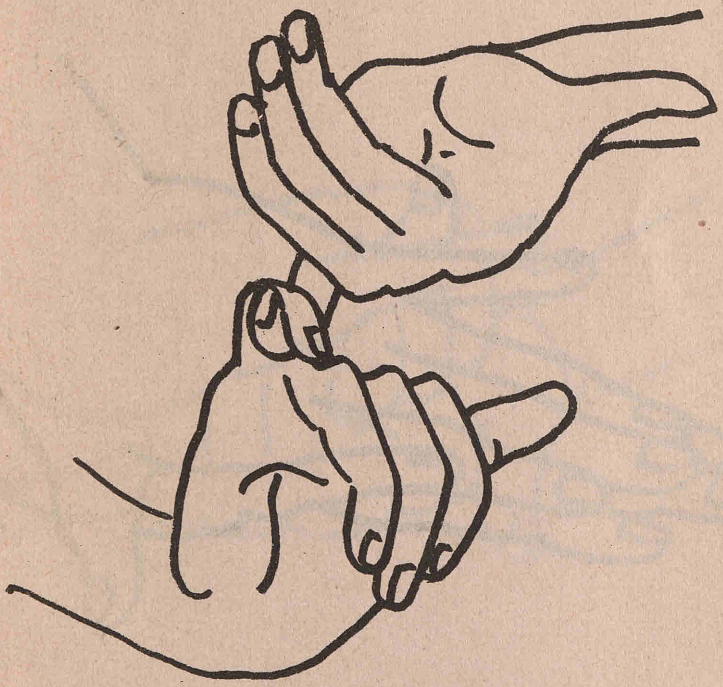
13. Chakra: When the palms in two ardha chandra hands are put across each other they make chakra hand used to denote chakra or wheel.



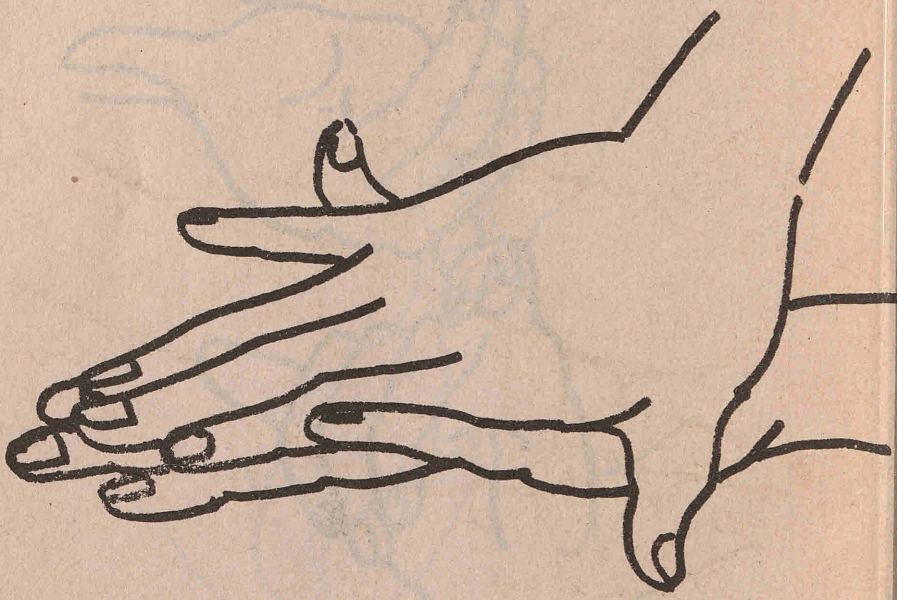
14. Samputa: When the fingers in the chakra hand are curved it is called the samputa hand gesture used for covering things and representing a box.



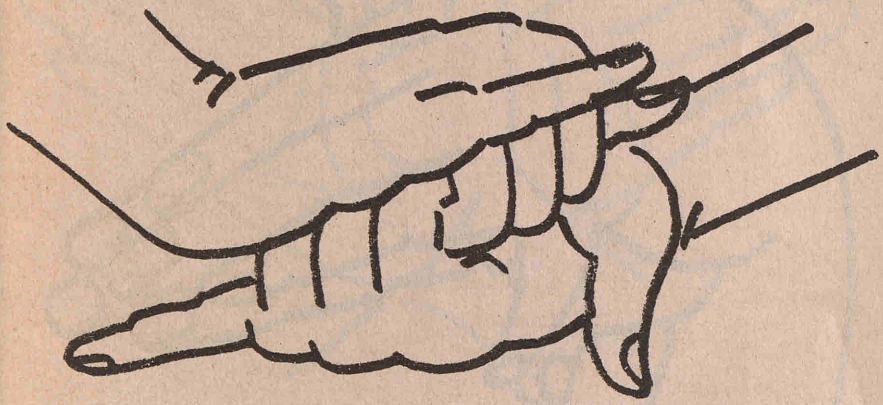
15. Pasa: When the forefingers of such hands are interlocked with each other (bent inwards) the hand is called pasa, used to denote a mutual quarrel, a string and a chain.



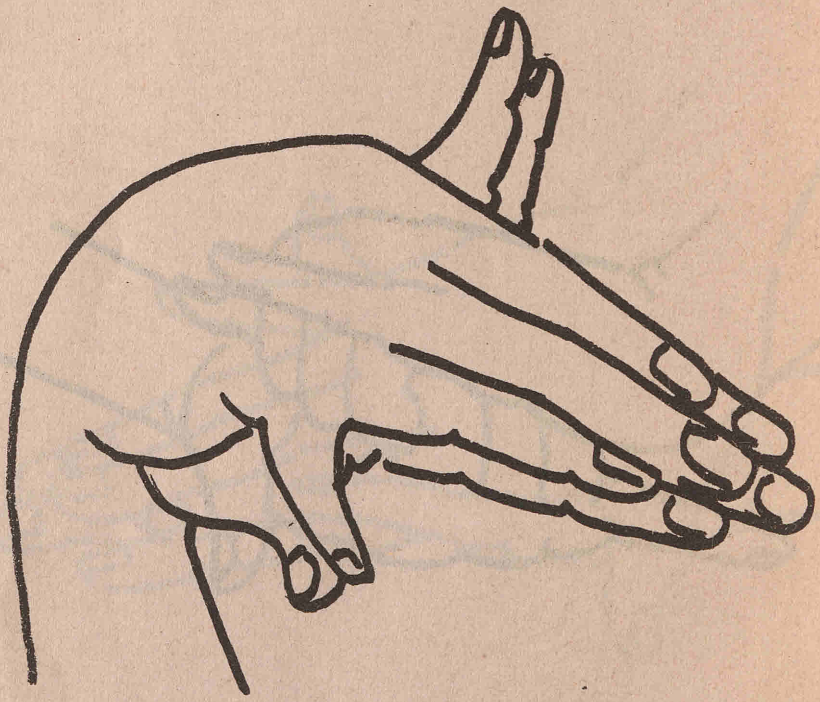
16. Kilaka: When the little fingers or the mrgasirsha hands are bent inwards and interlocked with each other, the hand becomes one called kilaka used to denote affection and amorous talk.



17. Matsya: When one hand is placed on the back of the other and the two thumbs are out stretched the hand is called matsya, used to denote a fish.



18. Kurma: When the tips of thumbs and the little fingers of the chakra hand are bent it is called the kurma hand used to denote a tortoise.



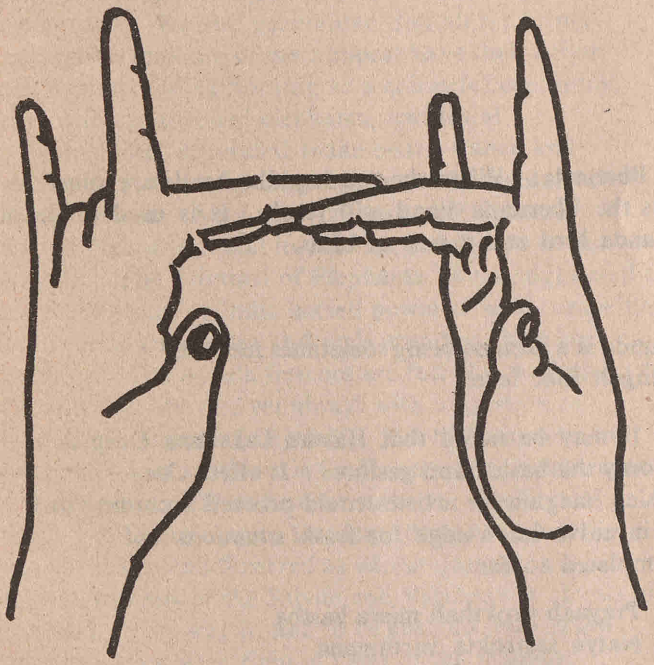
19. Varaha: When one mrgasirsha is placed above another and the thumb of one hand meets the little finger of the other and vice versa the hand becomes varaha, used to denote a boar.



20. **Garuda:** When the palms of the two ardha chakra hands are placed horizontally with the two thumbs placed on each other the hand is called garuda used to denote an eagle.



21. Nagabandha: The sarpasira and swasticka hands placed together will make the nagabandha hand, used to denote interlock of a snake.



22. Khatva: Placing one catura hand on another catura hand with the forefingers of each released, will make the khatva hand. It is used to denote a cot and a palanquin.

23. Bherunda: When the two kapidha hands are joined at their wrists the bherunda hand will result. It is used to denote bherunda bird and a pair of birds.

Bherunda is a fabulus being sometimes met with in Bengali folk lore.

Note: It may be noted that Hastha Lakshana Deepika gives only the basic hand gestures. It offers clues on which imaginative artistes could proceed according to their intuitive knowledge for fresh situations not contemplated so far.

Prayaah prokthah misra hastha
Natya sastrokta varthmana
Seshasya hastha jnathah
Vya vidwatbhir natya darsanat.

The exponent has catalogued a few as models. The rest is to be made up by ingenious individuals according to their inner vision of course on the models suggested. In these matters the last word can never be said.

SPIRITUAL HALO—TO BE PRESERVED

We began by treating the origin and roots of Mohiniyattom as a temple ritual. We also generalised that all art forms with a reasonable measure of mass appeal have their origin in temple worship. Flag hoisting as a colourful ceremony, procession with caparisoned elephants, sculptural effigies, illumination, decorated snake-boats, dance and music—all these in India have association with celebrations of a religious nature. About the Trimurti of Elephanta caves, Pandit Nehru says that its message is relevant to our ancient land. "The Trimurti of Elephanta caves might well be the many faced statue of India herself powerful with compelling eyes, full of deep knowledge and understanding, looking down upon us. The Ajanta frescoes are full of a tenderness and love of beauty and life, and yet always with suggestion of something deeper sounding beyond". We had occasion to discuss the marvels of sculpture in the Konark temple representing various dance poses of Devadasis or moharis. In Kerala after the fall of Chera empire Devadasi dance combined with Nangiar kuthu and flowered as Mohiniyattom, a harmonious synthesis of the Saivite and Vaishnavite rituals of high artistic appeal. Any way it used to be enacted only in the precincts of temples often right in front of the sanctum sanctorum, near the sopanam, by the accredited section of temple services.

Dance is invariably linked with music, and music is called the language of God. Without music Mohiniyattom would not be wroth its name. Every movement, even the minute twist and twirl is guided and decided by the subtle graces and

lines of Geeta Govindam or any other equally beautiful lyric composed for the purpose. Maharajah Swati Tirunal himself has contributed to the enrichment of that branch of literature. Tradition has laid down strict rules covering all aspects of the art, including costumes, decorative style of the person of the artiste and even stage set-up.

One is inclined to specially note that Mohiniyattom was staged right in front of the sanctum sanctorum or Garbha gruha where the chief priest does his worshipful rituals. We call him mukhya poojari and his style of worhsip in Kerala is as per Aagamas and Tantric rites. Vast literature of a very long chronology has developed about this. The Tantras are not as Sri T.K. Velu Pillai has opined in his Travancore State Manual (Chapter IX on Hinduism) just patches of isolated ceremonial gestures. On the other hand they consist of gestacular elucidations of the principles and doctrins of the Vedas. In other words the principles and doctrins of the Vedas, Tantras and Puranas coalesce to a harmonious system as in a dance performance designed for the spiritual elevation of the devotees. The particular movements of the hands and attitudes of the body were deemed indispensable to spectacular effect which it was believed would exercise a beneficial influence on the mind of the worshipper in the first place and enable him to raise himself to a high plane of spiritual attainment. The first requisite of efficiency is the purity and piety of the poojari. This is to be achieved by performance of various external acts as well as dhyana (meditation), japam (chanting of hymns). These would be followed by offerings of sanctified water, flowers and

sandal, incense, camphor and such like. The offering of water and sandal symbolises the identity of the Archaka's visible body (sthula sarira) with the universal soul. The offering of flowers establishes the unity of the physical and mental power of the priest with those of the Iswara. By offering of incense, it is understood that the archaka is freed of all his lower attachments or bonds born of carnal urges. By nivedyam the gratification of the karana sarira and virat sarira of man is realised.
In making these offerings the person has to picture to himself the elements and urges which the archaka represents to attain absorption into divinity.

Simultaneous with this elaborate scheme of worship, we have the Devadasi dance conducted at the sopanam. The mandapam is originally meant for that purpose and not for a selected section to do Namaskara. In Padmanabha Swamy temple at Trivandrum, namaskara is strictly forbidden. Anyway the mantras chanted by the poojari in a low tone inside the garbha gruha has its essence elaborated in the sopana sangeeta. The chanting corresponded to the Geeta Givindam sung by the musician cum drummer for the dances. That the sound exercises a potential effect on the mind, goes without saying. Its passage through the nervous system makes the mind doubly fit and poised for perception of the truth. Gestures and poses help this process of perception. The poojari who chants the vedic mantra communicates the result of his mental elevation to the devotees who flock outside. Hymns, mantras and hand gestures

do a very useful function. The sudden opening of the jingling doors of the sanctum sanctorum puts us in mind of the curtain splitting into two for Mohiniattom to begin.

It has been argued that civilization has advanced to a remarkable degree so that artificial symbols and aids are irrelevent. This cannot carry much force. Relegious experience is not a matter in which the law of averages or the provisions of democratic majority can afford any test. For, so long as new generations are brought into existence the prepondering number of shallow-minded men in the world is bound to cotinue.
The temples are therefore necessary for spiritual education for all time. Image worship is not confined to the unlettered or the unreflective. The best production of the Hindu intelligence are of the East, men and women who strived with equal lustre in the domain of science, politics and philosophy, and they show in their conduct that temples are institutions which should be preserved and maintained with scrupulos care.
Dance and music won the due and abiding place in religious and emotional life of man for an additional reason too. It may be seen that rhythm is the basis of all activities in nature. From the movement of the heavenly bodies in space down to the throb of the human heart, all movements are based on certain fundamental laws. Philosophers say that rhythm is the basis of the Divine manifestation and it is

this basic rhythm which is symbolised in the dance of Nataraja to which reference has already been made. In any case we have to accept the fact that rhythm has profound influence on a sentient being also just like resonance in physical vibrations. Regular ticking of a clock at times induces langour and drowsinness; the rhythmic movement of the running train often induces slumber. Rhythmic swaying of the swing lulls a child to sleep. It can be proved that under certain conditions bridges can be broken and glass shattered to pieces by the use of regulated movements or sound vibrations. The effect of rhythm on humanity is profound and one can work wonders by a judicious use of rhythm. This is what perhaps Tennyson meant when he said, "More things are wroght by prayer than this world dreams of".

Michelet, the French historiar writing in 1864, with special reference to the Ramayana said, "whosoever has done or willed too much, let him drink from the deep cup a long draught of life and youth.....Everything is narrow in the West. Greece is small and I stiffle, Judea is dry and I pant. Let me look towards lofty Asia and the profound East for a little while. Then let this great poem as vast as the Indian Ocean blessed, gilded with the sun, the book of divine harmony. A serene peace reigns there, and in the midst of conflict an infinite sweetness,

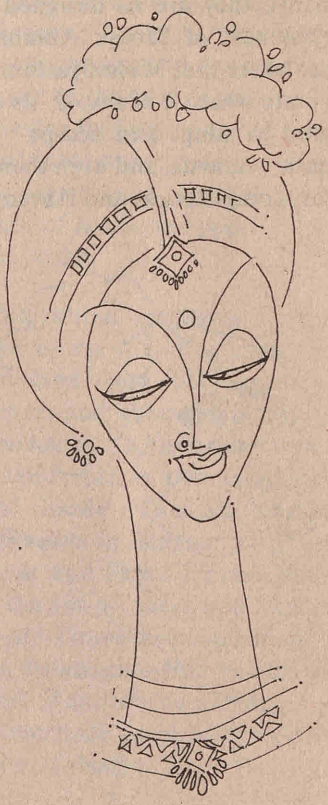
a boundless fraternity which spreads over all other living things on ocean (without bound or bottom) of love, of pity and clemency". In his 'Discovery of India' Pandit Nehru quotes this passage to project the innate greatness of India in the field of arts.
Anyway the dance worship by Devadasis out side the sanctum sanetorum and the tantric worship inside together served a common purpose in the moral elevation of the society at large using the medium of aesthetic appeal through audition and vison.

In as much as Mohiniyattom conforms to Natya Sastra, it can by no stretch of reasoning be considered to have evolved from folk dances where actors themselves are the singers and abhinaya is not insisted on. Sankaracharya, Ramanujacharya and Madhavacharya had their role in the revitalisation of temple worship and connected rituals. Thus Kshethrajna born in Kuchipudi, Jayadeva in Bengal, Thyagaraja of Tiruvayar and Swati Tirunal Maharaja of Travancore came to the aid of natya and raga aspects of Bhakti awakening. Swati Tirunal's compositions have been couched in seven languages—Malayalam, Sanskrit, Marathi, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Urdu.
They have sought to reconcile word with melody and often both with the demands of Natya.

Let me conclude by quoting Mr. M. K. K. Nair's learned paper. "Every component of the

performance whether it be music, drums, symbols
or the dance movements, they are all designed
to accentuate the astuteness of Satwik Abhinaya.
Likewise if we are keen to see that Mohiniyattom grows
and develops into a state where it can hold its own,
we should be prepared to adapt and accept
appropriate movements, adavus, and even themes that will give
the art form grandeur, completeness and Asvadyata".







MOHINIYATTOM – Prof. C.K. MOOSAD

Mohiniyattom is one of
Kerala's unique classical art forms.
This lasya type of dance
has developed over many centuries.
Dance is looked upon in
India as worship and it is to lift
people to higher reaches
of aesthetic and divine experience
that Mohiniyattom has been
conceived

