



Bhru Bheda: The Art of the Eyebrow and Its Impact on Eye Health

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Abstract

This essay explores the interrelationship between Bharatanatyam's Bhru Bheda, the manipulation of eyebrows, and its potential benefits for eye health. By examining the muscles involved in eyebrow movement and the mechanics of ocular function, the essay posits that Bhru Bheda can contribute to improved eye health through increased blood circulation, strengthened eye muscles, and reduced eye strain. While acknowledging the need for further scientific research to establish definitive conclusions, the essay highlights the potential of this traditional art form as a complementary approach to overall eye well-being.

(Keywords: Indian Classical Dances, Bharatanatyam, NatyaShastra, Abhinaya, Bhrukuti /Bhru beda, eyebrow, health)

Introduction

Dance is a world in itself; it's a world of infinite rhythm, and its source comes from life. Dance epitomises harmony. Each part of the body, including the breath is controlled and moves in coordination with the rest of the body. Thus, for those who 'internalise' dance, it could mean not just a part of their lives but also an inspiration to live life in a certain harmonious way. (5) Indian Classical dances have their origin from the ancient history, which show that the dance was for the betterment of the physical and emotional health of people. Initially there were the folk and tribal dances. The Indian Classical dances are rooted to the Natyashastra written by Bharatha Muni. The different Indian Classical dance include Bharatanatyam, Kuchupudi, Kathakali, Kathak, Manipur, Mohiniattam, Odissi and Satariya, all share the mudras from the Chaturvidha Abhinaya as in Natyashastra. Indian Classical dances are dances for mind and soul and are extremely traditional. Thus, mastering any classical dance form is always associated with physical, emotional mental and spiritual wellbeing. These dance forms are always learnt from a Guru or Teacher as it requires continuous monitor from the Guru in imbibing the techniques of each classical art form.

All Indian classical dances include the Chaturvidha Abhinaya. The Chaturvidha Abhinaya or the four manifolds of Abhinaya include the Angika Abhinaya, Vachika Abhinaya, Aaharya Abhinaya and Saatwika Abhinaya. Bharatha Muni has given a detailed description of the Chaturvidha Abhinaya in Natyashastra. The classical dancers refer to these ancient treatises and keep the art forms in tradition. In Nandikeshwara's Abhinaya Darpana only the Aangika Abhinaya has been elaborated and this is mainly learnt by the students learning Bharatanatyam, Kuchupudi, and other classical art forms.

The Bhrukuti or Bhru bedas come under the Angika Abhinaya. According to Bharata's Natayashastra, Angika Abhinaya (Gestures of limbs) consist of three types:

a) Sariira- Bodily movements

b) Mukhaja - Facial movements

c) Cestaakrta – Brought by movements.

There are six Angas in combination with the Angas and Pratyangas and they are- Shiras (the Head), Hasthas (the Hands), Kati (Hips), Uras (Chest), Parshwa (Sides) and Pada (Foot). The Mukhaja includes the Bhrukuti (Eyebrow), Drishti (Eye), Eyelids, the Nasal gestures, Cheeks, Lips, Chin, Oral and their gestures and Colour of face are all elaborately described in the various treatises. The classical art forms follow these movements. The Mukhaja Abhinaya can be seen the most in Kathakali the dance drama where each and every part of the facial muscles are moved and practiced by the artists performing them. So, there is a learning of minute control of the muscles in totality. This helps in smooth functioning of all parts of the body by learning and practicing classical art forms.

The Bhrukuti or the Eyebrow movement

Bhru Bheda, the manipulation of the eyebrows in Indian classical dance, is an intricate art form that transcends mere aesthetics. Eyebrow movements serve as nonverbal forms of communication to convey emotion.

Embedded within this practice is a profound understanding of the human body and its interconnected systems. While primarily recognized for its expressive role in conveying emotions and nuances, Bhru Bheda also offers significant benefits for ocular health.

The human eye is a complex organ, requiring a delicate balance of muscular activity, blood circulation, and neural coordination. The eyebrows, as the frame around the eyes, play a pivotal role in facial expression and, consequently, in ocular health. The nuanced movements of the eyebrows, as prescribed in classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, engage a variety of facial muscles, providing a subtle yet effective workout.

Bhrukuti Beda falls under the Upangas

According to Abhinaya Darpana, there are six Bhrukuti Bedas (Classification of the movements of Eyebrows according to other sources) described as

“Sahaja patitotkshipta Chatura rechitaa tathaa ||188 ||

Kunchiteti shadaiva atra bhru chaturyavati kriyaah || (2)

Natyashastra describes 7 movements of the eyebrows and they are:

1) Utkshepa 2) Patana 3) Bhrukuti 4) Catura 5) Kunchitha 6) Rechita and 7) Sahaja.

In Kathakali, a traditional dance-drama from Kerala, eyebrow movements play a crucial role in conveying emotions and storytelling. Dancers undergo rigorous training to master these subtle yet powerful expressions. Here are some key aspects:

- Utkshipta (Raised Eyebrows): Indicate surprise or fear.
- Patita (Lowered Eyebrows): Represent anger or determination.
- Rechita (Alternating Eyebrow Movements): Used to show confusion or curiosity.

These movements, combined with elaborate costumes and makeup, help Kathakali dancers bring mythological stories to life.

Function of Eyebrows

The eyebrow, together with the eyelid, serves several diverse and complex functions in the visual system. Its primary function is the protection and maintenance of the anterior structures of the eye. Because of its position and curvature, the eyebrow shields the eyes from bright light coming from directly above, and it is an effective barrier to liquids running from the forehead into the eye. The large hairs of the eyebrow have abundant sensory innervation and are very sensitive to tactile stimulation. Accordingly, stimulation of the supercilia results in reflex blinking of both eyelids.

The eyebrows can be elevated, depressed, or drawn together. Their position is critical to facial configuration and expression. Maximal elevation of both medial and lateral portions of the eyebrows gives rise to the look of surprise. Depression of the medial portion of the eyebrow depicts anger or concern. Elevation of only one eyebrow portrays a quizzical or questioning expression. These expressions serve as nonverbal forms of communication to convey emotion.

Eyebrow elevation helps clear the visual axis and is a natural compensatory response to the forehead sagging and dermatochalasis that occur with aging. In maximal upgaze, the eyebrows also elevate to provide maximal clearance of the visual axis, in coordination with lid, globe, and forehead elevation.

Muscles Involved in Eyebrow Movement

The primary muscle responsible for eyebrow movement is the occipitofrontalis. This muscle is divided into two parts:

- Frontalis: located on the forehead, it raises the eyebrows
- Occipitalis: Located at the back of the head, it pulls the scalp backward.

While the occipitofrontalis is the primary mover, other muscles like the orbicularis oculi (which controls eyelid movement) and corrugator supercilii (which draws the eyebrows together) also play a role in subtle eyebrow movements.

Benefits of Bhrukuti beda practice

Regular practice of Bhru Bheda stimulates blood circulation in the ocular region. Increased blood flow delivers essential nutrients and oxygen to the eye tissues, promoting their overall health. Moreover, the dynamic movements of the eyebrows help to strengthen the eye muscles, improving focus, acuity, and reducing eye strain.

Beyond the physical benefits, Bhru Bheda also contributes to mental well-being, which indirectly impacts eye health. Stress and anxiety can manifest as various eye problems, such as dry eyes, headaches, and blurred vision. The meditative aspects of dance, including the focused attention on facial expressions, help to alleviate stress, thereby promoting ocular health. To master the Eyebrow movement there needs to be minute control of the muscles and require concentration or involvement in the art form which adds to the meditative benefits.

While specific scientific studies directly linking eyebrow movement to eye health are limited, there is anecdotal evidence and logical reasoning to support the potential benefits:

Increased blood circulation: Moving the eyebrows stimulates blood flow to the facial muscles, including those around the eyes. Improved circulation can help nourish the eye tissues.

Relaxation and stress reduction: Consciously moving the eyebrows can help release tension in the facial muscles, contributing to overall relaxation. Stress can negatively impact eye health, so reducing it indirectly benefits the eyes.

Enhanced facial expression: Regular eyebrow movement can improve facial muscle tone and coordination, contributing to more expressive and engaging communication.

It is essential to acknowledge that while Bhru Bheda offers potential benefits, it is not a substitute for professional eye care. Regular eye check-ups and a balanced diet remain crucial for optimal eye health. However, incorporating Bhru Bheda into daily life can be a valuable adjunct to overall eye wellness.

Additional Considerations

Here are the additional considerations a practitioner can consider while practicing Bhru bedhas:

- **Consistency:** Regular practice is key to reaping the benefits.
- **Moderation:** Excessive or forceful movements can strain the eyes.
- **Eye Health:** Always consult an ophthalmologist for regular eye check-ups.

By incorporating Bhru Bheda techniques into your daily routine, you can enhance your eye health and overall well-being. Consistency is key. Even a few minutes of practice daily can make a significant difference in your eye health.

Eyebrow movements help to strengthen the muscles around your eyebrow leading to a natural lift and avoid the drooping of eyebrows. Coordinate Bhru Bheda with specific yoga postures or eye exercises for a more holistic approach. Focus on the sensations in your eyes and face while performing the exercises provides you with a mindful practise.

Always consult with a qualified yoga instructor or eye care professional before starting any new exercise regimen. While Bhru Bheda and eye exercises offer valuable benefits, maintaining overall eye health requires a holistic approach. Hydration and nutrition play crucial roles in supporting eye function. Drink plenty of water and incorporate water-rich fruits and vegetables like cucumbers, watermelon, and strawberries into your diet.

By combining Bhru Bheda with a healthy diet, adequate hydration, and protective measures, you can significantly enhance your eye health and well-being. While these Bhru Bhedas offer potential benefits, they should be practiced under the guidance of a trained classical dance teacher or a qualified eye care professional.

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