MKM Bollystars Dance Company & Academy
Shivani Thakkar, Artistic Director

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MKM BOLLYSTARS

PRESENTS

INDIAN DANCE: FROM CLASSICAL TO BOLLYWOOD

History

Indian dance is an integral part of Indian culture and expression throughout history and to present day. Historically, dance and theatre were integrated art forms in India, where in most theatrical presentations had elements of dance and music and vice versa. Nowadays, there is still a significant component of story-telling and acting present in the classical dance forms of India. Both theatre and dance in India is based on a treatise called the *Natya Shastra* – a book that outlines the technique and theories underlying the practice of dance and theatre addressing everything from body movements, to hand gestures, to facial expressions.

There is a strong relationship between Indian religious mythology and Indian dance. It is believed that the concepts of dance were conceived by the god Brahma. Brahma inspired the sage Bharata Muni to write the *Natya Shastra*, the treatise on performing arts, from which a codified practice of dance and drama emerged. Another god that is very much regarded in the context of dance is Lord Shiva – the god of arts and dance. It is very common to see a statue of Shiva on stage or an image of Shiva in the context of a dance performance.

Originally dance in India was performed in the temples, for religious and festive occasions and as a form of entertainment. Over the evolution of art in India, theatre and dance developed as their own individual art forms, while retaining elements of the other in their practice and performance. Slowly dance moved from the Temples to the Royal Courts, where kings sponsored artists and were patrons of the arts in their kindom. This shift had an influence on the classical Indian dance, as the music practices became more refined, and lyrics of songs incorporated the valors and accolades of the kings, expanding beyond the scope of religious mythological narratives as had been the practice up until that point. After its life in the courts, dance moved to auditorium and stage performances. Nowadays, classical Indian dance is performed in both temples and auditoriums, folk dances of India are performed on various festive occasions in a range of venues, and Bollywood – the contemporary fusion dance style born out of the Indian film industry is performed on screen and at live entertainment shows.

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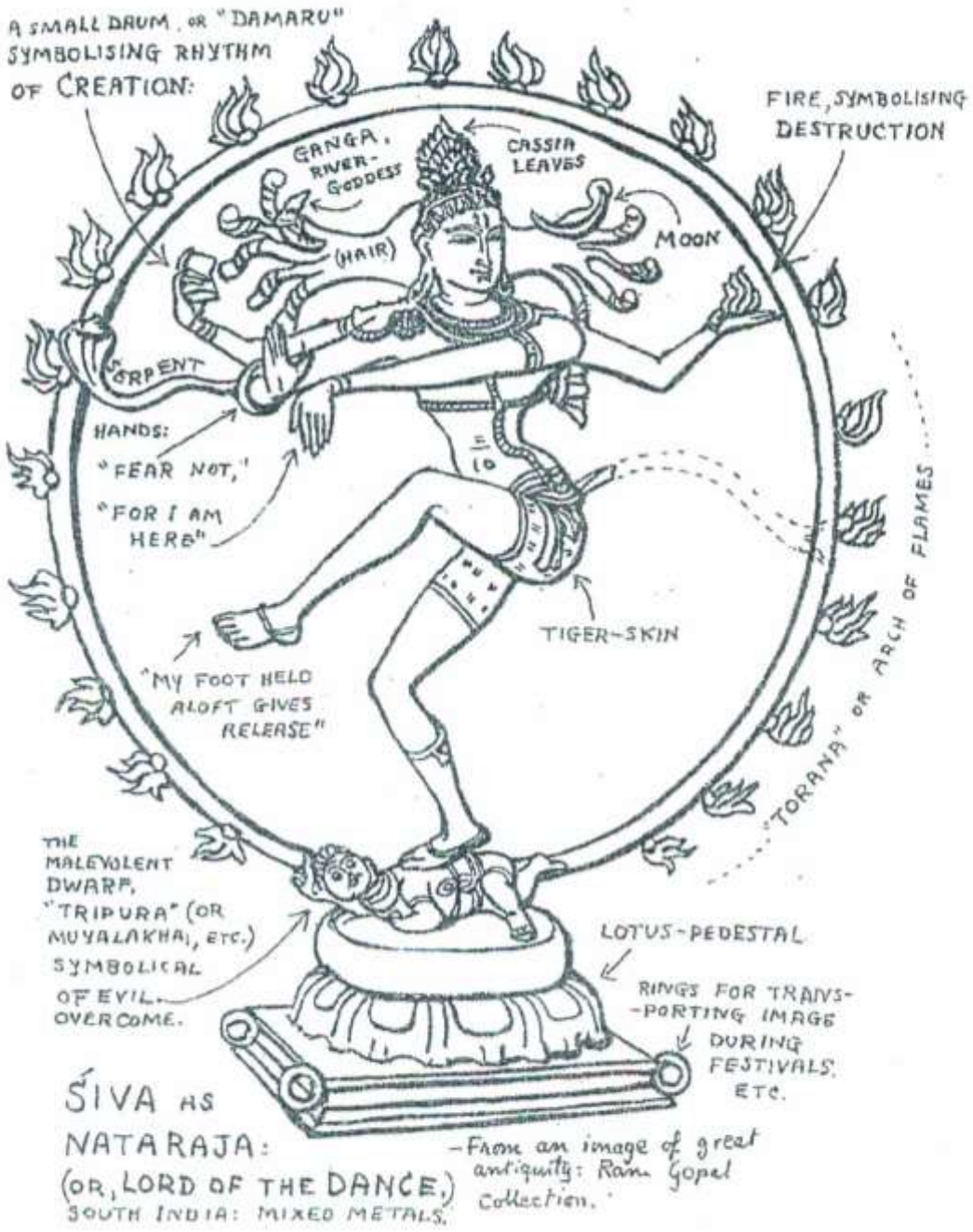
Diagram of Lord Shiva – the God of Dance and Theatre in Hinduism



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Types of Dance

There are three categories of dance one can consider when looking at dance in India:

1) Classical Dance
2) Folk Dance
3) Bollywood

Classical Dance

Classical dance in India is comparable to art of Ballet in terms of its vigor, technique, and years involved for mastery. There are 8 different styles of classical dance and they vary in terms of stylistics, practice, stories told, and even musically depending the region they originate from. The 8 styles of dance are:

1) Kathak – A dance from Northern India is performed by both men and women. It is known for its rhythmically intricate footwork patterns and graceful turns. Its element of story-telling is based in the Bhakti (devotional) movement of India and generally recants stories of the lord Krishna. In the 16th century it absorbed elements of absorbed certain features of Persian dance and Central Asian dance which were imported by the royal courts of the Mughal Era.

2) Manipuri – A dance from North-East India from the state of Manipur, it is performed by both men and women. Manipuri dance is purely religious and its aim is a spiritual experience. Development of music and dance has through religious festivals and daily activities of the Manipuri people. Manipuri dancers do not wear ankle bells to accentuate the beats tapped out by the feet, in contrast with other Indian dance forms, and the dancers' feet never strike the ground hard. Movements of the body and feet and facial expressions in Manipuri dance are subtle and aim at devotion and grace. The aim is to make rounded movements and avoid any jerks, sharp edges or straight lines. It is this which gives Manipuri dance its undulating and soft appearance.

3) Sattriya – A dance from North-East India from the area of Assam, it is performed by both men and women. The core of *Sattriya Nritya* has usually been to present mythological teachings to the people in an accessible, immediate, and enjoyable manner. Traditionally, *Sattriya* was performed only by *bhokot*s (male monks) in monasteries as a part of their daily rituals or to mark special festivals. Today, in addition to this practice, *Sattriya* is also performed on stage by men and women who are not members of the *sattras*, on themes not merely mythological.

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4) Orissi (Odissi) – A dance from the East coast of India from the state of Orissa. It is performed by both men and women. It is the oldest surviving dance form of India on the basis of archaeological evidences. It is particularly distinguished from other classical Indian dance forms by the importance it places upon the Tribhangi (literally: three parts break), the independent movement of head, chest and pelvis and upon the basic square stance known as Chauka or Chouka that symbolizes Lord Jagannath. This dance is characterized by various Bhangas (Stance), which involves stamping of the foot and striking various postures as seen in Indian sculptures.

5) Bharata Natyam – from the southern state of Tamil Nadu, it is performed by men and women. A possible origin of the name is from Bharata Muni, who wrote the Natya Shastra to which Bharata Natyam owes many of its ideas. This etymology also holds up to scrutiny better since Bharathanatyam is considered to be 'short form' or acronym wherein "**Bha**vam" means expression and "**ra**gam" meaning music, "**tha**lam" meaning rhythm and **natayam** meaning dance. Today, it is one of the most popular and widely performed dance styles.

6) Kuchipudi – is from Andhra Pradesh in South-East India. Traditionally performed by men only, it is now performed by both men and women. Kuchipudi dancers are quicksilver and scintillating, rounded and fleet-footed, they perform with grace and fluid movements. Performed to classical Carnatic Music (south Indian music system) it shares many common elements with Bharatanatyam.

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7) Mohinyattam – is from the state of Kerala and is designed to be performed by women only. The term Mohiniyattam comes from the words "Mohini" meaning a woman who enchants onlookers and "aattam" meaning graceful and sensuous body movements. The word "Mohiniyattam" literally means *"dance of the enchantress"*. The dance involves the swaying of broad hips and the gentle movements of erect posture from side to side. This is reminiscent of the swinging of the palm leaves and the gently flowing rivers which abound Kerala, the land of Mohiniyattam. There are approximately 40 basic movements, known as *atavukal*.

8) Kathakali – is from the south-west state of Kerala and is performed by men only, though there are certain decorative dances performed by women. is a stylized classical Indian dance-drama noted for the attractive make-up of characters, elaborate costumes, detailed gestures and well-defined body movements presented in tune with the anchor playback music and complementary percussion. It originated in the country's present day state of Kerala during the 17th century and has developed over the years with improved looks, refined gestures and added themes besides more ornate singing and precise drumming.

Map of India

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Indian Classical Dance Theory:

- Based in the books: Natya Shastra and Abhinaya (expressions) Dharpana (mirror)
- Have a codified system of body movements, rhythm, and hand gestures
- The hand gestures are like a sign language alphabet, used to symbolize various objects, thoughts, and expressions. They are used to tell various stories and also incorporated in pure dance choreography simply for their beauty.
- There are three main areas in Indian classical dance: Nritta (rhythm), Nritya (expression/emotion), Natya (drama element or the story itself). All Indian classical dance styles incorporate all these three elements of dance, and styles such as Bharata Natyam have sections of choreography that is focused primarily on graceful rhythmic movement and then other sections that concentrate on story telling. Sometimes dancers will combine both elements, executing intricate rhythmic patterns through their footwork, while story-telling with their upper body, hands and faces.
- Indian Classical dance has an integrated relationship with Indian music. There are two main types of music systems in Indian – Hindustani (North Indian) and Carnatic (South Indian). Hindustani and Carnatic music have different instruments, melodic structures (ragas), and rhythm systems (tala).

Folk Dances of India

There are a variety of regional folk dances of India that vary in terms of both stylistics and music. They are performed on various celebratory occasions, such as religious rites and festivities, harvest and other seasonal events, and for pure joy and entertainment. These styles of dance are easier to learn and tend to be a bonding experience for members of the community.

Rajasthani (Rajasthan)

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Bhangra (Punjab)

Raas/Garba (Gujarat)

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Additional Reading on Indian Folk Dances available online at:
http://www.indianetzone.com/1/indian_folk_dances.htm

Bollywood

Bollywood is a term popularly used for the Mumbai-based Hindi-language film industry in India. Bollywood is often incorrectly used to refer to the whole of Indian cinema; it is only a part of the Indian film industry. Other Indian cinema includes Tollywood (Telugu Language Film Industry), Kollywood (Tamil Language Film Industry), Malluwood (Malayalam) among others. Bollywood language movies are primarily in Hindi or more accurately Hindustani (the colloquial base of Hindi and Urdu), with a spattering of English and Hinglish (combination of Hindi and English words). Bollywood films are for the majority movie musicals. The stories do tend to be melodramatic, larger than life, and very picturesque. Outdoor/location shooting is a large component of Bollywood films, with many movies having sequences filmed in Europe, North America, and Australia. Bollywood is one of the largest film producers in the world. Recently the term "Bollywood" was officially entered into the Oxford English Dictionary.

Bollywood Dance

- The dances in the films are known as Bollywood dances.
- Bollywood dance style refers to the wide range of hybrid dances performed to the Hindi Filmi as in the films.
- Bollywood dance does vary in style compared to South Indian Film dance (Tollywood, Kollywood, and Malluwood) that sports it's own distinct flavor and moves.
- Bollywood dance is a amalgamation of various dance styles, being influenced by the following:
    - Indian classical styles (primarily Kathak)
    - Folk
        - Maharathi styles such as Koli (fisherman's dance), Lavani (fisherwoman's dance), etc.,
        - Gujarati Raas and Garba
        - Rajasthani Dance Gummarah (dance done with a lot of spinning, flared skirts, and with an inverted cone on top of the head)
        - Bhangra!
    - Indian Seasonal Dances/Celebratory Dances
        - Wedding dances
        - Holi (spring festival of colors) Dance
        - Dances to celebrate births, morn deaths etc
        - Festival Dances, religious and otherwise
    - Jazz
        - Cabaret/Blues club scenes
        - Lyrical pieces for romantic, dream sequence songs
    - Hip Hop
        - For large group numbers
        - High energy songs
        - Reflective of affluent young MTV influenced culture
    - Silks

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- Ballroom
- Salsa/Latin American Dance
- Partner work
- Bellydance *Please note that Bellydance is Middle Eastern and Egyptian, and is not an Indian form of dance. Often people link bellydance as a direct influence/path to Bollywood, when in fact they are two completely different and mostly unrelated styles of dance.*

The type of dance used in a film is dependent on factors such as history and location. Classical dance is used as an influence for historical movies taking place centuries ago, folk dance is used when the film is located in the villages or rural areas of India or for celebration events, and hip hop/jazz/world dance is used in urban metropolitan settings that are in the present day.

Role of Bollywood dances in a Bollywood film include:

1) Moving the plot or story forward
2) Revealing the inner emotions of a character
3) A fantasy or dream sequence – revealing the wishes of a character

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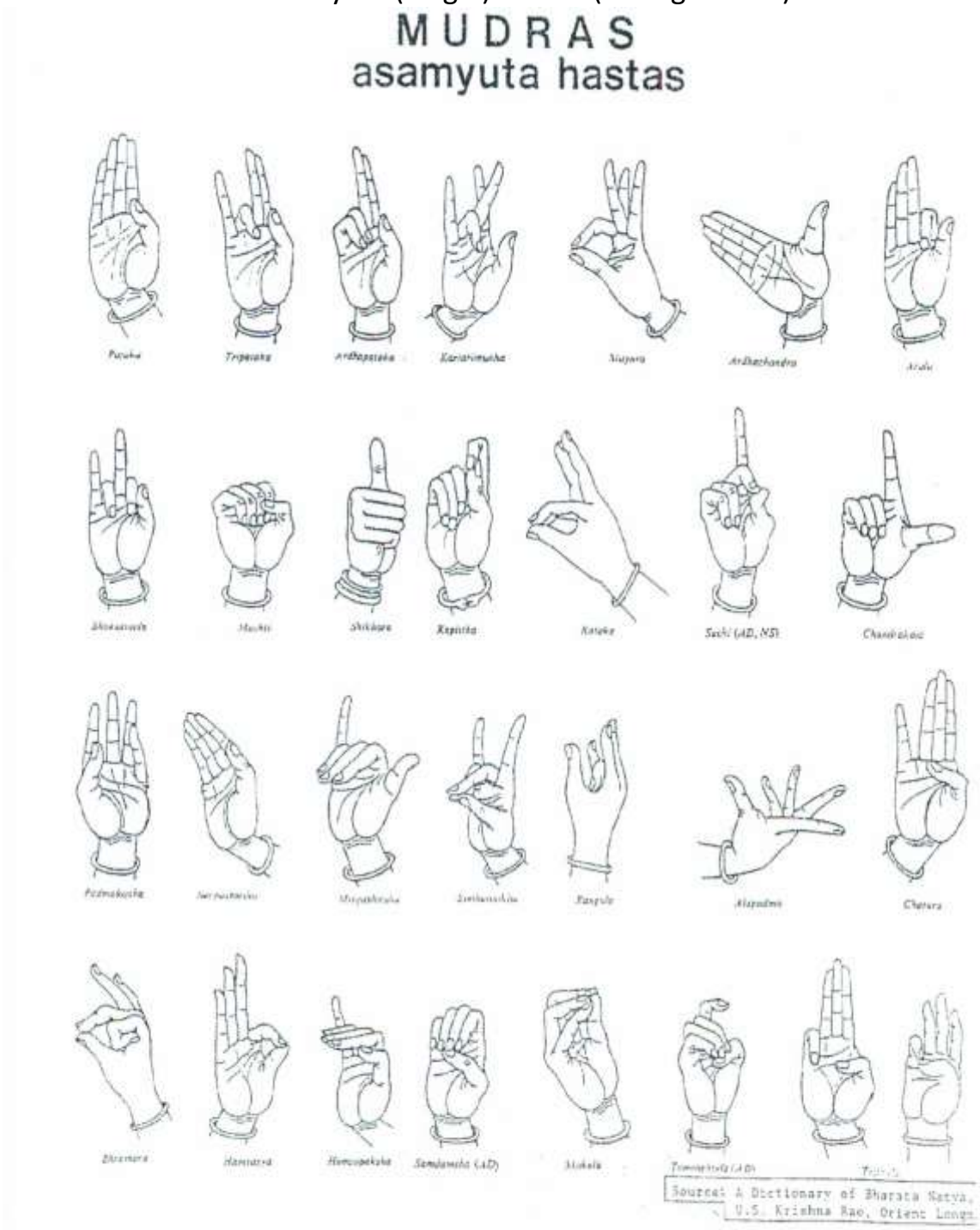
Basic Indian Hand Gestures

Asamyuta (Single) Hastas (Handgestures)



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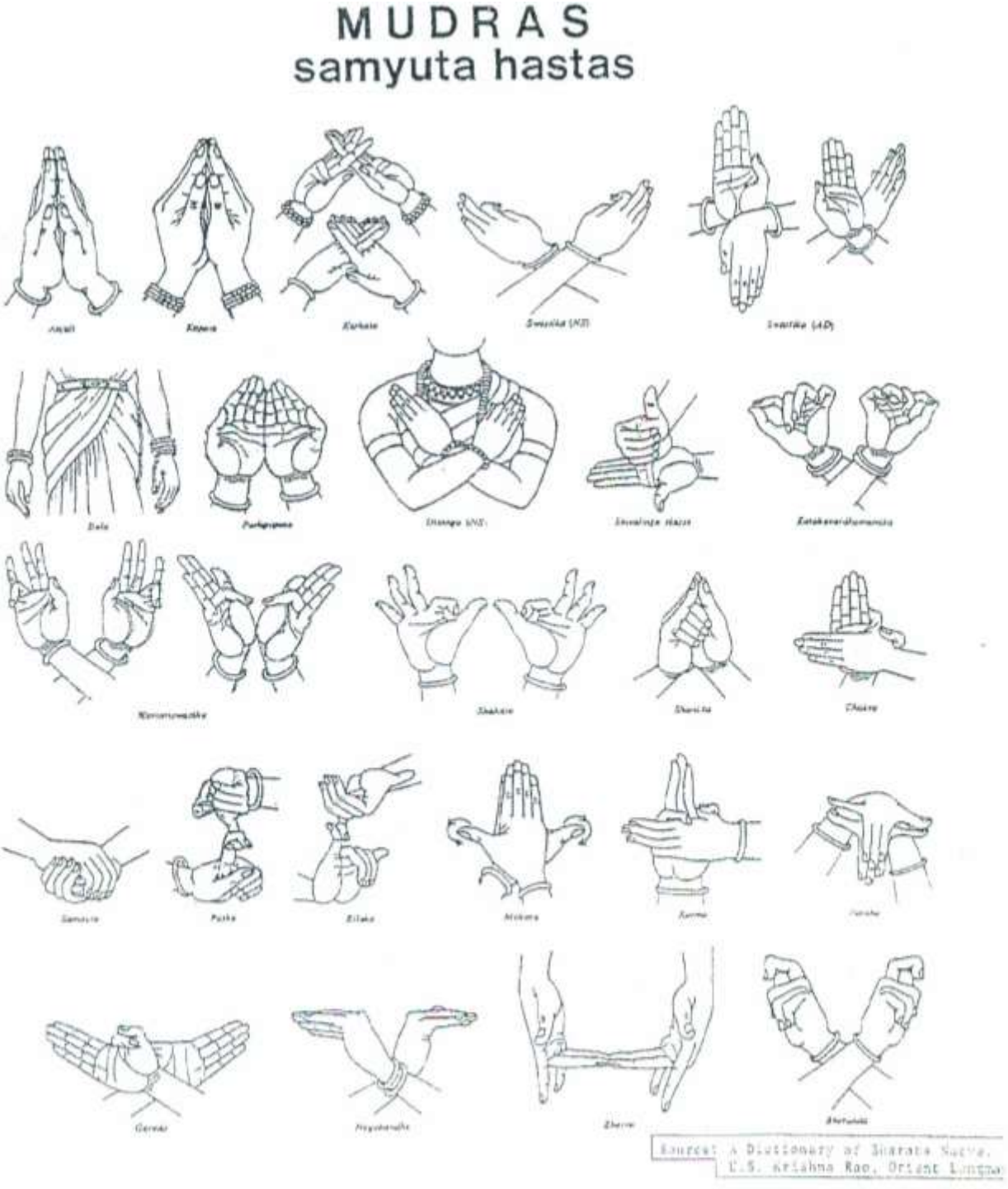
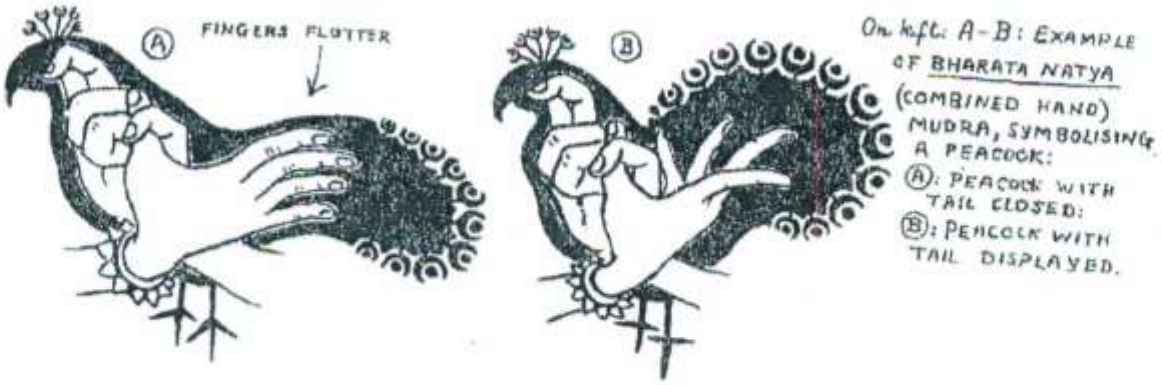
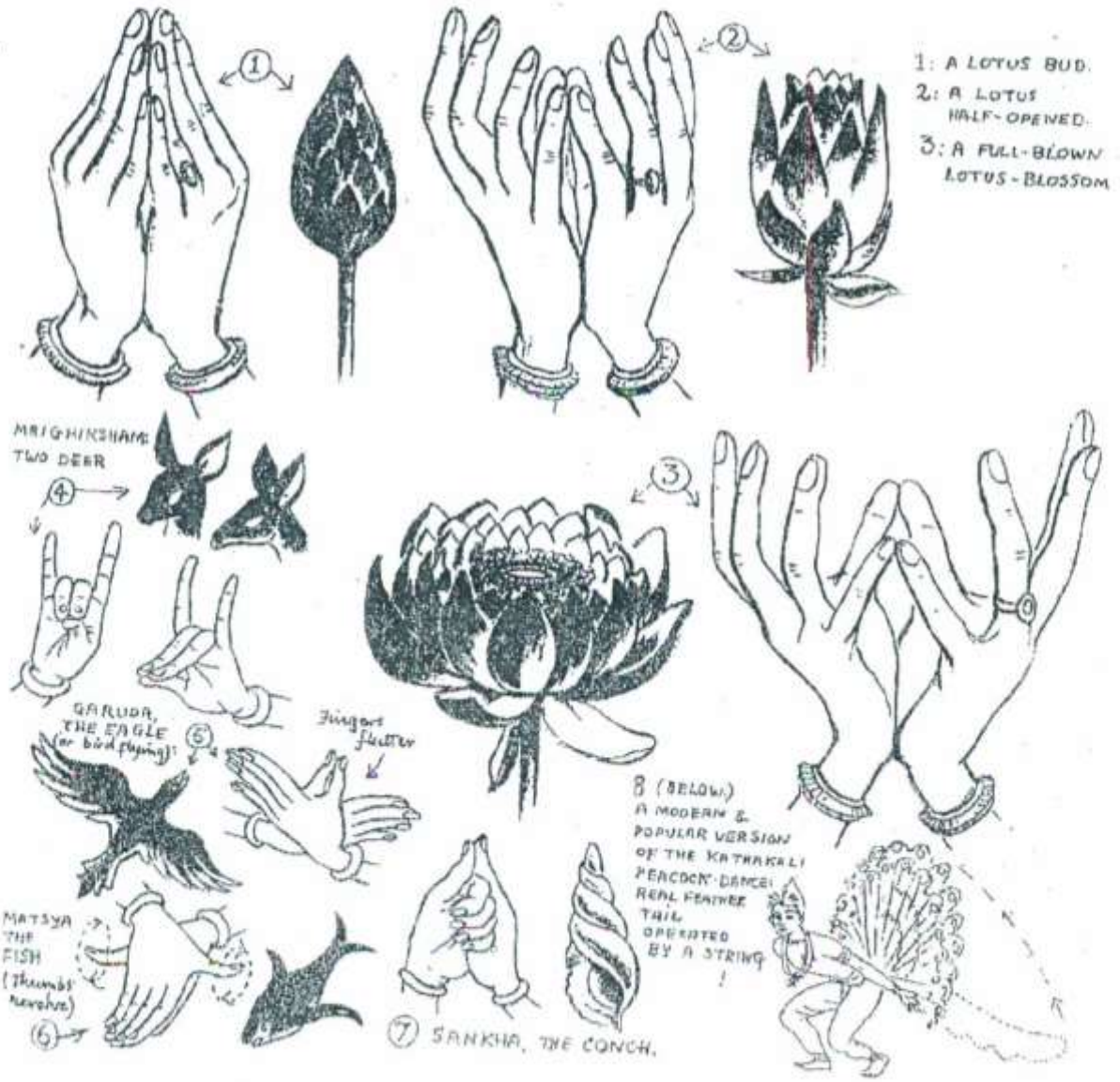
Basic Indian Hand Gestures

Samyuta (Double or Combined) Hastas (Handgestures)



Here are a few examples of hand gestures. Where the *mudra* represents an object or an animal or bird, there is little confusion. The name of the object is given as the name of the *mudra*.





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Enrichment activities that can be done before or after the Performance

- Using the diagram of hand gestures, have students identify all the different uses for a hand position. For example, Pataka can be used to say hello, give a high five, shade your eyes from the sun on a bright day, close your ears to a loud noise, hold your tummy when you are hungry, or show you want to sleep. Have students either think up ways in which they can use the hands to communicate an idea, or have them keep a log for a day or two in which they identify all the different ways in which they use their hands – what are some of the gestures that come up in their day to day activities. For example, when they wash their face in the morning, they might be using Pataka, or when they hold their toothbrush they might be using Mushti.
- Have students tell a familiar fairytale and use the hand gestures to show the princesses, dragons, and plot of story. A great exercise is when snow-white is given the poisonous apple by her wicked stepmother, or when Cinderella tries the glass slipper.
- Watch a Bollywood movie as a class and identify what styles of dance are present and also the role of the song in the movie. Draw a comparison to how western musicals such as Mary Poppins, Sound of Music, or West Side Story, use song and dance in the structure. Are there qualities that are also present in Disney movies that are musicals such as the little mermaid. Where is song and dance working and how is it more expressive then simply dialogue? Why is it a powerful element in story telling?
- What are some of the mythological stories of Indian gods and goddesses and how do they compare to the stories of Greek gods and goddesses. Are there similarities in plot lines, emotional expression, and height of emotion? How would you tell a Greek story through Indian dance? And how would you tell an Indian story in western dance such as ballet or hip hop?
- Find a hip hop song that you enjoy and try putting some Bollywood moves to it. Incorporate the hands and try doing a basic pony for foot work.
- Do an internet search for videos of Indian classical dance and observe the costumes and movement patterns.
- Do an internet search for Tap dance and Kathak – what are they rhythmic similarities and differences. Try looking up Jason Samuel Smith and Pandit Chitresh Das.

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