

# Some Pearls from the Fourth Chapter of *Abhinavabhāratī*

(*Karaṇas* and *Aṅgahāras*)

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The *Abhinavabhāratī*, Maheśvara Abhinavaguptācārya's commentary, is a beacon light for the ocean of the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. The importance of the work is not only because of the fact that it is the only complete commentary available as of date, but also because it has all the qualities of an ideal commentary. *Abhinavagupta* himself elucidates the methodology that he adopted in writing this commentary with the principles of examining all that is to be digested, eliminating the irrelevant, elucidating with clarity, solving the problems of any possible contradictions, abiding by the convictions of the original work, deciphering riddle-like double meanings, spotting out the comparisons, justifying any possible repetitions, and doing all this with the quality of brevity.<sup>1</sup>

*Abhinavagupta* was not a mere Nāṭyācārya (teacher of theater). True to his name, he was a fore-runner of all modern thoughts in performing arts, poetics and philosophy. He was able to do justice to all these faculties of knowledge and leave behind him the

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<sup>1</sup> ABh. Volume I - Chapter I, Verses 5 & 6.

products of his phenomenal achievements. All the branches of his wisdom are seen clearly reflected in his commentary on the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. His pen never hesitated to blatantly point out the mistakes of his contemporaneous artists and he is seen freely quoting, agreeing and differing with other commentators. This bold authoritative scrutinising character of **Abhinavagupta** has added charm, pep, uninterrupted interest, eloquence, and, of course, erudite complexity to his commentary. The few available translations of *Nāṭya Śāstra* do not provide translations of the *Abhinavabhāratī*.

**Abhinavagupta** was the author of many important works. Some of them are the two Vimarśinīs on *Īśvarapratyabhijñā* of **Utpaladeva**, his teacher's teacher (*parama-guru*) in Kashmiri Shaivism. *Paramārthasāra* and *Bodhapañcadaśikā* are for beginners in that field. His *Tantrāloka* and *Tantrasāra* are on the Trika system of Yoga. *Tripura Rahasya* discusses Tantric philosophy. His collection of poems includes *Kramastotra*, *Anuttarāṣṭikā*, *Bhairavastotra*, *Anubhavanivedana Stotra* and *Dehastha Devatā Stotra*. **Abhinavagupta** was also a great master rhetoric (*alāṅkāra-śāstra*). His commentaries on *Dhvanyāloka* of **Ānandavardhana** is on the theory of suggestion (*dhvani*), while that on *Nāṭya Śāstra* deals with the theory of aesthetic emotion (*rasa*). He seems to have composed dozens of works as seen through quotations from them in other works. His brief commentary on *Bhagavad Gītā* is said to be remarkable for throwing light on secrets of practical Yoga. Like a true Yogi, who has a unified control of body and mind, he is able to analyze and make us appreciate the aesthetic value of the kinetics of the human physique as well as its relationship with the psyche. The fourth chapter of *Abhinavabhāratī* is an ample proof of this.

Knowledge was considered as a common heritage of ancient India or Bharatavarṣa. The universal appeal and adherence to **Abhinavagupta**'s theory can be proved from the simple fact that this Kashmirian's work has been well preserved in the form of manuscripts in Kerala and sculpture in Tamilnadu. The constant crosscurrent in knowledge is revealed by **Abhinavagupta** himself in his *Tantrāloka* where he gives the genealogy of his teacher-disciple lineage (*guru-śiṣya-paramparā*). It is said that the sage who gave the light of true knowledge to **Abhinavagupta** was **Śambhunātha** of Jalandhara (Punjab) belonging to the Tryambaka school of philosophy; his preceptor and grand-preceptor were **Somanātha** and **Sumalinātha** respectively. These two sages lived in South

India. The origin of the Kaula system of Śiva-yoga was originated by **Matsyendranāth** of Kāmarūpa (Assam). **Abhinavagupta**'s was obviously a period which cared for truth and beauty and where it came from had no relevance, for the basic realization was that the whole earth is itself a manifestation of Lord Śiva as seen in the third introductory verse of *Abhinavabhāratī*.

The fourth chapter of *Nāṭya Śāstra* is termed "The Definition of the Vigorous Dance" (*tāṇḍava-lakṣaṇam*) and it happens to be the most important portion as far as dance technique is concerned. The editor of *Nāṭya Śāstra*, Sri. Ramaswami Sastri states that "this section of *Nāṭya Śāstra* dealing with *karaṇas*, being of a highly technical nature, was less understood and was rendered more difficult by numerous errors committed by the scribes as well as by the omissions of large portions in the manuscripts."<sup>2</sup> The seventh chapter of **Śārṅgadeva**'s *Sanḡitaratnākara* (12th century A.D.) deals with dance and the portion concerning the *karaṇas* seems to be just a verification of Abhinava's prose. This work had been of great help to the editors of *Abhinavabhāratī* and also to me in reconstructing the *karaṇas*.

## Karaṇa

Bharata's aphorisms are so brief that it is impossible to get any ideas for a practical reconstruction of the *karaṇas*, *aṅgahāras*, *piṇḍībandhas*, and *recakas*, all of which have been out of vogue for nearly five centuries. For example, the very definition of the *karaṇa* by Bharata as "*hasta-pāda-samyogaḥ nṛttasya karaṇam bhavet*" is very vague from a practical point of view. It literally means that the combination of hands and feet in dance (*nṛtta*) produces *karaṇa*. **Abhinavagupta**'s crystal-clear explanation amounts to a form of spoon feeding such that any earnest student who has the patience to go through his work would be able to picture the concept vividly.

The *nṛtta karaṇas* are often being misunderstood and referred to as postures and poses. A combination of *sthāna*, *cāri*, and *nṛtta hasta* gives rise to a whole movement, and not a mere posture. The sculptural representations of the *karaṇas* are often imitated in

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<sup>2</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra*, vol. I, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Gaekwad Oriental series, page 22.

their static attitude by some performing artists of today. The fact is that these sculptures are just frozen moments of movements. They represent only one stage of each of the *karaṇas*, which may be the beginning, the course, or the end. This fundamental point about the *karaṇa* must be properly grasped in order to penetrate the concept. The *karaṇa* is not even a mere linking of many poses. It is a coordinated movement of the hands and feet, the action of which is thoroughly based on cogency. The movement should be aesthetically appealing to give it the status of dance.

From the etymological point of view, the word *karaṇa* has its root in *kṛñ* meaning a doer, maker, causer, doing, making, causing, producing, helping, promoting, the act of doing and the doer. The work *karaṇa* also has all the above meanings.<sup>3</sup> The word *karaṇa* also suggests the idea of being an instrument, an element, an *aṅga* or part of something, and in dance it is a unit of action. We have words like *antaḥkaraṇa* meaning “an inner part” i.e., the conscience. We also have popular usage as in *manasā vācā karmaṇā trividha-karaṇaiḥ* meaning “by the three means of thought, word, and deed.” *Karaṇa* is that which causes and also effects. In dance it causes and effects the *aṅgahāra* (a dance sequence). It is a helper or companion and hence instrumental in effecting action. In dance, it is a contributory factor. It suggests motion and hence it is no wonder that it is the very name of a treatise on the motion of planets by *Varāhamihira*.<sup>4</sup> In short, a *karaṇa* in dance is to be understood as a basic unit of dance, of a dynamic and not merely static nature.

Bharata defines *karaṇa* as *hasta-pāda-samyogaḥ nṛttasya karaṇam bhavet*.<sup>5</sup> It means that the combined movement of hands and feet in dance is called the *karaṇa*. *Abhinavagupta* says that the words *hasta* and *pāda* do not denote merely the hand and foot. By *hasta* he denotes all actions pertaining to the upper part of the body and *pāda* all

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<sup>3</sup> Sir M. Monier Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ādi Śaṅkara*'s 'Bhajaḡovindam' has the phrase '... *ḡukṛñkaraṇe*.'

<sup>5</sup> *Nāṡya Śāstra with Abhinavabhāratī* (G.O.S.), chapter IV, line 30.

actions of the lower limbs of the body. *Hasta* implies *śākhā aṅga* ('branch limbs') and *upāṅga* ('subsidiary limbs'), and *pāda* denotes sides, waist, thighs, shanks and feet.<sup>6</sup>

*Āṅgika abhinaya* or physical expression is threefold, namely *śākhā*, *aṅkura* and *nr̥tta*.<sup>7</sup> *Śākhā* literally means branch. It is the term used for the various movements of the hands (*kara varhana*). All the gestures and movements of the hands are *śākhā*. *Aṅkura*, which literally means a sprout, is the movement of the hand that supplements an idea just represented. In this context, *śākhā* and *aṅkura* can also be taken to mean the *abhinaya hastas* and pantomiming through them respectively. The third element of *āṅgika abhinaya* is *nr̥tta* which is nothing but dance made up of *karaṇas* and *aṅgahāras*. *Nr̥tta* employs all the *aṅgas* and *upāṅgas*.

*Aṅgas* are the major limbs of the body which include the head, chest, sides, waist, hands and feet. *Upāṅgas* are the minor limbs, which include the neck, elbows, knees, toes and heels. The *upāṅgas* of the face include eyes, eyebrows, nose, lower lip and chin. Therefore according to *Abhinavagupta*'s commentary on Bharata's definition of the *karaṇa*, the words *hasta* and *pāda* imply practically all the *aṅgas* and *upāṅgas* of the body. Therefore the actual performance of the *karaṇa* compels a mastery over all the exercises prescribed for the major and minor limbs. Bharata himself says that all the exercises of the feet prescribed for the *sthānas* and *cārīs* apply to the *karaṇas*.<sup>8</sup> He also states that the use of the actions of the hands and feet must be suitably and coherently combined with those of the waist, sides, thighs, chest and back.<sup>9</sup> It actually signifies that the flow of the movement should be such that the entire body is involved in the curves and bends. It is not the isolated action of the specified limb alone. The actions have their own interaction,

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, *Abhinavabhāratī*, page 90.

<sup>7</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra Sangraha*, page 33, line 37.

<sup>8</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra* (G.O.S.), chapter IV, lines 169–172.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., line 58.

causing the subtle **nuances** without any disruption. These should be performed with relevance to the *vr̥ttis* and situations. Only such a correlated movement is called a *karaṇa*.

*Abhinavagupta* has defined *karaṇa* as “*kriyā karaṇam*,” i.e., action is *karaṇa*.<sup>10</sup> Action of what? It is that of *nṛtta*. Here he says “*gātrāṇām vilāsakṣepasya*,” i.e., it is the graceful throw of the limbs.<sup>11</sup> Hence we can perceive the contemporary western concept of space choreography. The *karaṇa* involves space. It is a medium for filling up the space in an aesthetic way. The conquest of space and of natural forces form part of the apotheosis of dance as established in the concept of the Dance of Shiva in the ethereal sphere. It is the duty of the dancer to realize this truth, experience it within her and transfer this transcendental feeling into a visually tangible one. By this, the artist helps the audience to share this indescribable bliss of freedom. It is not a mere theoretical philosophy, but a meaningful ideal for a practical experience of the performer.

The stage is to be treated as a microcosmic form of the universe and a sense of unbounded freedom and even a oneness with every part of it motivates motion in every direction. Then the dancer is here, there, rather everywhere. The movements of the *karaṇas* are to cover space according to *Abhinavagupta*. He says that the action commences at one point, proceeds on its course and culminates in its place of destination.<sup>12</sup> The throw (*kṣepa*) of the limbs must be without any inhibition. What is experienced is a gay abandon. Such throws must be guided by beauty and grace. The word *vilāsa* signifies this. Hence it is a free throw of limbs in a pleasing manner. That is why, though the *karaṇa* is defined by *Abhinavagupta* as “*kriyā karaṇam*,” he says it is different from the actions of normal life. It is not a mere placement, replacement or displacement. It has to be aesthetically appealing and intellectually and spiritually satisfying. The word “*nṛttasya*” in Bharata’s definition emphasizes this basic aspect of

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., *Abhinavabhāratī*, page 90.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., page 90, citation: *Pūrova-kṣetre sarṅyoga-tyāgena samucita kṣetrāntara-prapti-paryantatayā ekā kriyā tattaranmityamartha*. [???

dance. In *ṛtta* all the limbs of the body are involved. The *karāṇa* is the life of *ṛtta*. That is why it is specifically called the “*ṛtta karāṇa*.”

Another important aspect of *karāṇa* is the peculiar combination of *sthiti* (a fixed position) and *gati* (motion). According to *Abhinavagupta*, *karāṇa* includes both *avasthāna* and *gati*.<sup>13</sup> *Sthāna* is the specific posture of the body which forms the predominant feature of any movement. It may be the *sthānas* prescribed for both men and women, or even those especially for women. It may be of the nature of standing, sitting, or lying down. *Sthāna* represents a definite form of the lines of the body in a fixed condition. There may be a rhombus between the knees or it may be an erect posture. All these determine the static aspect of the *karāṇa*. In a *sthāna*, the hands and body are involved. Even if the *ṛtta hastas* undergo their specified course of action, the leg will not move away from their original placement.<sup>14</sup> No additional space is covered. Bharata gives six *sthānas* of standing nature in the tenth chapter. The twelfth chapter gives an addition of three more *sthānas* for women. These can be compared with the basic positions in which the contemporary western classical ballet dancers practice their exercises. Therefore, the *sthānas* are definite postures of the body, of a static nature. The *ṛtta hastas* are performed in the *sthānas* and *cārīs* as well. Apart from the *abhinaya hasta* meant for expressing the word-to-word meaning (*pada artha abhinaya*), there are thirty *ṛtta hastas* described in the ninth chapter. These are the hand movements indulged in a course of action for the entire arms. The mere movements of the hands create the impression of *ṛtta*. Hence the name is very apt. When they are tied to only a *sthāna*, they do not create an additional floor space. Hence it would still be a static movement. If the *ṛtta hasta* is added to the *cārīs* involving the movement of the legs, naturally it may also be instrumental in motivating

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., *Abhinavabhāratī*, page 95, citation: *Yāni sthānānīti th ?? avasthānam gatiś ceti dvaya-nirvartayam karāṇam*. [check??]

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., page 95, citation: *Tatrāvasthāne kārakayopayogi sthānakam*. [??? Check]

an intrusion into unoccupied space. Therefore, the agent of dynamism is the *cārī*. The *karaṇa* is the combination of *sthāna* and *gati*. By *gati*, Abhinavagupta means only the *cārī*.<sup>15</sup>

Abhinavagupta's perception of the *karaṇa* is a combination of *avasthāna* and *gati* and is a sum total of the two contrary concepts, the former being highly static and the latter being totally dynamic. How are they combined? Their combination may be considered as heterogeneous. In reality, they are to be conceived and presented as a homogeneous product. This is where artistry takes the upper hand. The moving *cārīs* and *nyṭta hastas* are built on fixed *sthānas*. This is the essence of *karaṇa*. It may be a movement in the Maṇḍala *sthāna* as in the *karaṇa* called Maṇḍala Svastikam or a movement in Vaiśākha *sthāna* as in the Vaiśākha Recitam *karaṇa*. It may also be a Sama *sthāna* as in Samanakam and Linam. The body carries a certain specific posture even while moving about. A certain amount of balance also underlies this concept. While there is fast movement for the feet, the torso might have to remain undisturbed. When the foot is being lifted, the chest may be frozen in an erect posture as seen in the Niṣṭhambhitam *karaṇa* where even the breath is held. Thus, these are the static elements within the dynamics of the *karaṇas*. That is why the *karaṇas* are a unique combination of contrary concepts. It is action in inaction. The limbs are involved, yet resolved. For this, a tremendous sense of balance is required. A study of this peculiarity is capable of revealing several fundamental truths of universal and individualistic structures, as reflected in the concept of the Dance of Siva in the Shaiva Āgamas. This state of action in inaction is what is recommended even in the *Bhagavad Gītā* in Karmayoga. Therefore the *karaṇas* can possibly be viewed as the physical representation of the metaphysical and spiritual perceptions.

Abhinavagupta says that due to the combinations of *gati* and *sthiti*, the resultant *karaṇas* are innumerable. But only those useful for the *aṅgahāras* are noted by Bharata.<sup>16</sup> Probably the number 108 was preferred because it is considered to be an auspicious number with a mystic value. Even Arcanā (a particular way of worship) and Japa (silent

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., page 95, citation: *gatou tu caryāha*.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., *Abhinavabhāratī*, chapter 4, page 95.



chanting) is done 108 times. There are 108 rhythmic patterns (*tālas*) too in the older system of Indian Music. Bharata's choice of the number 108 for the basic units of dance is in consonance with the general preference for this numeral. These 108 *karaṇas* became the standard ones. In later centuries, new movements were created and recorded under the name of Deśi *karaṇas*.

## Nāṭya and nṛtta

A major feature discovered in the fourth chapter of the *Abhinavabhāratī* is *Abhinavagupta*'s conviction that *nṛtta* ('dance') and *nāṭya* ('theater') are not different. He has devoted several paragraphs to establish this theory. The *karaṇas* are to be used in the Pūrvaraṅga (Preliminaries) of the Nāṭya as well as in the body of the play.

It is essential to understand Bharata's concept of *nāṭya* and *nṛtta* to appreciate the commentators' re-establishment of the same with more accuracy in analysis and intensity in expression. Bharata's *nāṭya* was "drama" and "*nṛtta*" or "dance" was one of the elements not only to beautify this art but also to serve as a medium of expression. *Nṛtta*, according to medieval authorities, was defined as purely non-representational dance devoid of *bhava* and *rasa*. *Abhinavagupta*'s theory reflects the true nature of the older tradition where *nṛtta* is an integral part of *nāṭya* and hence representational in character. *Āṅgika abhinaya* or physical expression includes *nṛtta* proper. The *karaṇas* have a psychological element in them. *Abhinavagupta* says that mono-acting is also part of *nāṭya*. In the dramatic genre (*rūpaka*) called Bhāna, many *aṅgahāras* are danced by a single artist. The various types of heroines in *nāṭya* also dance. In short, *Abhinavagupta* says that *nṛtta* is not different from *nāṭya*, for their defining characteristics (*lakṣaṇa*) are the same. He even gives examples of the use of *karaṇas* in drama.

The actor enacting Aśvatthāman's role enters with the Sūci Viddha ("Needle-Pierced") and Ūrdhvajānu ("Uplifted Foot") *karaṇas*. This is a reference to *Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa*'s high drama with a mythological theme (*naṭaka*) *Veṇī Samhāra* ("The Binding of the Hair"). In Kalidāsa's play (*nāṭaka*) *Vikramorvaśīyam*, the hero Purūravas enters with the Alapallava and Sūci *karaṇas*. Garuḍa enters with Garuḍa-plutam; Rāvaṇa's entry is with Vaiśākha Recitam; Vatsarāja in the play *Svapna Vāsavadatta* comes in with

Sambhrānta. Therefore, *nr̥tta* and *nāṭya* are considered the same. Hence, we are able to realize the extraordinary relationship that exists between the physique and the psyche, which are two salient aspects of dance and drama respectively. This theory of *Abhinavagupta* is as important as his world-renowned theory of *rasa* and hence deserves greater attention.

While commenting on the *karaṇas*, *Abhinavagupta* says that many of them are useful in communicating items through *vākyārthābhinaya* (“the physical enactment of the meanings of sentences”).<sup>17</sup> For most of the *karaṇas*, he has mentioned their psychological value.<sup>18</sup> He has actually quoted from Prakrit plays, phrases or dialogues or situations, the likes of which are to be enacted through the relevant *karaṇas*. It is unfortunate that his language as well as the source are obscure. But, the elucidation of the first *karaṇa*, Tālapuṣpa-putam, is most lucid. *Abhinavagupta* makes the concept of *vākyārthābhinaya* crystal clear through his recommendation of this *karaṇa* to enact the entire Nandi *śloka* of *Śriharṣa*’s *Ratnāvalī* which starts with the words *pādāgra* etc. This gives us a full idea of how to relate mood with movement. Hence *nr̥tta karaṇas* are capable of radiating emotions. They are not only physical and intellectual conceptions, but they do shine as physical reactions deriving from inner feelings. Hence *nr̥tta* can produce *bhāva* according to *Abhinavagupta*’s theory.

While commenting on the fifteenth *karaṇa*, *Abhinavagupta* has categorically stated that every *karaṇa* is capable of conveying some idea at least in a very subtle way. Along with his explanation of the 66th *karaṇa*, he also adds that wherever the use of the *karaṇa* is not stated, it is left to the imagination of the performer.

*Nr̥tta* seems to have been used as *āṅgika abhinaya* to express the ideas of whole sentences, mood and character. Unless the nature of *nāṭya* of those bygone days is kept in mind, it would be beyond our heads to appreciate this point. *Nāṭya* or drama was highly

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, page 96.

<sup>18</sup> Dr. Padma Subrahmanyam, *Karaṇas in Indian Dance and Sculpture*, Doctoral Thesis, Annamalai University. Uses are given along with the “Enumeration of *karaṇas*.”

stylistic in character. The *nāṭya-dharmi* mode was the basis on which dance was woven into the actual play. The *nāṭya* was hence staged through the actors singing, speaking and dancing in their roles. It included the four kinds of expression, namely through the physique (*āṅgika*), words (*vācika*), costumes, make-up and scenery (*āhārya*), and last but not the least, feeling (*sāttvika*). *Nṛtta karaṇas* were utilized to express various emotions. This was because of an amazing insight that our ancients had into the psychological effect of physical movements.

## Āṅgahāra

*Abhinavagupta* defines *āṅgahāra* and explains it as the process of moving the limbs from one place to another. Because it is loved and practiced by Hara (Shiva), the shadow of his name is incorporated in the term *āṅgahāra*. It must be understood as the twisting and bending of the limbs in a graceful manner.<sup>19</sup>

After mastering the basic exercises and the units of dance namely, the *karaṇas*, their simple combinations are to be learnt.

Two *karaṇas* make up a *nṛtta-māṭṛkā*; two, three or four *māṭṛkās* make an *āṅgahāra*; three *karaṇas* make a Kalāpaka; four a Sandaka; five a Saṅghātaka, and any number more than that forms the *āṅgahāra*. The *māṭṛkā* is made up of two different *karaṇas*. The *māṭṛkās* and *āṅgahāras* are used in *piṇḍibandhas* (group dances).

The *āṅgahāras* have their individual existence in both *nṛtta* and *nāṭya*. They may form part of *nṛtya* (expressive, as opposed to pure, dance) too. They can be compared with the Jātis of Sādir, (*bharata-nāṭyam* of today), Tirmanas of Bhagavatamela, Bois of Kathak and Kalasam of Kathakali. They are meant for aesthetic appeal.

Bharata has enumerated 32 *āṅgahāras* which are specific groupings of *karaṇas*. These *āṅgahāras* do not imply any special serial order. But the order of the occurrence of the *karaṇas* is important in each *āṅgahāra*. According to *Abhinavagupta*, though there are 108 *karaṇas*, only 64 are more important from the point of view of cogency of rhythm

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<sup>19</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra* and *Abhinavagupta's Abhinavabhāratī*, vol. 1, 2nd edition (GOS), pp. 167–168.

(*gati*). But **Abhinavagupta** concedes that, on the basis of correlation of movements and rhythm, innumerable *aṅgahāras* can arise. But only 32 have been given, for they are most fruitful from visual appeal. They ought to be taught and learnt in particular.<sup>20</sup>

## Piṇḍibandha

The *piṇḍi-bandha* was understood as dances which involved more than one dancer. In short, the *piṇḍibandha* is the technique of group formations. Bharata's classification of these reveal the most modern concept of group choreography, which is especially studied in the Western schools. In the last few centuries, many of the classical dances of India emerged as solo dance performances. Though the idea of group dance still continued to exist in the folk dances like the Daṇḍaras, Raslīlā, Kolāṭṭam, Kummi, Pinnal Kolāṭṭam and similar other dances in many parts of India, the classical traditions like Sadir, Odissi, and Kathak remained as solo programs only. Even when they involved more than one dancer, there was no variety in their formations. In the present context, when producing dance dramas is the fashion, a revival of Bharata's *piṇḍibandhas* is sure to open new vistas before the Indian choreographers.

The technical term *piṇḍibandha* has not been defined anywhere by Bharata. **Abhinavagupta** describes it as "*piṇḍi ādhāra aṅgādi saṅghātaḥ*," i.e., *piṇḍi* is a collection of all those basic elements which make a composite whole. He also states that *aṅgahāras* from the core of the *piṇḍibandhas*; but there are other things too; for they can be mere *karaṇas* as well. Even two *karaṇas* can form a *piṇḍi*. That is how the *nṛtta-mātrkā* becomes important. Just as the sky is spoken of as being with and without limit, *piṇḍis* are said to be existing both in parts and also as a whole. *Piṇḍi* is called *piṇḍibandha* because it draws in it every aspect and ties them together.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., page 89.

<sup>21</sup> Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra* and Abhinavagupta's *Abhinavabhāratī* - Volume I - Second Edition (GOS) - Pgs. 167 & 168.

*Abhinavagupta* says that the *piṇḍī*s reveal the manifestation of the Lord. By this he means the several formations of groups to satisfy or portray different deities, Bharata gives the following list:

Īśvara *piṇḍī* for Īśvara

Pattasi, i.e. Suelam *piṇḍī* for Nandi

Simhavāhinī for Caṇḍikā

Tarkṣya (Garuḍa) for Viṣṇu

Padma *piṇḍī* for Brahmā

Airāvati for Indra

Jaṣa (Fish) *piṇḍī* for Manmatha

Śikhī *piṇḍī* (Peacock) for Kumāra)

Padma for Śrī (Lakṣmī)

Dhara (drops of water) for Jāhnavyā (Gaṅgā)

Pāśa *piṇḍī* for Yama

Nadī (River) for Varuṇa

Yakṣī for Kubera

Hala (Plough) for Balarāma

Sarpa for Bhogīs (Nāgas)

Mahāpiṇḍī for Gaṇeśvarī, for breaking Dakṣa's sacrifice

Triśūlakṛti for Rudra who annihilated Andhakāsura<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., lines 253 to 258.

## Recaka

In all the above aspects of *nr̥tta*, the beautifying agent which gives grace and refinement to the actions is the *recaka*. Manmohan Ghosh translates Bharata's definition as "the term *recita* (relating to a limb) means moving it round separately (i.e., not in any *karaṇa* or *cārī*) or its drawing up or its movement of any kind, separately."<sup>23</sup> The definition itself is rather obscure. The translation makes it a puzzle. The major problem that we face is that the ten lines of Bharata's *Nāṭya Śāstra* relating to the *recakas* are said to be not available in the manuscripts of *Abhinavagupta*'s *Abhinavabhāratī*.<sup>24</sup> *Abhinavagupta*'s recension has only the names of the 4 *recakas*. Their definitions are missing. Hence we have to contend ourselves with the available sources and try to speculate on it. The *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, which closely follows *Abhinavabhāratī* for its *nr̥tta* chapter, also does not enlighten us any further. *Kallinātha*, its commentator, just adds that *recakas* form part of the *aṅgahāras*.<sup>25</sup> Since *Sāraṅgadeva* does not give us details in his *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, it is likely that *Abhinavagupta* himself had not commented more on this. Probably the recension of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* that he knew did not have these ten lines. They may be an interpolation also. However, the *recakas* seem to have had some place of importance in Bharata's time itself, for he mentions its four classifications, namely the *recakas* of the feet (*pāda*), waist (*kaṭi*), hands (*hasta*) and neck (*grīva*).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra*, English translation by Manmohan Ghosh (Manisha Granthalaya, 2nd edition), vol. 4, p. 66.

<sup>24</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra* (G.O.S.), chapter 4, p. 163, footnote 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*; see *Kallinātha*'s comments on line 797 of Chapter 7. He says that the *recakas* are useful in adjusting the time unit.

<sup>26</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra* (G.O.S.), chapter 4, line 248; citation: *pāda-recaka ekaḥ syat dvitīya kaṭi-recaka kara-recakas tritīyas tu caturtaḥ kaṅṭha-recakaḥ*. I have solved the problem of understanding the *recaka* from a practical angle. This has been dealt with in great detail in my doctoral thesis on "*Karaṇas* in Indian Dance and Sculpture."

With regard to the commentary that the sculptors of *karaṇa* figures followed at Tanjavur, at the Bṛhadīśvara temple (1000–1006 A.D.), very little can be inferred. However, Dr. T.N. Ramachandran's view that they have followed *Abhinavagupta's* *Abhinavabhāratī* does not seem to hold good on a close scrutiny.<sup>27</sup> *Abhinavagupta's* date is generally ascribed between the 9th and 11th centuries. The impact of this Kashmirian's work could not have reached the Cola country in that short a period. In fact some of the figures seem to even differ from his *Abhinavabhāratī*. The practical reconstruction of the *karaṇas* without and with the help of this commentary, reveals their evolution and the change they had undergone during the centuries that had galloped between Bharata and *Abhinavagupta*. By directly following Bharata, we derive a particular movement. But *Abhinavagupta's* interpretation changes the shape of the same. The Tanjavur figures represent Bharata's thoughts directly and not through the help of this only available commentary. This is, however, a greater asset, because to a performer, it gives a bonus of more than one interpretation, for at least some of the *karaṇas*. To quote a few examples of *karaṇa* figures which differ from *Abhinavagupta's* commentary and yet authentically follow Bharata, are *karaṇas* 1, 4, 7, 8, 31 and 49.

Regarding the commentary that might have been followed for the creation of Kumbhakonam series of *karaṇa* figures at Sargopani temple (12th Century A.D.), it has to be confessed that it is difficult to pinpoint. *Abhinavabhāratī* has been of very great help. But, there are some figures which do not agree with the descriptions found in this text, they may either represent some other reading of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* or even the contemporaneous practice. The *karaṇas* 4, 19, 62, 76, 78, 80, 93 and 105 distinctly vary from *Abhinavagupta's* comments. *Karaṇa* 93 of this series seems to follow *Kīrtidhara* as quoted by *Jayappa* in *Nṛtta Ratnāvalī*. This is not however enough to conclude that all of them must have followed *Kīrtidhara*. In any case, his work is not available for verification. It is also likely that those sculptures may have been based on some other commentary. No other commentary other than that of *Abhinavagupta* is available in full

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<sup>27</sup> Dr. T.N. Ramachandran's "Dance *karaṇas* of Bharata *nāṭya* Sculptures in Tanjore & Kumbhakonam Temples" - An article in "The Mail," Madras, 1970.

as of date. When the other commentaries see the light of day, more insight into the subject can blossom.

*Abhinavagupta's* *Abhinavabhāratī* has been extremely useful in interpreting the Chidambaram series of *karaṇas* at the Natarāja temple (13th century A.D.), more so than even those of Tanjavur and Kumbhakonam.

## Tāṇḍavam

Though *Abhinavagupta* was a great religious figure, his scientific approach is seen in his explanation for the term *tāṇḍava*. The *karaṇas* are said to be units of dance performed by Maheśvara. According to the mythology found in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, when Bharata produced the drama Tripuradāha (“The Burning of the Three Cities”) at Kailāsa in the immediate presence of Shiva, this great God was reminded of his own dance which he performs in the evenings. He asked Bharata to include this in his production and made Taṇḍu teach the art to Bharata. Bharata says that the dance art came to be called *tāṇḍavam* because Bharata’s teacher was Taṇḍu. While commenting on this, *Abhinavagupta*, in spite of all his unshakeable *bhakti* for Shiva, ventures on a rational approach. While there are some authorities who associate Taṇḍu with Nandikeśvara, *Abhinavagupta* says that the *bhaṇḍam* (percussion instruments) which produce sounds like “Bhan, Than” etc. are important for *nṛtta*. *Abhinavagupta* says that the term *tāṇḍava* is derived from the sounds like “Tando” produced through the accompanying drums. Since he has the base for this in grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), we are able to see that he is quoting the onomatopoeic theory of sound very rationally to explain the origin of the term *tāṇḍava*.

## Dombikā form

Among the references to some of his contemporaneous traditions, *Abhinavagupta's* reference to “Dombikā” is interesting from both technical and sociological points of view. This is performed by a single danseuse (*nartakī*) and in short it seems to have been erotic in nature, designed as an entertainment for the royal



audience, to win favors. It certainly involves mastery over music and dance, in which the prince is himself addressed indirectly or directly as the Lover. The Ḍombikā also used speech. The Ḍombikā does not change her original identity. In short it must have been the performance of the royal courtesans (*rāja-dāsī*).

## Importance for Practice

**Abhinavagupta**, the great theoretician as we understand him, attaches enormous importance to the actual practice of the art. For example, while commenting on the definition of the *aṅgahāra* called Apavidddham, he adds that the rhythm and action which are to be charmingly graceful cannot be comprehended unless one is an expert in the field. Only those who know how to handle the form can absorb the idea of the linking of movements through the use of the head, eyes, brows, etc., in chaining the *karaṇas*. He categorically states that others, who are mere theoreticians, cannot understand it.<sup>28</sup> He then adds that, for the same reason, the definition of the *sthānas*, *maṇḍalas*, etc. given by some of his contemporaries are not useful. Here two points can be inferred. One is that **Abhinavagupta** had some practical understanding of the art and the other that even during his time, the older technique was not easily understood, probably due to the lapse of time between the author of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* and the commentator.

## Creativity and Tradition

**Abhinavagupta** was quite a revolutionary with an open mind to appreciate creativity. He was truly a genius and had no complex in facing facts regarding the concept of tradition. This catholicity, which is a result of true knowledge, is seldom met with, even in our 20th century, among the pseudo-guardians of our so-called traditions. **Abhinavagupta** opines that since even Lord Shiva says that he was reminded of the *karaṇas*, it denotes that the origin of the art cannot be traced; it is without a beginning

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<sup>28</sup> *Anyasya tu utapi prayoktam asakya na cāpi nirūpayitum sakya; Abhinavabhāratī* (G.O.S., 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), vol. 1, p.142. [*ukto'pi* ??? - check the Sanskrit citation!!!]

(*anādi*). Even he renewed it, ornamented it, repainted it, just as the Vedas were discovered and not invented. The construction of the Vedas is immortal. Yet every creature of unending generations uses them according to their power of perception and absorption. Thus the need arises for their flow in a novel way, without interfering with the element of creativity. Such an attempt is called “an artifact” (*kṛtaka*). Each of the creations has its own postures, actions and even relevant rhythmic patterns and they must be manifested without detriment to continuity. Therefore like the Veda, *nṛtta* is not to be construed then and there. Such an action or creation is tied up with the existing avalanche [avalong ???] of previous creations and hence it attains permanence (*nitya*). *Abhinavagupta* concludes that if this concept is well understood, there will be no contradiction between *kṛtaka* and *nitya*. With regard to creativity, he further explains the meaning of the term *datta*. *Datta* is one who knows the value of independence and is also capable of using his own intellectual faculties to create a variety of an uncommon nature and truly brings in a fresh beautiful perception. Therefore beautification has a permanent value and this is certainly based on practice. These creations cannot be discarded or ignored. One really wonders at *Abhinavagupta*’s extraordinary support for modernity. His only criterion is its beauty and continuity with historicity.

*Abhinavagupta*’s religious, philosophic, and metaphysical perception is quite transparent in his fourth chapter. He says that the fruit of the gentle dance (*lāsya*) is that it pleases the Goddess (Devī) and that of Tāṇḍava is that it pleases Shiva who is with Soma.<sup>29</sup> He says that the spectators must either be entertained or enlightened. These should be found at least intermittently. He says these qualities are not to be found in his days.

## Dṛśya and Adṛṣṭa Phala

He then analyzes the results of performances from the mundane perceptible and the spiritual invisible levels. From a yogic angle the result of singing is not considered as tangible (*drṣṭa*). But that of programs like Ḍombikā is its vicinity. It is merely worldly

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<sup>29</sup> *Abhinavabhāratī*; *ibid.*, p.177.

(*laukika*), thus being a gross physical object of pleasure to the senses along with an economic advantage. This is the level of perceptible fruits (*dr̥ṣṭa phala*). But **Abhinavagupta** himself criticizes his contemporaneous Ḍombikā as not even fulfilling the above needs. Apart from the entertainment value and vocational advantage of these arts, **Abhinavagupta** glorifies the fruit of true art. It has an intangible fruit (*adr̥ṣṭa phala*). The very entry of the danseuse (*nartakī*) is meant to please the Gods. The gratification of the spectators is the core of the subject of *rasa* in *nāṭya*. But it must cater to the goals (*purusārtha*) of life: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* and *mokṣa*. Otherwise *nāṭya* would merely become a means for living. While commenting on Puṣpāñjali (“offering of a handful of flowers”) and rules regarding the theatrical Preliminaries (*pūrvaraṅga*), he says that while performing the dance-gestures (*abhinaya*) for Puṣpāñjali, one’s looks must not be diverted towards the audience. It is not addressed to the spectators. It must be performed looking into one’s own soul. This lights up the core of the monastic philosophy of Kashmiri Shaivism. While enunciating the fruits of *nāṭya* and its study (*phala-śruti*), he says that the dancers, actors, sponsors, and financiers and spectators are all purified from their sins and attain unlimited benefits, including the realm of Shiva (Śiva-loka), merely through *nṛtta*. In the colophon at the end of the chapter, he refers to himself as a “a supreme Shaiva teacher” (*maheśvarācārya*), whose ignorance is being burnt by the three eyes of Shiva, which are the sun (*sūrya*), moon (*candra*), and fire (*agni*).

The staunch Pratyabhijñā Saivite character of **Abhinavagupta**’s *Abhinavabhāratī* does get radiated throughout the work. The very basic principle of monastic Kashmiri Shaivism is seen reflected in Bharata’s *Nāṭya Śāstra* itself and hence there is no wonder that the most able propagator of this philosophy took upon himself the task of writing a commentary on it. Kashmiri Shaivism, which has spiritual aims, does not ignore the worldly goals of life consisting of objective enjoyments. It advocates a path aimed at both enjoyment (*bhukti*) and liberation (*mukti*) and both can be pursued simultaneously. It lays stress on devotion (*bhakti*) and makes it practicable. Devotion, enjoyment and liberation being very close to the goals of life (*purusārtha*), take *Nāṭya Śāstra* very close to the basic aim of Kashmiri Shaivism. Moreover, this Pratyabhijñā philosophy accepts 36 principles (*tattvas*) consisting of the 24 *tattvas* of the Sāṅkhya system in addition to 12 of its own. Ramaswamy Sastri, the editor of *Nāṭya Śāstra*, opines that “It is also believed that the

*Nāṭya Śāstra* has also been divided into 36 chapters by Bharata to harmonize or correspond to the 36 principles of Pratyabhijñā philosophy of Kashmir.”<sup>30</sup>

Though **Abhinavagupta**’s commentary alone is extant completely, it is interesting to note that all the rest of the commentators on *Nāṭya Śāstra* like **Bhaṭṭodbhatta**, **Lollaṭa**, **Maṭṛgupta**, **Śaṅkuka**, **Bhaṭṭanayaka** and **Bhaṭṭayantra**, who flourished from 8th century onwards were all Kashmiris. It is a great tragedy that this art has practically been swept from that heavenly region. Perhaps it is the duty of the experts in other regions to erase this artistic poverty from that land which is endowed so bountifully with nature’s charm. For this uphill task, the other regions will also have to regain much of the lost traditions and values. May Bharata and **Abhinavagupta** re-establish themselves through the undying vitality of their works.

**Abhinavagupta**’s elucidative work has almost exhausted all the salient features of theatre art of not only Bharata’s days, but also those of the commentator. From his commentary, we are able to conclude that the *Nāṭya Śāstra* in its present form had taken its shape at least a thousand years ago. If we are to accept Dr. Manmohan Ghosh’s dating of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* as 500 B.C.,<sup>31</sup> we are able to admire with awe the inspiring efforts of **Abhinavagupta** in his daring venture of clearing the hazy clouds of an almost forgotten tradition of the dim past, shrouding the *Nāṭya Śāstra*. Though Bharata Muni is believed by some scholars and the Kashmiris in general to have belonged to Kashmir, **Abhinavagupta**, the Kashmiri scholar states that much of the older traditions had faded out of practice. He says that in fact, it is with a view to save this tradition that he is writing this commentary, where he leaves some room for inferences.<sup>32</sup> If that was the state of affairs a thousand years ago, what could be our destiny today?

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<sup>30</sup> *Nāṭya Śāstra* (G.O.S., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. 1, Introduction, p.16.

<sup>31</sup> Manmohan Ghosh’s English Translation of *Nāṭya Śāstra*, vol. 1, Introduction, p. I xv. [check the I ???]

<sup>32</sup> *Evam anyad api ūhyam iti an-upayogyāt samastam na likhitam āgama-bhraṁsa-rakṣanāya tu diṅ nirupitā* (vol. 1, p. 169).