

Comparative Study of the Dance Sculptures in Early and Later Chalukya Temples

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Abstract

A large part of Southern and Central India was ruled by two Chalukyan dynasties and they are commonly known as Early and Later Chalukyas. Early Chalukyas, also known as Badami Chalukyas, came to power during mid sixth century and reigned for nearly two centuries. Later Chalukyas, also known as Kalyani Chalukyas, came to power in 10th century and ruled till the end of 12th century. Both the Chalukyan dynasties have contributed immensely to the development of art and architecture in India. This paper aims at examining the dance sculptures of Early and Later Chalukyan temples in Deccan region. The study is important as it can throw light on the two distinct phases in the evolution of Indian classical dance. The research can bring out the details of sculptural patterns that are influenced by the Mārga and Deśī traditions of dance. The Chalukyan temples were constructed in two periods, that is, one period- before tenth century when the Mārga was the central tradition of dance and popular all over India and the second period, that is after 10th century when the Deśī tradition was popular. During the second period Deśī tradition was so strong that the treatises on dance which came after 10th century found it imperative that they codified Deśī techniques along with Bharata's Mārga techniques. Interestingly the first text on the Deśī came during the Later Chalukyan period. The monumental text Mānasollāsa which substantially describes the Deśī tradition is attributed to Kalyani Chalukyan King Someshwara III. Dance sculptures in temples bear a testimony for the art that was practiced during ancient and medieval period. The dance sculptures in Early Chalukya temples of Badami, Aihole, Pattadakallu, Alampur depict the Mārga tradition of dance whereas later Chalukya temples of Haveri, Lakkundi, Dambal, Gadag, Laxmeshwara etc. reveal both Mārga and Deśī tradition of dance that was popular in their society.

1. Introduction

India is home to one of the most ancient civilisations. The nation is endowed with an incomparable gift of dance that embraces a wide spectrum of forms and styles such as classical, folk, ritual, tribal, modern etc. Extensive representation of dancing is seen in the literature, sculpture, iconography and painting. Dance like any other aspect of Indian culture and tradition has developed over thousands of years. The present-day classical dance styles have a common root though they are different from one another in their exposition. This paper aims at understanding the process of evolution of dance in the Deccan region of South India in two distinct phases of history- the ancient and the medieval period.

1.1 Mārga and Deśī

Medieval theoreticians who wrote on dance and dramaⁱ have broadly divided dance into two categories- the *mārga* and *deśī*. The first category strictly adhered to the rules of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and hence called as the *mārga*, which meant the ‘established path’. The other tradition, the *deśī* indicated the regional tradition. The transitional forms created by blending of *mārga* and the regional variations also were called as the *deśī*. *Mārga* was popular till tenth century and after this period assimilation of dance forms led to the evolution of dance. This gave rise to a new tradition of dance which was named by theoreticians of medieval period as ‘*deśī*’ since they represented regional style of dance. The treatises and manuals which came after twelfth century have discussed elaborately on the *deśī* tradition. Texts like *Mānasollāsa* of Someśvara, *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* of Śārngadeva, *Nṛttaratnāvali* of Jāyasenāpati, *Saṅgīta Samayasāra* of Pārshvadeva, *Nṛtyādhyāya* of Aśokamalla, *Nartana Nirṇaya* of Pundarīka Viṭṭala, *Saṅgīta Darpaṇa* of Dāmodara and *Saṅgīta Makaranda* of Veda provide significant information on this tradition.

2 Dance Sculptures in Temples

Indian dance has influenced the sculptors to chisel the dynamic movements on the walls of the temples. The *śilpa* and *citra* are closely related to *Nāṭya*. According to Stella Kramrisch the rules of Iconography or *Pratimā lakṣaṇa* are based on *Nāṭyaśāstra*. She finds an array of similarities between the canons of *Śilpaśāstra* (SS) and *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS).ⁱⁱ It can be further stated that the sculptors of medieval period not only knew the canons of NS but also aware of the newer set of rules and codes included in later treatises and manuals on dance. The sculptors worked closely with their contemporary dance gurus, actors and dancers while creating enchanting images of dance. The dance sculptures in temples bear a testimony for the art that was practiced during ancient and medieval period. The paper examines the sculptural patterns in dance images of Early and Later Chalukya temples of Karnataka state on the basis of the kinetic and static elements such as *sthāna-sⁱⁱⁱ*, *cāri-s^{iv}* and *karaṇa-s^v* of both the *mārga* and *deśī* variety. And by doing so, we can understand the transition that took place almost

800-1000 years ago in Indian classical dance in this region. In addition, exploration is also carried to identify the complex dance sequences of the *deśī* tradition mentioned in the medieval texts.

2.1 Sculptural Evidences for Evolution of Dance in Karnataka

The temples of South India built under the patronage of early and later and Chalukya, Hoysala, Pallava, Kakatiya, Chola and Vijayanagara kings portray exclusive themes that represent and interpret dance and music in greater dimension of aesthetic sensibilities. With regard to Chalukya period, dance and music were extensively used to embellish the temples built during their reign. A careful study of these temples, known for its rich architecture, variety and aesthetic standards indicates the involvement of sculptors, architects, painters, dancers, musicians and patrons in contributing original and first-hand information on the dance and music traditions which prevailed during historical times. Karnataka has been regarded as an open air museum of architecture and sculptures belonging to various schools of art. There are hundreds of temples showcasing different schools of art and architecture. Karnataka was fortunate to have rulers who patronised the art, architecture and literary activities. Different dynasties which ruled this region have contributed to the temple building activity and these temples are replete with enchanting dance images. Art historians like Percy Brown^{vi}, Kapila Vatsyayan^{vii}, place Karnataka high in the evolution and development of temple architecture and historical sculptures. It is also true in the representation of dance and music traditions. The sculptural representations preserve the ancient traditions, culture and life style. The costumes, hair style, musical instruments, dance movements are immortalised in temple sculptures. The ancient temples reflect the tradition that was in practice during their period of construction.

3. The Chalukyas

A large part of Karnataka was ruled by two Chalukyan dynasties and they are commonly known as Early and Later Chalukyas. Early Chalukyas or Badami Chalukyas came to power during mid sixth century and for nearly two centuries they governed major parts of Southern and Central India. Later Chalukyas or Kalyana Chalukyas came to power in 10th century and they ruled larger parts of western Deccan region till the end of 12th century. Both the Chalukyan dynasties have contributed immensely to the development of art and architecture in India. This paper aims at examining the dance sculptures of Early and Later Chalukyan temples in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The study is important as it can throw light on the two distinct phases in the evolution of Indian classical dance. The study can bring out the details of sculptural patterns that are influenced by the *mārga* and *deśī* traditions of dance. The Chalukyan temples were constructed in two periods, that is, one period- before tenth century when the *Mārga* was the central tradition of dance and popular all over India and the

second period, that is after 10th century when the deśī tradition was popular. During the second period deśī tradition was so strong that the treatises on dance which came after 10th century found it imperative that they codified deśī techniques along with Bharata's mārṅa techniques. Interestingly the first text on the deśī came during the Later Chalukyan period. The monumental text Mānasollāsa or the Abhilāśitārtha Cintāmaṇi is attributed to Kalyana Chalukyan King Someśvara III.

3.1 The Chalukyas of Badami (535-757 AC)

The early Chalukyas of Badami were the major power in the Deccan from the mid-sixth century to mid-eighth century. Pulikeśi I was the founder of the Chalukya dynasty of Badami. Chalukyas were an indigenous Kannada family with Kannada as their mother tongue. (Sounder Rajan 2009:5) They were feudatories of Kadamba-s of Banavāsi. Their earlier capital was Aihole which was vulnerable to enemy attacks and hence they shifted their capital to Badami as it was surrounded on three sides by hillocks. Pulikeśi I built a hill fortress in Badami in 543 AC. They ruled the territory comprising parts of Karnataka and Maharāṣṭra region.

The Chalukyas of Badami were great patrons of the fine arts, especially music and dance. At the same time, the Chalukya rulers were also interested in experimenting in temple art and architecture. Both these aspects are clearly reflected in the sculptures adorning the walls of the temples they built in Karnataka. During their reign, they built temples at Aihole, Badami, Paṭṭadakal and Mahakuta. The temple-building activity under during their period can be broadly divided into two stages. The first stage is represented by the temples at Aihole and Badami and the second stage is represented by the temples at Paṭṭadakal. The sand stone temples erected by the early Chalukyas comprise the largest and earliest group of standing structures in South India. The amalgamation of art and architectural styles of equal interest are the images that adorn the wall panels, beams, columns, brackets and ceilings. The sculptural representation during their period is known for their plastic beauty and serene and restrained expressions. The temple sculptures display gods, goddesses, as well as mythical characters from Ramāyaṇa, Mahābhārata and Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The dance sculptures and dance like sculptures in cave temples and structural temples of Aihole, Badami, Paṭṭadakal and Mahakuta were studied.

3.2 The Chalukyas of Kalyana (973-1189AC)

The Chalukyas of Kalyana came to power in 973 AC overthrowing the Raṣṭrakūṭa dynasty. Kalyana (Today's Basava Kalyana in Karnataka) was their capital and the founder of this empire was Taila II. Some of the illustrious rulers of this dynasty were Someśvara I, Vikramāditya IV, Someśvara III and Jagadekamalla I. Fine arts flourished during the Chalukyas of Kalyana. The temple building activity was in full scale during their reign. They have left behind some of the most beautiful monuments for posterity. Substantial literary

activity also was there during their period. King Someśvara III was a great scholar and compiled the encyclopaedia 'Mānasollāsa' or 'Abhilāṣitārta Cintāmaṇi'. This text is considered as a monumental work in the field of arts, science, medicine, architecture, music and dance. The text gives volumes of information as it describes the art that was practised in the society. Even the queens of Chalukyas themselves were great dancers and musicians. The temples of their period were decorated with arresting dance sculptures at door jambs, windows, ceilings, pillars, niches and recess of the walls. The temple complexes at Lakkundi, Dambal, Gadag, Itagi, Haveri, Kuruvatti, Balligave are known for the quality of sculptural art.

3.3 Dance Images in Early Chalukya Temples

Senior art historian Choodamani Nandagopal in Dance and Music in Temple Architecture has made an in depth analysis of the imagery of Siva in Saiva Cave of Badami and Ravalphadi Cave in Aihole. She has identified several karaṇas in these two figures and observes that both the figures are carved strictly following the canons of Nāṭyaśāstra. This examines other figures in early Chalukya temples on the basis of NS and later texts on the deśī tradition.

3.3.1 Gandharva in Garuḍapluta

The theme of flying Gandharva-s, Vidhyadhara-s and Apsarā-s are the favourite of the sculptors of early Chalukya period. A number of figurines of flying Gandharvās can be seen in the temples of this period. To depict flying Gandharvās the sculptors have chosen garuḍapluta karaṇa. The motif of flying Gandharvās has a long and continuous history in Indian art. Khandagiri caves of Orissa (2nd century BC), the stupa of Amaravati, Bahrut are adorned with such Gandharvās. Flying is not depicted by wings but it is depicted through the dynamic dance movement. Here we can certainly link the suggestion in Viṣṇu Dharmottara Purāṇa, which says to gain knowledge of citra sūtra (both painting and sculpture) one should have the knowledge of the nṛtya sūtra. This gives a clear indication that ancient sculptors had



Pl. 1 Gandharva in Garuḍapluta

the knowledge of SS and NS and that explains how these artisans arrested a dynamic movement of dance in stone during ancient period. The flying motif is not shown through the

open wings. The flying human figure's one leg is bent and kept on the base and the other leg is stretched behind and held in vṛścika position.

Pl. No 1 shows a Gandharva in Garuḍapluta karaṇa (Karaṇa no. 70) on a panel at Hucchappayyamata in Konti Group of temples in Aihole.

The pertaining śloka is,

Pr̥shtaprasaritaḥ pādaḥ latārecitakau karau

samunnatam śiraścaiva garuaplutakam bhavet (NS IV- 133).

The feet are extended backwards. One foot is taken near the ear as in vṛścika, says NS. AB and SR also give the same description.

3.3.2 Śiva Gaṇā-S in Dancing Mode

Śiva Gaṇās in dancing mode are abundant in the temples of early Chalukya. They mostly adorn the basement friezes of the temples. These dwarfish figures with round belly are playful and they seem to be following the dance instructions of their lord, Śiva. One such sculpture (Pl 2) depicts gaṅgāvatarāṇa karaṇa (No 108) in Rāvalaphadi cave temple in Aihole. The pertaining śloka for Gaṅgāvatarāṇa (descent of the Ganges) is,

Urdhvāṅgulitalau pādau tripatākāvadhomukhau

hastau śirasannatam ca gaṅgāvatarāṇamtviti (NS IV- 166)

The toes of the feet and the heels are turned up; hands in tripatāka facing downwards and the head in Sannata constitute this karaṇa.



Pl. 2 Gaṇa in Gaṅgāvatarāṇa, Aihole



Pl 3 Gaṇa in Nikuncita, Badami

Another sculpture in Badami cave

temple portrays a dwarf gaṇa (Pl. 3) dancing in nikuncita (Karaṇa No.26). The NS says nikuncita can be performed in the following manner:

Vṛścikam caranaṃ kṛtvā karaṃ parsvaṃ nikuncayet

Nasāgre dakṣiṇaṃ caiva jneyaṃ tattu nikuncitaṃ (NS IV -86)

Foot performs vṛścika^{viii} (karaṇa 47) along with the left hand bent on its side. The right hand is arched over the tip of the nose. This karaṇa can be performed on both the sides. Other texts, like AB, SUS and SR say hands can be in arāla, kaṭakā mukha and sucī.

3.3.3 Lady in Āyata Sthāna

A beautiful maiden (Pl.4) is standing on the right side of the entrance of Aralibasappa temple in Aihole. She is standing in āyata sthāna, one of the sthānas mentioned in NS. The sthāna is attained by keeping right foot in sama and the other in tryaśra. The sculptor has cleverly used cinna kaṭi to give a graceful look to the entire sculpture. She is holding a lotus in kaṭakā mukha hasta with her hand gracefully resting on the niche in the wall using latā hasta.



Pl 4 Female figure in Āyata Sthāna, Aihole



Pl 5 Śiva in Ūrdhvajānu, Paṭṭadakal

3.3.4 Śiva in Ūrdhvajānu Karaṇa

The mythology of dancing Śiva dominates the pilastered projections of much of the temples in Paṭṭadakal. One such sculpture on the outer wall of the Virūpākṣa temple is shown in Pl.5. Here, Śiva is dancing in ūrdhvajānu karaṇa on Apasmāra. The vital energy and the vigour of dance are well evident in the dancing figure. The corresponding lakṣaṇa śloka for this karaṇa in NS is,

kuñcitam pādmutkṣipya jānustanasaman nyaseth
prayogavaśagau hastā ūrdhvajānu prakīrtitam (NS IV-85)

The karaṇa is performed by lifting the foot with its knee at the level of the chest along with the suitable action of the hands. AB says when the foot is raised, respective hand also is raised.

Thus the dance sculpture denote the staggering variety and the quality of sculptures found in the temples of early Chalukya period. It appears by the time of early Chalukya period the NS tradition was quite popular, attracted the attention of the kings artistes and sculptors. Sometime during ninth and tenth century the style of dance absorbed new techniques and by the time the later Chalukya period arrived the sculptural adaptation of dance became distinct. In the next chapter the dance sculptures that depict the deśī tradition of dance are analysed in detail.

3.4 Dance Images in Later Chalukya Temples

Kāśī Viśveśvara temple is one of the earliest temples of Kalyana Chalukya period at Lakkundi. An astounding image of Śiva (Pl 6) dancing in the belly of Gajāsura is on the outer wall panel of this temple. His dance signifies the victory of good over evil. There are many versions of the story related to this episode in our purāṇas such as Śiva Purāṇa, Kūrma Purāṇa and Varāha Purāṇa etc. But the popular version is that the demon Gajāsura or Nīla was a friend of demon Andhaka. In the form of an elephant Nīla attacked Śiva. After slaying Andhakāsura, the lord kills Gajāsura. He stamps Gajāsura's head and dances in his belly. (In another version of the story, he dances underneath the skin of the demon's butchered skin.) The Gajāsura samhāra mūrti in Lakkundi is resonating with vibrant action. The right foot of Siva is firmly planted on the demon and he is dancing inside the belly of Gajāsura. He is flanked by dancing Ganeśa, Parvathi on the right side and a drummer on the left side. His vigorous dance is represented by a swift twirling action and his eight hands are spread all over in the course of spirited movement representing 'vīra rasa'. To portray the pirouette, the sculptor has chosen the bhramarī, an utpluti karaṇa of the deśī tradition.



Pl 6 Shiva in Bāhya bhramarī, Lakkundi



Pl 7 Male dancer-drummer in bhramarī, Balligave

The sculptor here explored the farthest limits of movement as in the entire body twirls in curves and an extreme bending of the torso is seized successfully. Texts on deśī discuss elaborately on the varieties of bhramarī-s. One of the bhramarī-s, bāhya bhramarī is represented in the sculpture of dancing Śiva in Lakkundi. The pertaining śloka in SR is,

Dakṣiṇenāṅgrīṇā stitva vāmāṅgri tu kuñcayet

vāmāvarta bhavedyatrasā bahyabhramarīmatā (Saṅgīta Ratnākara 7.775)

Bāhya bhramarī is executed by standing on the right leg, bending the left leg and revolving swiftly on the left side. If the same movement is performed with left leg down, then it is called antarbhramarī. Sculptors of Kalyana Chalukya period seem to be fascinated by various bhramarī-s of the deśī tradition. It is a challenge to arrest a bhramarī movement in stone. However, they have successfully brought out the speed, energy and the vigour that play a crucial role in delineating a bhramarī. The twist in the torso while doing a bhramarī is well brought out in the sculptures. The twisted body is known as atibhaṅga both in nṛtya and śilpa. Dancers, both male and female, can be seen in different modes of bhramarī in the temples of Kuruvatti, Balligave and Gadag temples.

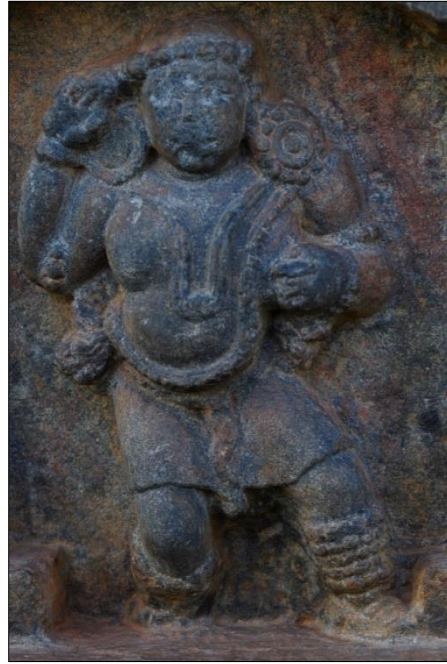
Pl.no. 7 illustrates a miniature figure in the perforated window screen (jālandhra) of Tripurāntakeśvara temple is from Balligave. The force with which the drummer-dancer is twirling in *bhramarī karaṇa* is clearly evident. This image reflects the high degree of precision and artistic excellence achieved by the sculptors of that period.

3.5 Gaunḍali, Periṇi and Daṇḍa Rāsa Dance Traditions

Texts on the deśī tradition give detailed description of Gaunḍali, Periṇi, Daṇḍa Rasa and other dance traditions. Gaunḍali is a dance form, which evolved into a style of its own. SR classifies this dance form as ‘Deśī Paddhati’. A bracket figure (Pl 8) in Kuruvatti is identified as Gaunḍali dancer by dance historians and researchers. She is playing a small drum and which is called as ‘trivaḷi’ and performing an energetic movement. Her right leg is kept firmly on the ground and her left leg, which is damaged, is lifted and there is a deep twist in her body. Researcher Radhika Nandakumar in ‘Classical Dance Heritage of Karnataka’ says “one of the standout descriptions of Gaunḍali art form is that the danseuse sings along with playing a special drum called trivaḷi”. Texts like SR, NR, NN describe Gaunḍali nṛtya as one of the deśī dances that was popular in ‘Karnāṭa Deśa’ (Karnataka region). Likewise, another deśī nṛtya, Periṇi is a dance performed by men and this dance form which was popular in Karnataka during medieval period.



Pl 8 Bracket figure of Gaundali dancer, Mallikarjuna temple, Kuruvatti



Pl 9 Image of a Perini dancer, Kedareshwara temple, Balligave

The figure of Perini dancer in Pl No 9 is from the Kedareshwara temple in Balligave. Dance sculptures representing Perini can also be seen in the temples of Gadag and Lakkundi. However, it is observed that the Hoysala temples which are of later period than Kalyana Chalukya temples have more Perini and Gaundali dancing figures. It can be assumed that the Perini and Gaundali dance traditions became more popular during Hoysala period.



Pl 10 Daṇḍa Rāsa dance scene on the panel of Tripurantakeshwara temple in Balligave

In one of the panels in Tripurāntakeśvara temple in Balligave, on a base relief one can see dancers engaged in kolāta or stick dance. In Pl.10 men, women and children are engaged in dancing. The panel portrays an entire dance scene including musicians. Kolāta is called as 'Daṇḍa Rāsa' in deśī texts. 'Daṇḍa' literally means 'the stick' and 'Rāsa' means the 'dance'. It is performed in pairs, with a group of dancers participating in it. The texts and literature of medieval period indicate that Daṇḍa Rāsa was an important part of Vasanta Habba or

Vasantotsava (the Spring Festival), Navarātri and Durgā Pūjā celebrations. The dancers holding Daṇḍa-s in their hands dance together in a group of four to sixty four. The sticks have to be 16 aṅgula-s in length and they are straight, hard and rounded, plain or painted without joints. The dancers strike their Daṇḍa-s four, five or six times at the front, at the back and at the sides to produce the sound. They frequently form a circle and dance by facing the audience or by turning to the right and left side. When performed without the sticks this dance is called as Rāsanṛtya. Hence the sculptural representation of dance in temples during Kalyana Chalukya period clearly reflects the evolution and growth in Indian dance.

4. Conclusion

The dance images in early Chalukya temples can be analysed by cross examining them with the rules of the NS whereas to do so in later Chalukya temples one should know the intricate details of both the NS and later treatises and manuals such as SR, NR, SSS etc is essential. It appears by the time of early Chalukya period the NS tradition was quite popular, attracted the attention of the kings artistes and sculptors. Even sculptors of early Chalukya period were highly dance conscious and they adopted the techniques in its original form rendered by Bharata which could be observed in their artistic expression. Sometime during ninth and tenth century the style of dance absorbed new techniques and by the time the later Chalukya period arrived the sculptural adaptation of dance became distinct. The later Chalukya temples have more number of dance sculptures than early Chalukya temples. When there was a need to create additional number of dance sculptures and dance figures, to break the monotony, sculptors chose to carve more number of postures derived from the kinetic and static elements such as *sthānaka-s*, *cāri-s* and *karaṇa-s* of the newer tradition. Hence the sculptures indicating varied dynamic actions which are faithful to a set of canons other than the 'mārga' also increased in later Chalukya temples.

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^{i i} Starting from 12th century theoretician Śārngadeva who wrote the magnum opus *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* till 18th century writer Tuḷaja who penned *Saṅgīta Sārāmṛta*

ⁱⁱ Stella Kramrisch in 'Visnu Dharmottara Purana (part III)', and 'The Hindu Temple'.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sthanakas are the postures or stances from where stylised movements emerge. It denotes the 'stīti' or static aspect of dance. A movement in dance begins and ends with a posture suitable to the movements and the situation in dance. This stance or posture is known as *sthāna*. There are six puruṣa *sthānas* (posture for men) and four *sthṛī sthānas* (posture for women) according to NS. *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* describes 23 *desi sthānakas*

^{iv} Cari- This is predominantly the movement of feet involving the movement of shanks, thigh and the hips. NS describes 32 *cāri-s*. They are classified into two groups on the basis of the nature of the movement. There are two groups of *cāri-s* depending on the foot contact with the earth. They are *bhūmi* (earthly) and *ākāśa* (aerial) *cāri-s*. *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* describes 35 *bhūmi* and 23 *ākāśa cāri-s*.

^v *Karaṇa-s* are the fundamental units of Indian dance. 'Tāṇḍava Lakṣaṇa', the fourth chapter of NS, defines *karaṇa* as 'Hasta pāda samāyogāh nṛttasya karaṇam bhavet' (NS 4-35) which means the interrelated movements of the hands and feet results in a *karaṇa*. A *karaṇa* is a combination of *sthāna* (static posture), *cāri* (leg movements), *nṛtta hasta* (non-representational hand gesture) and graceful connecting movements called as *recakas*. This means a *karaṇa* is a beautiful combination of static and dynamic aspect of dance. NS describes 108 *karaṇas*

^{vi} Percy Brown in 'Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu'

^{vii} Kapila Vatsyayan in Arrested Movements- Sculpture and Painting

^{viii} *Vṛścikam* is performed by bending the back and lifting the foot and hands that are bent in *añcita*. *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* says the foot is turned and bent like the tail of a scorpion. Abhinava Bhārati, the commentary on NS and *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* prescribe Karihasta for the hands.