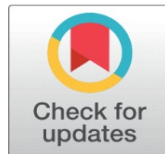


THE DISTINCTIVE ROLE OF ANG SANCHALAN IN THE AESTHETIC VOCABULARY OF THE LUCKNOW GHARANA

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ABSTRACT

The Ang Sanchalan is the coordinated rhythmic movement of body parts, which gives way to the typical aesthetic vocabulary of the Lucknow Gharana of Kathak. This study is an inquiry into the core of the Gharana's unique artistic language so that it may find how in detail Ang Sanchalan gives contribution to and provides an identity with skill and emotional depth. Drawing upon classical texts like the *Natyashastra* and *Abhinaya Darpan*, scholarly works, and traditional guru-shishya teaching methods, the research highlights the significance of Ang Sanchalan in the Lucknow style. The study reveals that Ang Sanchalan is not merely a stylistic feature but a deeply ingrained philosophy that reflects the cultural spirit of Awadh and the elegant expressiveness that defines the Lucknow Gharana's dance style. The Gharana's emphasis on *nazakat* (delicacy), *nafasat* (refinement), and *bhava-pradhan* (emotional expression) is embodied in the mastery of Ang Sanchalan, which transforms every gesture into a form of poetic expression. Pedagogical insights from maestros like Pandit Birju Maharaj and Pandit Munna Lal Shukla underscore the importance of Ang Sanchalan in shaping a dancer's aesthetic maturity, emphasizing the harmonious coordination of the eyes, fingers, and wrists to achieve expressive grace. The study concludes that preserving and systematically teaching Ang Sanchalan is crucial for sustaining the Lucknow Gharana's legacy, ensuring that its rich cultural spirit and artistic sophistication continue to inspire future generations of dancers and scholars.

Keywords: Ang Sanchalan, Lucknow Gharana, Kathak Dance, Aesthetic Vocabulary, Nazaqat (Delicacy), Abhinaya Darpan, Guru-Shishya

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lucknow gharana holds a special place amongst other gharanas because of the subtle and graceful gestures with the rich storytelling. Central to its distinctive style is Ang Sanchalan, which refers to the graceful flow and precise coordination of body movements that give the dance elegance and charm.

Although Ang Sanchalan means “the movement of limbs,” within Kathak, it signifies far more than just physical motion. It is carefully nurtured art that harmonizes the dancer's form with its emotions. For Lucknow Gharana, Ang

Sanchalan is the pathway through which emotions (bhava), aesthetic sentiments (rasa), and delicate refinement (nazaqat) come to life.

This study explores how Ang Sanchalan shaped the unique aesthetic identity of Lucknow Gharana. It examines how this particular movement technique enhances Gharana's grace, setting it apart from others like Jaipur Gharana, which is known for its vigorous and complex rhythms. Drawing on classical texts, teachings from respected masters, and detailed observations of performance, this study argues that Ang Sanchalan is the heart of the Lucknow style, embodying its poise, restraint, and emotional subtlety.

The core elements of Kathak include the body and its various parts, the musical text to be expressed, the rhythm cycle, and the diverse syllables of the rhythm. The dancer's creativity is directed toward harmonizing all of these components to create a unified and expressive performance. [Saxena \(1991\)](#)

However, the ang and footwork are more important in Kathak.

Ang Sanchalan involves the seamless synchronization of various body parts, including the limbs, torso, neck, eyes, and facial expressions, in a balanced and rhythmic way, which is crucial in all dance forms. "तस्य शिरोहस्तोरः पार्श्वकटीपादतः षडंगानि" [Azad \(2020\)](#) The Sanskrit term refers to "ṣaḍaṅgāni," signifying the six limbs or primary components in classical Indian arts. Anatomically these six parts are explained as extending from the head, hands, sides, waist, and feet, respectively. This term is a traditional aesthetic and technical expression used in Indian art and classical dance theory to identify the essential sections or divisions of a performance. In this context, षडंगानि literally translates to "six limbs," and in Indian classical arts such as dance and theater, it typically represents a sixfold categorization of techniques or elements that collectively structure the art form. In performance, these components come together through expressive faces, delicate gestures, balanced stances, rhythmic flow, and culturally significant costumes. This phrase highlights that these six parts, from the head (शीरो) to the feet (पादतः), encompass the entire body as a medium for expressive and technical purposes, a principle fundamental to classical performance theory. Angas are the major sections of the body that are deemed important in dance. These included six parts: the head, hands, chest, armpits, waist, and both legs. Pratyangas are body parts that bend easily during dance, primarily the connectors between the main limbs. There are six key parameters: shoulders, arms, back, abdomen, pelvis, and thighs. Some experts also included wrists, elbows, necks, toes, and knees. Upangas are smaller parts of each ang attached to the main body parts. Although small, they are vital in dance. Examples include the following: For feet: heel, ankle, toes, fingers, and thumb. For the hands, the wrist, palm, toes, fingers, and thumb were used. Head, eyes, eyebrows, pupils, eyelids, nose, cheeks, lips, teeth, jaw, tongue, chin, and face. [Nāgar \(2018\)](#)

(शिरो भेद) Shiro Bhed (Head - Gestures) - The head is the most crucial part of the body, responsible for overseeing all its functions. It plays a very important role in dance to convey the emotions to the audience. According to the अभिनयदर्पणम् by Acharya Nandikeshwara Ji, there are nine head movements:

(सम) Sama - The head remains straight and still. (उद्वाहित) Udwaḥita: The head is lifted upwards. (अधोमुख) Adhomukha - The head is bent downwards. (आलोलित) Alolita - The head moves in a circular motion. (धुत) Dhuta: The head moves side to side. (कम्पित) Kampita - The head gently nods up and down. (परावृत्त)

Paravritta: The head turns sharply to the right or left. (उत्क्षिप्त) Ukshiya: The head is turned with a slight tilt. (परिवाहित) Parivahita – The head shakes with quick, small nods. [Nāgar \(2018\)](#)

In the Abhinaya Darpana, nine different head movements are described, while the Natyashastra outlines thirteen, as follows: 1- (अकम्पित) Akampita (slow nodding up and down), 2- (कम्पित) Kampita (very fast up and down movement), 3- (धूतम्) Dhutam (slow horizontal movement), 4- (विधूतम्) Vidhutam (fast horizontal movement), 5- (परिवाहितम्) Parivahitam (alternating turns to both sides), 6- (अधूतम् या उदवाहित) Adhutam or Udvahita (turned upwards once), 7- (अवधूतम्) Avadhutam (turned down once), 8- (अञ्चितम्) Anchitam (slightly bent to one side), 9- (निहञ्चितम्) Nihanchitam (neck bent to one side with shoulder raised), 10- (परावृत्तम्) Paravrittam (turned around), 11- (उत्क्षिप्तम्) Utksiptam (slightly raised), 12- (अधोगतम्) Adhogatam (face looking downwards), 13- (लोलितम्) Lolitam (rolling, moving in all directions) [Medhi and Talukdar \(2022\)](#). These movements are essential in classical dance for expressing different emotions and intentions. Dancers frequently practice these to enhance their storytelling skills through expressive gestures and facial expressions, making their performances more meaningful and engaging for the audience.

(ग्रीवा भेद) Greeva Bheda (Neck Movement) - In connecting the head and the body, neck plays a very vital role helping it move gracefully and smoothly.

according to natyashastra there are nine well defined neck movements: (सम) Sama (natural position), (नत) Nata (bent downward), (उन्नत) Unnata (raised upward), (त्र्यास) Tryasra (turned sideways), (रेचित) Recita (vibrated or shaken), (कुंचित) Kunchita (bent forward), (अंचित) Anchita (turned backward), (वाहित) Vahita (moved sideways), and (विवृत) Vivritta (facing forward).

In Abhinayadarpan by Acharya Nandikeshwara, these are precipitated into four fundamental types: 1- (सुंदरि ग्रीवा) Sundari Greeva – The neck is gently and elegantly moved from side to side, expressing emotions such as love, acceptance, elegance, and gentle effort. 2- (तिरश्चिना ग्रीवा) Tirshchina Greeva: The neck moves in a serpentine fashion, shifting sideways and upward, symbolizing a snake's motion or swordplay. 3- (परिवर्तिता ग्रीवा) Parivartita Greeva – The neck moves in a crescent shape from one side to the other, often used to convey grace, affection, and delicate qualities of Lasya. 4- (प्रकम्पित ग्रीवा) Prakampita Greeva – The neck moves back and forth like a pigeon's throat, used in storytelling, rhythmic sequences, and to depict a horse's movement. In conveying the actions and movements with perfection and grace these neck variations helps dancers also add harmony and depth to the classical dance form. [Medhi and Talukdar \(2022\)](#) [Nāgar \(2018\)](#)

(दृष्टि भेद) Drishti Bheda (Eye- Glance) - Eyes are one of the most significant organs of the body. Without them, the world would remain dark. Emotions such as joy, sorrow, fear, and surprise can be conveyed most naturally through the eyes.

They enhance human beauty and reflect on both artistic and emotional depth. It is by observing the eyes that one can recognize one's inner feelings.

Recognizing their importance, great scholars like Bharata Muni and Nandikeshwara described eight types of Drishti Bheda, or eye glances, namely: Sama, Sachi, Pralokita, Aalokit, Nimeelit, Ullokit, Anuvrit, and Avalokit.

- (सम दृष्टि) **Sama Drishti**: Looking straight ahead without blinking; used at the start of a performance, to express wonder, or while showing a divine idol.
- (साची दृष्टि) **Sachi Drishti**: Glancing sideways through the corner of the eyes; used for gestures like signaling, remembrance, or aiming.
- (आलोकित दृष्टि) **Aalokit Drishti**: Moving the pupils in circular motion; used to look around, represent dizziness, or depict energetic movements.
- (प्रलोकित दृष्टि) **Pralokit Drishti**: Shifting the pupils from one side to another; used to see objects on both sides or to show affection and curiosity.
- (निमीलित दृष्टि) **Nimeelit Drishti**: Keeping the eyelids half closed; used to show humility, meditation, or fainting.
- (अनुवृत्त दृष्टि) **Anuvrit Drishti**: Rapid movement of the eyes up and down; used to indicate anger or to look above and below.
- (उल्लोकित दृष्टि) **Ullokit Drishti**: Gazing upward; used to see the sky, tall objects, or celestial bodies.
- (अवलोकित दृष्टि) **Avalokit Drishti**: Looking downward; used to show hesitation, contemplation, or to see something below. (Nagar, 2018)

Understanding Drishti Bheda is fundamental for dance students. As stated in Bharata Muni's Nāṭyaśāstra,

यतो हस्त स्ततो दृष्टि, यतो दृष्टि स्ततो मनः। यतो मनः स्ततो भावः, यतो भावः स्ततो रसः॥

"Where the hand moves, the eyes follow. When the eyes move, the mind follows. Where the mind is engaged, expression arises, and where there is expression, beauty exists."

While Nandikeshwara, in Abhinaya Darpanam, defined eight kinds of glances, the Nāṭyaśāstra expanded them into thirty-six types divided into three categories: glances expressing sentiments (eight), those showing dominant emotions (eight), and those representing fleeting states (20). These classifications highlight how eyes serve as a vital tool of expression in classical dance. [Medhi and Talukdar \(2022\)](#)

(पद संचालन) Foot Movement-Footwork, by establishing the foundation serves as the heartbeat of any dance form. In the Natya Shastra, Bharat Muni identifies two principal dimensions of foot movement: Chari and Gati Prachar.

Chaari (चारी)—The term "chaari" originates from the Sanskrit root char, meaning "to move" or "to walk." It encompasses a range of stances and transitions created by foot movement. In the Natya Shastra, Bharat Muni mentions thirty-two types of chari, categorizing them into Bhumichari and Aakashchari. Both feet firmly placed on the ground denote the grounded energy and firmness in bhumichari in contrast, one foot is lifted from the ground, giving the movement a sense of grace, height and fluidity in akashchari.

Gati Prachar (गतिप्रचार) (The Dialogue of the Ghunghru) – The second aspect, Gati Prachar, is closely tied to the rhythm created by ghunghru, or ankle bells. Although various Indian classical dances use ghunghru, Kathak is unique in the sophisticated harmony it achieves between intricate footwork and the resonant sound of these bells. Through rhythmic patterns, such as tatkaar and variations in laya, or tempo, the dancer communicates emotion and musical texture purely through the play of sound and movement. The pleasing and soft sound of ghunroo not only pleases the ears of the audience it also enhances the expressive quality of the performance. Foot movements also shift according to the rasa being portrayed, with Shringar rasa—the expression of beauty and love—placing special emphasis on graceful, sensuous footwork and rhythmic sophistication. [Srivastava and Khare \(2020\)](#)

(छाती संचालन) Chest Movement in Kathak

The use of the chest is very moderate in the classical dance traditions, as it can affect the grace and aesthetic of the performance if used excessively. Chest movements are often used in cinematic or popular dance forms to enhance visual appeal and entertain audiences. According to Sangeet Ratnakar and Ashok Kamal's Nrityaadhyay, there are five distinct types of chest movements described in the Shastra: 1- (सम) Sam. 2- (अभुग्न) Abhugn. 3- (निर्भुग्न) Nirbhugn. 4- (प्रकम्पित) Prakampit. 5- (उद्वाहित) Udwahit [Srivastava and Khare \(2020\)](#)

भ्रू (भौं संचालन) Eyebrow Movement

Facial expressions are at the heart of dance, giving life to emotions and storytelling. The eyes, nose, cheeks, and among the facial features the eyebrows specially play a very important role in showing inner feelings. Movements of the eyebrows bring subtle variations to expression and help the dancer convey a spectrum of emotions—joy, anger, surprise, affection, or tranquility. Mastery of these delicate movements comes only through consistent practice and a deep awareness of facial control.

In the Natya Shastra, Bharata Muni classifies eyebrow movements into seven types: Sahaj, Ukshipta, Patana, Bhrukuti, Chatur, Kunchit, and Rechit, each contributing to a distinct emotional nuance within abhinaya (expressive dance).

(सहज) Sahaj: A natural and effortless movement of the eyebrows used to depict simple, everyday emotions.

(उत्क्षिप्त) Ukshipta: One or both eyebrows lifted upward, suggesting doubt, surprise, or irritation.

(पतन) Patana – A downward drop of the eyebrows, often used while showing light laughter, smiling, or playful amusement.

(भ्रुकुटि) Bhrukuti: To show the anger, determination, or intensity, the eyebrow's outer edge is slightly lifted.

(चतुर) Chatur: To express beauty, affection, or tender emotion, the eyebrows are spread gracefully or gently arched.

(कुंचित) Kunchit—Folding one or both eyebrows or soft contraction, used to suggest serenity, mild sadness, pride, or reflection.

(रेचित) Rechit – while showing the expressive detailing, ornamentation, and flirtling during the performance, lifting one eyebrow is often seen [Srivastava and Khare \(2020\)](#)

Aesthetic Vocabulary of Lucknow Gharana

The Lucknow Gharana flourished between the 18th and 19th centuries, supported by the Nawabs of Awadh, to whom the region belonged at the time, who were at the height of their splendor. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah was an art lover and the last of this dynasty. In Lucknow's courts, every gesture—from conversation to dance—reflected a deep sense of grace and poetic refinement. It had a profound impact on its aesthetics. The founding masters—Pandit Bindadin Maharaj and his brother Pandit Kalka Prasad—imbued Kathak with lyrical charm and expressive sophistication [Kothari \(1989\)](#)

The Lucknow Gharana is known for its qualities of nazakat (delicacy), nafasat (refinement and elegance), and bhava-pradhanta (emphasis on emotional expression). The movements in this style are soft, carefully measured, and enriched with lasya, a quality of graceful femininity. The dancer uses subtle gestures to express emotions, avoiding exaggeration or overt dramatization. Ang Sanchalan, which is the skillful and rhythmic coordination of body movements, is at the core of the Lucknow Gharana's artistic expression. Through this mastery, dance movements flow with grace, turning each gesture into a form of poetic expression. It transforms every movement into a lyrical and expressive form, bringing poetry to the motion.

Every element of the Gharana's dance vocabulary—from thaata (poised stance) to gat-nikas (narrative walk)—is defined by precision and fluidity. The graceful use of balanced and angled body movement coordination helps the dancer to move smoothly and effortlessly, creating a smooth and continuous visual flow. Unlike the Jaipur Gharana, known for its vigorous footwork and fast spins, the Lucknow tradition focuses on maintaining measured movements and inner calm, exuding an aura of balance, elegance, and graceful restraint.

The Distinctive Role of Ang Sanchalan in the Lucknow Gharana and its Function in Kathak Training-

Kathak training starts with the foundational exercises that include hastaks (hand movements), tatkar (footwork), and chakkar (spins), train dancers to maintain body symmetry while executing complex rhythmic sequences. The neck, torso (upper body), and arms should move harmoniously and balanced while maintaining balance and posture. With time, control of movement becomes second nature to the Kathak dancer, enabling a seamless shift between the energetic sparkle of nritta and the expressive nuance of abhinaya. The Lucknow Gharana embodies this refinement to perfection. Grace flows through every limb; gestures unfold with quiet eloquence, and stories emerge through delicate hand and eye movements. The elegance of this tradition rests in its subtle equilibrium—each posture balanced, each expression gently restrained. The dancer's face becomes a canvas of emotion, drawing the viewer into a world where rhythm and feeling blend in perfect harmony..

Much of the gharana's distinctive style was crafted by Maharaj Bindadin Ji, whose insights and creativity gave this tradition a unique artistic and emotional depth. The presentation of bhaav (expressing feeling) through singing while dancing was introduced by him only.

Historically, performers have often chosen pieces such as thumri, bhajan, and ghazal to infuse their dances with devotional and emotional layers, allowing each

step to resonate with the music and lyrics. Although this practice faded over the years, Pandit Birju Maharaj kept its spirit alive by bringing expressive singing back into his Kathak presentations and drawing inspiration from traditions dating back to Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. What makes kathak different is the focus on *thaat*, or its posture for every movement that acts as a foundation.

Dancers pay special attention to gentle, flowing wrist and neck actions and refined postures, weaving them into a precise rhythm. Their skill shines in the way they execute intricate footwork and rhythmic patterns, proving both their technical mastery and the subtle beauty that defines the Lucknow tradition. [Sharma \(2024\)](#)

Pedagogical Insights

Gurus such as Pandit Birju Maharaj and Pandit Munna Lal Shukla have underlined the pedagogical value of *ang sanchalan* in shaping a dancer's aesthetic maturity. Shukla ji often remarked that “without control over *ang*, the *bhava* loses its soul.” Students are trained to practice *sanchalan* through mirror exercises, breathing coordination, and visualization of movement flow. The emphasis is on *sahajata*—naturalness—where technical precision merges with expressive ease.

According to Pt. Birju Maharaj ji, mastery of wrist and hand movements is crucial for executing Kathak effectively; these movements should appear fluid and graceful. For conveying the artistic emotions and the narratives, it is very important to use the entire body, including shoulders and arms. Specific movements symbolize natural elements, akin to the expansion of tree branches, enhancing the visual appeal of the performance.

Mastering these fundamental aspects of Kathak is essential before moving into more intricate techniques [Prasar Bharti Archives. \(2020\)](#).

According to Pt. Birju Maharaj ji he has beautifully described the articulation of the arm (*ang sanchalan*) as a coordinated and sequential movement flowing through three distinct segments—from the palm to the wrist, from the wrist to the elbow, and from the elbow to the shoulder. The elbow must descend smoothly to give way for the wrist to move forward while performing a movement. As the wrist advances, the palm naturally unfolds, completing the gesture with a graceful effortlessness.

He emphasizes that the *kalas*—the circular and spiral motion of the wrist—is a defining feature of expressive Kathak. If this rotation lacks clarity or beauty, the entire dance appears to be static or lifeless. Through dance, he explains, emerges through the gradual unfolding of each limb, where the movement of the eyes (*drishti*), fingers, and wrists come together in harmony to create a unified expression.

In the absence of fluidity in the wrist, the aesthetic and emotive qualities of the movement diminish. For example, in an *aalingan* (embracing) gesture, the chest must be fully engaged to convey warmth and emotions. Similarly, in every movement, the complete participation of the body — even in its smallest details — is essential for the dance to attain its fullness and grace.

He further stated the importance of *ghungroo* which represent the voice of the dancer, while *hastaks* (hand gestures) define the visible language of Kathak. Without *hastaks*, the visual form of dance is incomplete. Achieving this refinement requires consistent and mindful practice, in which the neck, facial expressions, and eyes blend seamlessly with bodily movements. Only then does the dancer achieve the aesthetic and emotional beauty that defines Kathak's *ang sanchalan*.

However, According to Pt. Munna Shukla ji, *hastak* — the articulation and positioning of the hands — forms the language of dance. He explained that *hastaks*

speak, and if they are not directed correctly or placed in the right orientation, the entire meaning of the movement is lost. To illustrate this, he often quoted the following line:

“नुख्ते के हेर-फेर में खुदा जुदा हो गया”

Through this poetic example, he emphasized how the slightest displacement of a single nukta (dot) in the Urdu script can completely change the meaning of a word—transforming Khuda (God) into juda (separate). Similarly, in Kathak, if a hastak is misplaced or executed in the wrong direction, its intent, emotion, and communicative value change entirely.

For Munna Ji, this precision was not merely technical but deeply philosophical—a reflection of how Ang Sanchalan (the movement and alignment of body parts) must be consciously guided to preserve the purity of meaning in dance. A hastak, if executed correctly and with rhythm and emotion, comes alive, expressing kathak. He believed that the body must move with natural ease and that the feet do not always have to produce sound; instead, the dancer should express rhythm and create music through the coordinated movements of the whole body. [Prasar Bharti Archives. \(2022\)](#)

The foot movement referred to as pad sanchalan must be executed with great accuracy, as each bol has a unique sound and weight, and it should be performed accordingly. The articulation and placement of the feet, according to Pandit Birju Maharaj often explained that true dance emerges from the balanced control of wajan, or body weight. Now, beauty does not lie in the difficulty of striking the floor or in the mechanical movement of the feet, but in how the dancer channels their body weight correctly with awareness and balance.

For Maharaj ji, paun ki nikasi—the graceful release of the foot—emerges only when wajan, or body weight, moves in an unbroken flow, beginning from the forehead, tracing the spine, and settling naturally into the foot. This steady current of energy creates rhythm, elegance, and stability, giving the dancer's steps their effortless beauty.

Maharaj ji emphasized that each bol in Kathak carries its own weight. The dancer must sense where to anchor, release, or shift it, allowing movement to unfold with refined precision. This awareness is not learned overnight but cultivated through dedicated abhyas, where rhythm and balance gradually become part of the dancer's physical instinct.

If wajan is misplaced, disconnected from the body's center, the dance loses its inner depth. Thus, pad sanchalan in Kathak is not merely rhythmic footwork but an act of full-body awareness. When the weight flows harmoniously through every limb, paun ki nikasi blossoms into an aesthetic union of rhythm, alignment, and inner grace.

2. CONCLUSION

This study shows that Ang Sanchalan is the heart of what makes the Lucknow Gharana unique in Kathak. It is much more than just moving the body; it is a deep way of expressing emotion, grace, and cultural richness all at once. Passed down through classical texts and the guru-shishya tradition, Ang Sanchalan brings every movement together in a smooth, flowing rhythm that tells complex stories and conveys powerful emotions. The care and skill emphasized by great masters perfectly blend technical skill with expressive beauty, capturing Kathak's true spirit.

This research helps us better understand the deep connection between physical movement and artistic expression in kathak. It also highlights the importance of Ang Sanchalan not just for this dance form but for dance as a whole, with lessons that could apply to other styles too.

Although the focus was on the Lucknow Gharana, there's room for future studies comparing this with other Kathak Gharanas or looking at how Ang Sanchalan adapts to modern influences. Developing clear teaching methods to preserve this art form is a valuable area for future research.

In short, keeping the tradition of Ang Sanchalan alive and passing it on carefully is essential for preserving the rich legacy of the Lucknow Gharana. It is a beautiful, living art that not only honors the past but also inspires dancers, scholars, and audiences for many years to come.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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