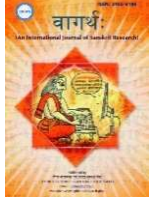




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Performance of Līlā, Rāmalīlā and Sanskrit Theatre

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In this paper I propose to investigate upon the concept and performance of *Līlā* as evinced through the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS) of Bharatamuni and the interrelationships of *Rāmalīlā* with Sanskrit theatre. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* presents three views of *Līlā*, viz.: – (i) a cosmic creative process recurring through *anukṛti* on theatre which correlates to *Līlā* as a form of theatre. (ii) *Līlā* as a fundamental aesthetic concept out of which various categories of performance in correspondance to the actual practice of *Līlā* evolved; (iii) a typical genre of performance described in the NS which formed the basis for *līlā* theatre.

Keywords- *Nāṭyaśāstra*, *Līlā*, *Rāmalīlā*, *Sanskrit Theatre*.

Līlā as a cosmic creative process and Līlā in the creation of Theatre

The *Nāṭyaśāstra* describes the first manifestation of *Līlā* as a creative force in the Primordial Being. *Līlā* manifests through cyclic movements of time and circularity in space. Human life is also visualised in cycles. Some of the key terms in Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* like *vṛtti* (theatre-practice), *vṛtta* and *itivṛtta* (plot) are formed from the root *vṛt* – basically indicating a circular movement. *Nāṭya* (theatre) is defined as *lokavṛttānukaraṇa* – re-creating the cosmic movement which is marked with circularity. *Vṛtta* means a circle, a circumference, character, conduct, happening or event; and also, a form of *Chandas* as cosmic rhythm that percolates language and life. *Vṛtta* is circumscribing this cosmic rhythm through a particular arrangement.

With this perspective, Bharatamuni describes *Līlā* imbued in rhythm of the cyclic movements of Time when there is creation. The whole activity leading to the creation is defined through four types of *vṛttis* and all these *vṛttis* are marked with *Līlā*. In the chapter XX of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharatamuni narrates the story of the genesis of *vṛttis* at the time of creation of this universe. The story runs like this. At the time of another Creation, when the Universe was reborn having since long rested in the great dissolution (*mahāpralaya*), Viṣṇu, created *vṛttis* out

of his *Līlā*. “Having shrunk the whole world in one ocean, and having made all the worlds compressed by his *māyā* (or *līlā*), He was reclined on his bed of snake. Suddenly two *asuras*, quarrelsome and intoxicated with potency, came down on him with threats”.

एकार्णवं जगत्कृत्वा भगवानच्युतो यदा।

शेते स्म नागपर्यङ्के लोकान् संक्षिप्य मायया ॥

अथ वीर्यबलोन्मत्तावसुरौ मधुकैटभौ।

तर्जयामासतुर्देवं तरसा युद्धकाङ्क्षया॥ *Nāṭyaśāstra*, XX.2-3

They kicked and punched Viṣṇu and spoke to him in a humiliating way. The sea was taken upon by them. Viṣṇu did not respond. He was actually enjoying the pandemonium created by the two rogues, because their addresses to him had already led to the creation of the *Bhāratī Vṛtti*, the verbal mode of performance. But Brahmā was not pleased with the disturbance. He called upon Viṣṇu – “why are you just playing with them through *Bhāratī Vṛtti* (verbal mode of performance) only? Please finish them!” Viṣṇu replied sportively way – “O Brahman! I created this *Bhāratī Vṛtti* for this purpose [of performance]. Now I will kill these demons.”

Then Viṣṇu tied down the the locks of his hair and “with refined gestures and dancing attitudes, He fought the two belligerent *daityas*” (NŚ XXII.4-10). Brahmā then praised the grace and the beauty which the Lord exuded while killing the fierce and notorious demons. Consequent to this *Līlā* performed by Him, four *vṛttis* were generated. They became the *mātrikās* (mothers) for *Nāṭya* (theatre). Then Brahmā the creator mixed this element of *Līlā* in the Vedas. (NŚ XXII.20).

Bharatamuni suggests here that theatre came out through these *vṛttis*. “Again, on the order of Druhiṇa (Brahmā) these *vṛttis* consisting of various steps were introduced by me to create *Nāṭya*” He says. (NŚ XX.23).

The legend of the origin of *vṛtti* is suggestive of the pervasive nature of *Līlā* - sport or play. Be it *sṛṣṭi* or *pralaya* it is all *Līlā*. The act of killing and destruction is equally imbued with *ānanda*. Abhinavagupta says that only the Lord Viṣṇu could create these *vṛttis*, as he is filled with bliss (*ānanda*). Because the Lord created them, so the practitioners of theatre also adopted them as the form of his worship. Theatre then became an offering to the divine.

Līlā and *vṛtti* in this way involves divine activity which awakens creative universal powers in each cycle of Creation. This creates a view of theatre as a analogue of divine Game.

Natalia Lidovva says – “As evidently follows from the legend, the concept of *vṛtti* was initially used to designate the various kinds of divine activity aiming to awaken universal creative powers as an earnest of another cycle of Creation. The battle fought with their help also had a cosmogonist meaning because the universe again became real from a potential one through that battle.”

***Līlā* as a Fundamental Aesthetics concept: from Lokadharmī to Nāṭyadharmī**

Bharatamuni has described two modes of performance *Lokadharmī* (realistic) and *Nāṭyadharmī* (conventional and idealistic). The element of *anukṛti* is common to both. But in the *Lokadharmī* mode *anukṛti* is done to impart an experience of the world as it appears to us in our normal sense perception. In *Nāṭyadharmī* mode *anukṛti* is done to transgress the mundane world and to reach an experecial plane by taking a leap. This involves transgression and imagination. As a Fundamental Aesthetic concept *Līlā* can be identified with *Nāṭyadharmī* mode of performance. The space for the introducing *Līlā* plays was created on Sanskrit theatre through *Nāṭyadharmī*.

Bharatamuni says that there is no *Līlā* in *Lokadharmī* (*aṅgalīlāvivarjitam* - XIII.71). *Lokadharmī* simply presents the practices and behaviour of the people as they are already known. It consists of the *abhinaya* (performance) of *svabhāva* – things in their very nature. This *svabhāva* becomes *vibhāva* in *Nāṭyadharmī*. This is made possible by introducing the element of *Līlā*. When *Līlā* and *aṅgaḥāras* are added in the performance, (*līlāṅgaḥārābhīnaya* - XIII.73), the same *Lokadharmī* becomes *Nāṭyadharmī*. *Nāṭyadharmī* comprises transgressing the normal speech, normal actions and normal emotions.

Līlā is the spontaneous activity at reshaping, remolding the given world which invests it with a charm. Bharatamuni has used the world *Līlā* for all activities done with grace and ease which exude brilliance and beauty.

Bharatamuni and Abhinavagupta, his commentator *par excellence*, have cited numerous examples to illustrate this inculcation of *Līlā* in drama and theatre. Even a poem is the *Līlā* of the poet. An art form is invested with *Kānti* (brilliance) because of the *Līlā* (XVI.113). *Līlā* in fact converts an ordinary being into divine, because the Divine Being is *Līlāmaya* – whatever He does is *Līlā*. Even his sleep is *Līlā* (*divyaṃ varṣasahram arṇavajale suptaś ca yo līlayā* – q. by Abhinavagupta on NŚ, XVI.163). Whatever an actor speaks on the stage, if it fills the auditorium with surging notes carrying sweetness and charm, then it is imbued with *Līlā* (NŚ. XVII).

Evolution of *Līlā* plays

From the view point of performance-space, Indian theatre has developed through three distinct channels - Open air theatre, Theatre in the Royal Court and the Temple Theatre. Of these, theatre in open has been in practice from a hoary past. Bharatamuni adopted its techniques, structural designs and aesthetics his debut performances – *Samudramanthana* – a *samavakāra* type of play and *Tripuradāha* – a *dīma* type of play.

These performances were given on the terrain down the Himalayan mountains. The play *Amṛtamanthana*, was based on the theme of churning of the ocean by the gods and the demons to obtain *amṛta* – the elixir of life. The play involved fight between the gods and demons.

Bharata says that he made the *anukṛti* of the way the gods defeated the demons – *tadante'nukṛtir baddhā yathā daityeḥ surāḥ jītāḥ* (*Nāṭyaśāstra*, I.57).

On the basis of the description of the performance of these two plays as given by Bharata in his *Nāṭyaśāstra* (Chapter I and Chapter IV), we can say that they presented the earliest form of theatre which developed some three or four thousand years ago. We can say that these performances also initiated the beginning of the *Līlā* - theatre, because (i) Bharatamuni is aware of and discusses *Līlā*, not only as a generic term for *anukṛti*, but also as a specific genre in theatre performance as well, (ii) Even the great masters of Sanskrit drama like Bhāsa and Kālidāsa, who are basically creating plays for the theatre in Royal Courts, are aware of forms of theatre which can be called the proto-types for *Līlā* theatre (cf.- - The incorporation of *Hallīsaka* - a group dance of *ābhira* community in *Bālacaritam* and Pañcaratram by Bhāsa; and presentation of *chalita* in *Mālavikāgnimitram* by Kālidāsa).

The two forms of *Līlā* – robust and graceful might have developed from the two types of dance - *Tāṇḍava* and *Lāsya*. The former is more related to Rāmalīlā and the latter to Kṛṣṇalīlā.

Parallel to the broad view of *līlā* as *anukṛti*, and a fundamental principle for theatre, Bharatamuni has also given a specific concept of *līlā* as a form of theater. *Līlā* is described as one of the ten *svabhāvaja alaṅkāras* (NS XXII.12) under the

sāmānya abhinaya (generalised performance) in the XXII chapter of his *Nāṭyaśāstra*. *Līlā* here is defined as the *anukṛti* done by a lady when out of her love, she starts imitating the acts, speech and appearance of the beloved (NŚ, XXII.14). In fact, various other categories under the whole gamut of *sāmānya abhinaya* herald the beginnings of *līlā* –theatre. The essence of this theatre lies in beauty. Bharatamuni terms it *alaṅkāra* generated out of *Rasa* and *Bhāva* (NŚ XXII.4). We may also take up the other categories like *hāva*, *helā*, *mottāyita* and *nāṭyāyita* in the conceptual framework of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* which are closely linked to the *Līlā* theatre.

The manifestations of *sattva* through the human body of an actor are called *alaṅkāras* by Bharatamuni. They manifest out of *Rasa* and *Bhāva* during the course of an integrated performance (*sāmānya abhinaya*).

अलङ्कारास्तु नाट्यज्ञैर्ज्ञेया भावरसाश्रयाः।
यौवनेऽभ्यधिकाः स्त्रीणां विकारा वक्त्रगात्रजाः॥

Nāṭyaśāstra, XXII.4

Bharatamuni has categorized these *alaṅkāras* in three types - *āṅgaja* (manifesting through limbs – face), *svabhāvaja* and *āyatnaja*.

आदौ त्रयोऽङ्गजस्तेषां दश स्वाभाविकाः परे।
अयत्रजाः पुनः सप्त रसभावोपबृंहिताः॥

Nāṭyaśāstra, XXII.5

Three *alaṅkāras* fall under the category of *āṅgaja* – *Bhāva*, *Hāva* and *Helā*.

भावो हावश्च हेला च परस्परसमुत्थिताः।
सत्त्वभेदे भवन्त्येते शरीरे प्रकृतिस्थिताः ॥

Nāṭyaśāstra, XXII.7

They are in fact the most subtle *alaṅkāras* to be represented through gestures. *Bhāva* is generated when an actor's body is completely possessed of *sattva* (the state arising out of the concentration of mind).

This *Bhāva* becomes an *alaṅkāra* in a performance. Being the manifestation of the emotions rendered through speech, limbs and facial expressions, it is termed as *Bhāva*.

As a fundamental principle for *Līlā*, this *Bhāva* generates *Hāva* and *Hāva* generates *Helā*. These three *alaṅkāras* in a performance also nourish each other. The intensification of *Bhāva* for expression of love by the way of movements of eyes and brows and turning of the neck is *Hāva*. This *Hāva* is further developed in the form of *Helā* by graceful movements.

देहात्मकं भवेत्सत्त्वं सत्त्वाद्भावः समुत्थितः।
भावात्समुत्थितो हावो हावाद्धेला समुत्थिता॥
वाङ्मयमुखरागैश्च सत्त्वेनाभिनयेन च।
कवेरन्तर्गतं भावं भावयन्भाव उच्यते॥
तत्राक्षिभूविकाराढ्यः शृङ्गाराकारसूचकः।
सग्रीवारेचको ज्ञेयो हावः स्थितसमुत्थितः ॥
यो वै हावः स एवैषा शृङ्गाररससंभवा।

समाख्याता बुधैर्हेला ललिताभिनयात्मिका ॥

Nāṭyaśāstra, XXII.6.8,10,11

The following ten are the *Svabhāvika Alaṅkāras* of women –

- (1) *Līlā* -- *nāyikā*'s imitation of the speech, movements or actions of beloved before her friends for fun,
- (2) *Vilāsa* - amorous shift in *nāyikā*'s stance, sitting and walking as also in the action of hands, brows and eyes,
- (3) *Vicchitti*- re-adjusting the garments or ornaments with spontaneity and ease by the *nāyikā* with a glow of her face.
- (4) *Vibhrama* - a studied confusion out of *mada* (intoxication), love or joy in the adjustment of garments and ornaments;
- (5) *Kilakiñcita* (mingling smiles and bewailing, weeping and laughter, joy with sorrow, fatigue with desire out of hysteria in love);
- (6) *Mottāyita* - displaying love upon hearing the words or noticing the actions of the *nāyaka* with the inclination to imitate him;
- (7) *Kuṭṭamita* - pretended anger to conceal one's excess of joy on being touched in the hair, breast, lips etc.
- (8) *Bibboka* - affected indifference out of pride,
- (9) *Lalita* (graceful pose) and
- (10) *Vihṛta* (willful withholding of words out of bashfulness or deception).

The following are the *āyatnaja alaṅkāras* of ladies - *Śobhā* (natural beauty with attractiveness, youth and loveliness), *Kānti* (charm), *Dīpti* (charm in excess), *Mādhurya* (grace), *Dhairya* (patience), *Prāgalbhya* (boldness) and *Audārya* (dignity). These occur in all situations and exude *lālitya* (charm) and *saukumārya* (delicacy).

We learn from Abhinavagupta's commentary that there have been other theorists who had proposed new *alaṅkāras* under these categories. Rāhula, a Buddhist philosopher had proposed *mada* (intoxication) and *maugdhyā* (innocence) as two additional *alaṅkāras* here.

The following are defined as the *alaṅkāras* for men - *Śobhā* (brilliance) *Vilāsa* (graceful disposition), *Mādhurya* (not losing temper, sweetness), *Sthairya* (perseverance), *Gāmbhīrya* (sternness), *Lalita* (spontaneous amorous disposition), *Audārya* (generosity) and *Tejas* (velour with self respect).

Nāṭyāyita is one of the six divisions of *Śārīra abhinaya*. It has been defined in two ways. The *abhinaya* done through *Sūcā* and *Upacāra* for abiding time to allow the entry (of main characters) is one type of *Nāṭyāyita* (NŚ, XXII.48). It consists of an interpretative style to be applied by the performer through explaining of emotions of a character when *Dhruvā* songs are being sung by the singers seated on the stage in the *kutapa* or orchestra (XXII.49). According to Abhinavagupta, here the actor distances himself from the character and joins the group of singers.

According to Śaṅkuka *Nāṭyāyita* is practiced with *Dhruvāgāna*, *Sūcā* and *Parikramaṇa*. According to Abhinavagupta *Nāṭyāyita* is like seeing a dream, and then becoming aware of the fact that this was just a dream. The

performer becomes a spectator and then again reverts back to his role as performer. Alternately, the group of performers splits into two – one group creating a play within a play and the other group watching it. This in fact is *Līlā nāṭya* as described in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and *Śrīmadbhāgavata*, and Bhavabhūti has made a very creative use of it in his *Uttararāmacaritaṃ*.

In fact, the *Nāṭyāyita* described by Abhinavagupta is presented as *Līlā* in *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and in the *Rāsapañcādhyāyī* of *Śrīmadbhāgavataṃ* (X.29-33).

तदप्रामिसिहादुःखविलीनाशेषपातका।
तच्चिन्ताविपुलाह्लादक्षीणपुण्यचया तथा ॥
चिन्तयन्ती जगत्सूतिं परब्रह्मस्वरूपिणम्।
निरुच्छवासतया मुक्तिं गतान्या गोपकन्यका ॥

Viṣṇupurāṇa, V.13, 21-22.

It creates a blend of the aesthetics of distance and aesthetics of rapture which is mark of *Līlā* theatre. But ultimately the *Līlā* theatre leads to the dissolution of limited consciousness in the infinitum. *Viṣṇupurāṇa* not only gives a vivid description of *Līlā* performed by the gopīs (milk-maids) in this context, the term *Līlā* is also used here.

कृष्णे निरुद्धहृदया इदमूचुः परस्परम्।
कृष्णोऽहमेतल्ललितं ब्रजाम्यालोक्यतां गतिः।
अन्या ब्रवीति कृष्णस्य मम गीतिर्निश्चयताम्।
दुष्ट कालिय तिष्ठात्र कृष्णोऽहमिति चापरा।
बाहुमास्फोट्य कृष्णस्य लीलां सर्वस्वमाददे॥

Viṣṇupurāṇa, V.13.25-26, p. 168

Nāṭyāyita as treated in the NŚ of Bharata and as interpreted by Abhinavagupta assumes the features of this *Līlā* performance. The whole theretical framework of *sāmānya abhinaya* as envisaged in NŚ has percolated in the actual practice of the theatre of *Līlā*.

On the other hand, Bharata and his followers were incorporating the elements of popular theatres similar to *Līlā* in the theory. This is evident in their treatment of *Lāsyāṅgas* (ancillaries of the *lāsyā* dance). In the NŚ, ten ancillaries of *lāsyas* are enumerated: (1) *Geyapada*, (2) *Sthitapāṭhya*, (3) *Āsīna*, (4) *Puṣpagandika*, (5) *Pracchedaka*, (6) *Trimūḍhaka*, (7) *Saindhavaka*, (8) *Dvimūḍhaka*, (9) *Uttamottamaka* and (10) *Uktapratyukta*. The very definition of *Lāsyā* by Bhatratamuni is suggestive of *Līlā* theatre.

लसनाल्लास्यमित्युक्तं स्त्रीपुम्भावसमाश्रयम्।
एकार्थं पृथगर्थं च तदङ्गैस्तु प्रकीर्तितम्॥

Viṣṇupurāṇa, XXXI.331

Geyapada (simple song) is sung to the accompaniment of the lute by a singer occupying a seat and without any imitative gesture. *Sthitapāṭhya* (song in a sitting position) is the song of a lovelorn heroine in Prākṛit, herself remaining quiet on a seat giving vent to her emotions. *Āsīna* is the sitting pose with crooked or bent eyebrows suggesting anxiety and sorrow and remaining without bodily embellishments or make up.

Puṣpagandikā is assumption of the role of male characters by a female performer with speech in simple Sanskrit for the entertainment of her friends. In *Pracchedaka*, the ladies in a huff are forcefully attracted to consorts who have offended them because they are affected by moonlight. *Trimūḍhaka* is a dance by ladies in male costume, *Dvimūḍhaka* is performance on a song with with double meaning. An auspicious meaning is enacted with the placing of footsteps to all the four corners of the stage combined with deceptive actions representing Rasas and Bhāvas in it. *Uttamottamaka* lies in presenting different Rasas and a variety of stanzas and sportive actions serving as embellishment. *Uktapratyukta* is formed by questions and answers with a variety of songs embellished with angry and pleasant words in the form of a repartee.

Making of in-roads: Rāmālīlā in Sanskrit Theatre and Sanskrit Theatre in Rāmālīlā

The earliest reference to Rāmālīlā occurs in the *Harivaṃśamahāpurāṇa*. Sāmba with his companions forms a fake drama troupe, which performs *Līlās* in the city of the demon Vajra. One of the plays they perform is on the story of Rāma. The performances of Rāmālīlā and Kṛṣṇālīlā started in an early age. When Vālmiki was composing his epic, he was also training the Kuśilavas to perform it with songs and narration. The second generation after Kṛṣṇa perhaps started performing his *Līlās*. We therefore have a description of the primitive form of *Rāmālīlā* and *Kṛṣṇālīlā* in *Harivaṃśamahāpurāṇa* situating the event of performance in Kṛṣṇa's times. In a festival organised at the Piṇḍarakakṣetra in Dvārakā, the apsaras (nymphs) descended on earth to perform the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa. These *līlās* included killing of various demons – Pralamba, Dhenuka, Baka, Aṣṭa etc as well as the *Rāsa* and the *Kamsavadha Līlā*.

With the advent of Vaiṣṇavism, the theatre activity was brought within the precincts of the temples with the above conceptual framework of *Līlā*. The *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa* describes the *yātrā* of the deity of a temple. This *yātrā* invariably incorporates performance of plays for several days in the temple area before the masses.

Though the word Rāmālīlā does not occur in *Viṣṇudharmottarapurāṇa*, but what we call Rāmālīlā is going on within Sanskrit theatre and without it as well throughout the first millennium of the Christian era. Some of the most renowned playwrights in Sanskrit chose to hand over their plays to the theatre-groups performing for the *yātrās* in the temple area. Bhavabhūti was one of them. In fact, his plays were created for the Temple Theatre and they display the characteristics of *līlā* plays as well the form of Rāmālīlā as practiced between in 8th to 12th centuries AD. All the three plays of Bhavabhūti were produced on the occasion of the *yātra* festival of the temple of *Kālapriyanātha*. The fact that he was writing for Temple Theatre must have inspired Bhavabhūti to choose Ramayana-theme for two of his dramatic works and a popular type of folk-tale for the third one. These plays, together with *Hanumannāṭaka*, of dubious authorship which is the oldest available specimen of a *Līlā*-play on *Rāmāyaṇa*-theme as well as the plays by dramatists like Rājaśekhara, Murāri, Jayadeva (the author of

Prasannarāghava) create standards for the form of *Līlā* as developed in the medieval period.

Although Bhavabhūti had thoroughly mastered the system of NŚ(commentators like Jagaddhara point out how all the 36 types of *dr̥ṣṭis* prescribed in the NS have been assimilated in the beautiful description of Malati's *katākṣa* (glance) in the 1st act of *Malatimadhava*), his dramatic pieces require a different type of theatre and different mode of presentation. The view and design of the Temple Theatre has influenced the structure and concept of Bhavabhūti's drama. He appears to be writing for a big audience, instead of the scholarly gathering of the selected few for which Kālidāsa and perhaps Bhāsa too have been writing. Big crowds assembled on the occasion of *yātrā* festivals to witness the performance of plays or dance recitals that went on for a number of days during the period of the festival. Bhavabhūti himself has given a graphic picture of the masses which might have come to see the performance of his own plays in the prologue of his *Mālatīmādhava*.

It is to be noted here that the protagonist of this play gets the first chance of meeting his beloved on the occasion of the *yātrā*-festival of a Kāmadevayātana (Kāma's temple) in the city of Padmāvātī where he has come from Vidarbha for the purpose of study. The atmosphere of *yātrā*- festivals and the temples pervades the texture of this play. A number of incidents take place within the precincts of a Śive-temple. The heroine is carried to a Karalāyatana – the temple of Caṇḍika for being sacrificed.

The fact that he was writing for Temple Theatre must have inspired Bhavabhūti to choose Rāmāyaṇa-theme for two of his dramatic works and a popular type of folk-tale for the third one. Some of the features that mark his deviation from the norms set by his great predecessors belonging to the Royal Court Theatre are – (i) absence of Vidūṣaka, (ii) disregard for secret love affair for the royal harem, (iii) emotional approach and excessive dwelling on pathetic sentiments (iv) vigorous movements requiring larger stage-space, and (v) reference to different set of performing modes – (like *Niśumbha Karaṇa* or *Vaimuḍhaka lāsya* in *Malatimadhava*) instead of sophisticated stylised postures.

Like Bhāsa, Bhavabhūti also presents his characters in sleep or lying on bed contrary to Bharata's directive. In the I act of *Uttaracarita*, Sītā goes to sleep and has a bad dream. In *Mālatīmādhava*, Makaranda is shown lying on the bed. Scenes of embrace also occur in Bhavabhūti's dramatic world. Such scenes somewhat uncouth for the refined classical theatre must have been practiced on popular theatre aligned to the *Līlā* plays.

The very presentation of a play within the play in *Uttaracarita* stands in violation to Bharata's dicta; in the terminology of NŚ, it is a *bāhya-prayoga*, as it is being performed within the precincts of Vālmīki's hermitage without a proper theatre. This experiment in Bhavabhūti stands in sharp contrast with the *garbha-nāṭaka* in *Priyadarśikā* which was presented in theatre of Royal Court. Bhavabhūti in fact is presenting a scene of Rāmalīlā within a scene of his play. He also shows that the aesthetic experience of a *Līlā* play uniquely

differs from that of the classical theatre. Rāma himself is sitting in the audience with his younger brother and when he sees Sītā jumping in Ganges in utter exasperation in the play on the stage, he cries and rises shouting. Lakṣmaṇa has to remind him repeatedly that this is simply a drama being presented and not reality. In fact, the whole performance of the play within the play in Bhavabhūti's *Uttararāmacaritaṃ* is an exemplification of *nāṭyāyita* as discussed above.

Rājaśekhara introduced a number of new features in Sanskrit drama, which were inspired perhaps from a parallel tradition of a *Līlā* -theatre. He added *dhruvā* songs in his dramas. Employment of puppets, or use of motifs related to puppet theatre is another speciality of Rājaśekhara. The central concept of *Viddhaśālabhañjikā* by him is based on the puppet motif. *Śālabhañjikā* is a puppet. In his *Bālarāmāyaṇa*, the puppet of Sītā is brought on the stage for entertaining Rāvaṇa.

Rājaśekhara has introduced *carcarī* in his *Karpūramajari*, giving a lively account of its performance. *Carcarī* has been mentioned and defined amongst the minor forms of drama or the *uparūpakas*. The *carcarī* as described by Rājaśekhara combines a number of group dances – (i) sprinkling of coloured water through the pipes with *lāsya* type of dance; (ii) the *ḍaṇḍarāsa* by thirty-two danseuses in various combinations, (iii) cemetery dance with demon-like masks; (iv) *pulinda*-dance with feathers of peacocks; and (v) *challi* or *calli* dance in accompaniment of *hudukka* and *mardala*.

Several experimentations or designs of various situations in Rājaśekhara's dramatic pieces violate Bharata's norms. Vidūṣaka in his *Karpūramañjarī* wears a mask (*pratiśīrṣaka*), whereas only the minister, Kañcukī and purohita should wear masks according to Bharata. Rājaśekhara introduced a number of new features in Sanskrit drama, which were inspired by *Līlā* theatre.

Kohala, the worthy disciple of Bharatamuni, became the forerunner of the parallel forms of theatre, including the *Līlā* theatre. He has exercised great influence on the later theorists and dramatists also. No wonder that Rājaśekhara in his *Bālarāmāyaṇa* presents Kohala as the *Sūtradhāra* of the play within the play (*garbha-nāṭaka* or *garbhāṅka*), which has been named there as 'Sītāsvayamvaram.' Kohala appears to present the show of this play in the court of Rāvaṇa, and informs that Bharatamuni has sponsored this play and has also provided the script for it.

It is natural for Rājaśekhara to present Kohala as the *Sūtradhāra*, as he is drawing from Kohala's tradition, which is *Līlā* theatre.

In fact, the plays of Bhavabhūti and Rājaśekhara are marked with a strong impact of *Līlā* theatre. *Hanumannāṭaka* on the other hand, provides a specimen of a *Līlā* play in Sanskrit.

The script of *Hanumannāṭaka* has a floating text, edited on different times. It is called *Hanumannāṭaka* because Hanumān is supposed to have authored it. There are two different editions available in the manuscript tradition. One of them is called *Mahānāṭaka* also. It is comprised of nine acts. It was edited by

Madhusūdana Miśra in Bengal. Another version, larger than this and containing in 14 acts was compiled by Dāmodara Miśra in Mahārāṣṭra. Many legends are cited by the commentators with regards to the rediscovery of this play. Madhusūdana Miśra and Dāmodara Miśra do not claim the authorship, they just inform that we have re-arranged what ever material was available and they also tell us how Hanumnnāṭaka was lost and recovered.

एष हनुमता विरचिते श्रीमन्महानाटके
वीरश्रीयुतरामचन्द्रचरिते प्रत्युद्गते विक्रमैः।
मिश्रश्रीमधुसूदनेन कविना सन्दर्भ्य सज्जीकृते
स्वर्गारोहणनामकोऽत्र नवमोऽङ्क एवेत्यसौ॥

Mahānāṭakam, IX.149

रचितमनिलपुत्रेणाथ वाल्मीकिनाब्धौ
निहितममृतबुद्ध्या प्राङ्महानाटकं यत्
सुमतिनृपतिभोजेनोद्धृतं तत्क्रमेण
ग्रथितमवतु विश्वं मिश्रदामोदरेण॥

Hanumannāṭaka, XIV.96 p. 233

As the legend goes, Hanūmān wrote this play and inscribed it on the stones. When Vālmīki came to know of a play authored by Hanūmān, he became apprehensive about the future of his own Rāmāyaṇa and aired his apprehensions before the its author. Hanūmān then threw the stones with his play inscribed on them in the sea. In one of versions of the story, it is the king Vikramāditya recovers the stones lost in the sea; in another version it is the king Bhoja. In *Bhojaprabandha*, Vallālasena has narrated this episode at length, Kālidāsa is said to have supplied the missing lines in one of the stanzas, which were found exactly as the master poet gave them when the missing portions were also recovered. This story is also repeated in the introduction of Dhanapāla's Tilakamañjarī, whereas *Prabandhacintāmaṇi* gives the credit of supplying the missing line to Dhanapāla.

A profuse number of stanzas have been borrowed in the script of *Hanumannāṭaka* from earlier Rāmāyaṇa-literature - Vālmīki's Rāmāyaṇa, Raghuvamśa of Kālidāsa, Bhavabhūti's plays, Rājasekhara's Bālarāmāyaṇa, Udātta-rāghava, Anargharāghava, Jayadeva's Prasannarāghava etc. The compilers even included beautiful stanzas from Kālidāsa's Abhijñānaśākuntala, or the poems of some great poets like Yogeśvara; moderating the original context to suit their purpose.

[*Digvāsā yadi...* of Yogeśvara occurs in IX.37 (p. 140). The stanza from Mahavīracaritaṃ 'Utpattir Jamadagnitah..' is reproduced in I.54, *Bāhor balaṃ na viditaṃ* from Bālarāmāyaṇa (IV.61) in 1.39; Anargharāghava III.21 is reproduced in IV.43. The oft-quoted stanza *Mūrdhnām urvṛttakṛtta* occurs in Madhusūdana's version when Rāvaṇa bewails the death of Indrajita (IX.56), whereas Damodara's puts it in the mouth of Aṅgada when he is having an exchange of words with Rāvaṇa. Sadyaḥ purī parisare of Balarāmāyaṇa (II.13) occurs in this version. Even the fascinating description of the deer being chased by the king in Kālidāsa's Abhijñānaśākuntala (*Grīvābhṅgābhirāmam* ...) is made to fit in the description of the golden deer chased by Rāma (IV.2, p. 48-9). The stanza *dyūte paṇaḥ prayakeliṣu kaṇṭhapāś* from

Kundamālā is adopted by reversing the time – from Sītā's exile to the period following her abduction by Rāvaṇa (V.1, p. 54).]

There is no Prakrit, dialogues in prose are quite infrequent. Continuous narration is interspersed with the dialogues.

There are detailed dramatic directions. They tend to become descriptive and poetic. For example -

लक्ष्मणः श्रीरामहृदयानन्दकन्दाङ्कुरोद्भवाय निजप्रचण्डदोर्दण्डयोर्महतीं
प्रौढिं नाटयति। p. 5;

(Lakṣmaṇa performs a profundity of mature actions through his fierce arms with a view to get the sprouts of joy grow in the heart of Rāma.)

or

जामदग्न्यः

—

स्फीतफूत्कारप्रफुल्लनासापुटकोटरोद्गीर्णप्रभूतगर्वानलोच्छलित
कालकूटधूमस्तोमाच्छादितदिङ्मण्डलः p. 14

(Jāmadagnya – with his nostrils swelling due to vigorous hissings, covering the space with the emitting of the poisonous smoke arising out of the burning of his fire of pride)

Normally the dramatic directions in Sanskrit drama are framed with one or two words in a coded language to be decoded by the performer. They just hint upon the action to be done by the actor, who understands the suggestion of these directions like *nāṭyena*, *rūpayati*, *sasmitam* etc. Drawing sharp contrast from this rather cryptic method, dramatic directions in Hanumannāṭaka are not only descriptive and elaborate, they sometimes come like complete stanzas to be recited by a sūtradhāra, making the whole performance to be adjusted for a theatre of narration. For example, there is this description of Mandodarī -

वृन्दारुवृन्दारकवृन्दवन्दिमन्दारमालामकरन्दलेशैः

मन्दोदरीयं चरणारविन्दरेणूत्करान् कर्करतामनैषीत्॥ IX.4, p. 130

(Here is this Mandodarī, who, by her prostrations, has made the heaps of the pollen of the lotus feet of Rāvaṇa, which was formed by the garlands offered at them by the groups of gods like the bards, hardened like sand.)

Everything is blown out of proportions, the war is terrific beyond imaginations, cruelty and braveness reach to their extreme. The stanzas which appeal to the public memory and make them weep are preserved. They are imbued with a rare poetic quality, carrying tender emotions and sentiments. For example, revived from his unconscious stage by Sanjīvanī and being asked how does he feel, Lakṣmaṇa says -

ईषन्मात्रमहं वेद्मि स्फुटं वेत्ति राघवः

वेदना राघवेन्द्रस्य केवलं व्रणिनो वयम्। XIV.38, p. 194

(I feel just very little, Rāghava – the elder brother, feels it overtly. We are simply wounded, Rāghavendra suffers the pain).

Tulasīdāsa in his Baravairāmāyaṇa has borrowed from this stanza and has made his Lakṣmaṇa say -

हृदय घाउ मेरे पीर रघुवीरै

(Wounds in my heart Pain in Rāghavba.)

Quite a lot of patch work has been done in preparing the present script of Hanumannāṭaka. The editors have even taken up popular *samasyāpūrtis*. (The *samasyā* ‘*maśakagalakarandhre hastiyūtham praviṣṭam*’ One of the wives of the Kumbhakarna is made to remark when her husband is being awakened with gusto of sounds)

विरम विरम तूर्णं कुम्भकर्णस्य कर्णा-
न्न खलु तव निनादैरैष निद्रां जहाति।
इति कथयति काचित् प्रयेसी प्रेक्ष्यमाणा
मशकगलकरन्ध्रे हस्तियूथं प्रविष्टम्।

Hanuman says that I will go and return with the herb *sañjivani* within the time a seed of mustard is parched in the boiling oil. These are the passages; the lovers of Rāmalīlā would cherish and would like to listen to again and again. (Sītā is made to offer her prayers to Rāma in Pañcavaṭī in this way)-

क्रीडाकल्पवटं विसर्पितजटं विश्राम्बुजन्मावटं
पिष्ठाण्डोघघटं धृताङ्घ्रिशकटं ध्वस्तक्षमासङ्कटम्।
विद्युच्चारुचाविधूतकपटं सीताधरालम्पटं
भिन्नाम्भोदघटं विरुग्णशकटं वन्दे गिरां दुर्घटम्॥ III.23 p. 47

On the other hand, there are passages of somewhat rustic nature which would delight the masses. In the beginning of the second act, the newly married Rāma goes to the royal pan with Sītā and starts beating the horses. The couple thinks that seeing the horses of in the pan thrashed this way, the horses of the Sun would pity them and move quickly, so that here is night he can make love with Sītā. This scene is to be depicted with a question – how is it that Rāma, suffering from the wounds of the arrows shot by the Kāmadeva, together with Sītā, has been beating the horses from the past three yāmas (nine hours)?

रामो यामत्रयमपि कथं मारनाराचभिन्नो
नीत्वा सीतां किमिति तुरगांस्ताडयामास दण्डैः? (II,1. p. 23)

This is followed by a detailed description of Rāma’s act of thrashing the horses in prose (p. 23). In fact this is introducing Rāsalīlā in Rāmalīlā. It is a precursor of Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda. The narrator in Hanumannāṭaka does not hesitate in a frank description of love making between Rāma and Sītā -

अन्योन्यं बाहुपाशग्रहणरसभराशीलिनोस्तत्र यूनो -
भूयो भूयः प्रभुत्वाभिमतफलभुजोर्नन्दतोर्जात एषः।
संसारो गर्भसारो नव इव मधुरालापिनोः कामिनोर्मा
गाढं चालिङ्ग्य गाढं स्वपिहि नहि नहीति च्युतो बाहुबन्धः॥ II. 13.p. 28

(For the young couple, with their arms closely arrested in embrace;

Again, and again enjoying the fruits of their prosperity so cherished and rejoicing,

Talking secretly to each other

Saying – embrace me more

And then no, no, and then loosing the grip of arms,

The world became renewed with essence of life.

There are also several stanzas which were enjoyed by the masses and have been popular in oral tradition. They form relief, amusement and tinge of humour after the performance of tense moments. Rāma is going to be crowned as king. This oft-quoted stanza is recited on this occasion

रामाभिषेके मदविह्वलाया
हस्तच्युतो मेहघटस्तरुण्याः।
सोपानमार्गे प्रकरोति शब्दं
ठंठं ठंठं ठंठंठंठं॥ III.3, p. 37

(On the occasion of the coronation ceremony of Rāma, certain young woman who was overcome with intoxication, dropped a jar she was holding in her hand. The jar falling on the stairs is making sounds - *ṭham, ṭam, ṭaṭhaṁṭham ṭaṭhaṁṭham ṭaṭhaṁṭhaḥ!*)

In a dialogue between Mandodarī and Rāvaṇa, Madodarī asks her husband what at all is the difference between her and Sītā, claiming that she is equally beautiful, Rāvaṇa retorts by saying that it is the fragrance of lotuses from the body of Sītā and the foul smell of the frogs /fishes from your body which makes the difference (IX.39,p. 141).

Hanumannāṭaka also records several passages and verses which must have been popular in the Rāmalīlās for centuries. The dialogues of of some of the characters like Lakṣmaṇa and Aṅgada, with their tumultuous provocative tone are full of mass appeal. Tulasidāsa, who re-organised the Rāmalīlā theatre also during his time, must have studied Hanumannāṭaka and emulated passages like these from this play in his Rāmacaritamānasa. The following dialogue of Lakṣmaṇa for example -

पृथ्वि स्थिरा भव भुजङ्गम धारयैनं
त्वं कूर्मराज तदिदं द्वितयं दधीयाः
दिक्कुञ्जराः कुरुत तत्त्रितये दिधीषां

रामः करोति हरकामुकमाततज्यम्॥ (Hanumannāṭaka has borrowed this stanza from Bālarāmāyaṇa 1.48)

(Earth, remain stable, Serpent! hold her!

O king of tortoises! You grasp both of these!

O elephants of direction! You manage to bear all these three

Rama is fastening corfd on the bow of Śiva.

Hanumannataka brings the form of Rama’s story as the people might have understood or interpreted. It has also preserved and cherished records from people’s memory and people’s creativity. Hence there are striking innovations and new motifs introduced. They are bold and reflect the voices from common people. When the dying Vālin expresses his disgust on being killed fraudulently, and even says that if Rāma had approached him for assistance he could have searched Sītā for him, a dejected Rāma, with tears rolling down his eyes, has no excuses to offer here. He simply accepts his guilt of killing the antagonist. He also accepts Vālin’s curse that he will be killed in his next incarnation as Kṛṣṇa by Vālin as a hunter. The faith of the people in both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa as incarnations of Viṣṇu has led to establish interconnections between Rāmalīlā and Kṛṣṇalīlā here.

Rāvaṇa also appears in most pathetic moments of weakness when his kith and kin are killed one after the another, and then he goes to Mandodarī to ask her whether even at this stage he should make peace with Rāma by returning Sītā to him.

रामाय प्रतिपक्षवृक्षशिखिने दास्यामि वा मैथिलीम्
युद्धे राघवसायकैर्विनिहतः स्वर्गं गमिष्यामि वा?
नीतिज्ञे कथयस्व देवि, कतमः पक्षो गृहीतस्त्वया?
सुश्राव्यं पदमस्मदीयमगमन्मन्मात्रशेषं कुलम्॥14.4. p. 197

Shall I return Sītā to Rāma
Who is at the top of the trees – my enemies.
Or killed by his arrows shall depart to heaven
O wise Mandodarī, you know the course of nīti
Tell me which side you opt for
My predicament has become well known now,
And the family is left with me alone!

It is Mandodarī who now stands stronger, and says how can there be a compromise now? Unwavering, she stoops to tell Rāvaṇa that there can be no turning back at this stage. (14.5. p. 197). Rāvaṇa becomes even more dejected and speaks a well-known dialogue.

न्यङ्कारो ह्ययमेव मे यदरयस्तत्राप्यसौ तापसः
सोऽप्यत्रैव निहन्ति राक्षसकुलं जीवत्यहौ रावणः।
धिग्धिक् शक्रजितं प्रबोधितवता किं कुम्भकर्णेन वा
स्वर्गग्रामटिकाविलुण्ठनवृथोच्छ्रनैः किमेभिर्भुजैः ॥

Mandodarī seeing this condition of her husband goes to the extent of saying

शोकं लङ्केश मा गाः कुरु चिरमपुनर्भावि गाढोपगूढं
देवाऽऽज्ञां देहि योद्धुं समरमवतरामस्मि सक्षत्रिया यत्॥

You sovereign of Laṅkā! do not be depressed
Let us have a close embrace for the last time
Permit me to go to the battle field
Because I too am a lady from the warrior class.

Naturally, Rāvaṇa is transformed after this. With a gusto, he starts swearing that he alone is capable of protecting Laṅkā and Mandodarī should not pity him this way.

मैवं कान्ते स्वकान्ते तरुण्य करुणां प्राणरङ्कः किमेको
लङ्कां सन्त्यज्य शङ्कां शिव शिव समरायोद्यतो राक्षसेन्द्रः॥

XIV.7, p. 198

A most fascinating theme is woven in the episode of Rāma's celestial journey from Laṅkā to Ayodhyā. Seated in the Puṣpakavimāna, Rāma is trying to show to Sītā the places connected to his seizure of Laṅkā. He points out the setu (bridge) on the sea. Sītā peeps and looks down from the aircraft, says – I see the sea, but where is the bridge? Rāma says – it is there! Look again! Repeated exercise of Sītā's looking down to locate the bridge are simply exhausted in failure. Rāma then comprehends the situation. Sītā's face being like moon, the sea swells in a high tide the moment she bends her face to look down and the bridge is covered. Rāma then covers her face with his

palms and asks her to look down again. This time the bridge is visible.

दृष्टोऽयं सरितां पतिः प्रियतम क्वास्ते स सेतुः परं ।
क्वेति क्वेति मुहुर्मुहुः सकुतुकं पृष्टे परं विस्मिते।
अत्रासीदयमत्रात्र किमिति व्यग्रे निजप्रेयसि
व्यावृत्तास्यसुधानिधिः समभवन्मन्दस्मिता जानकी॥ XIV.67, p. 224

These very fanciful and tender moments are followed by a humorous situation. The night dawns and moon rise. Rāma covers Sītā's eyes apprehending that seeing the deer in the moon she would again ask him to bring the deer!

Hanumannāṭaka curiously mixes most subtle feelings, aesthetic ruptures and divine experiences with most grotesque and crude portrayals of life. Characterizations reflect the views of a community and collective creativity; hence there are deeper insights in study of human behavior in many situations. Mandodarī's lamentations after the fall of her husband reflect her concerns and apprehension on account of Vibhiṣaṇa. She even proposes to accompany Rāma, as she knows that Rāma alone is the man who will not set his eye on another woman.

विभीषणः पापकथानिमग्नः स्वापाकुलोऽभूद्यदि कुम्भकर्णः
राजाऽभिमानी पतितः कलङ्के लङ्के निमग्नाऽसि गभीरपङ्के॥

IX.41, p. 141

After the fall of Rāvaṇa, Aṅgada suddenly flashes out his mussels. In fact, he had vowed to avenge the injustice done to his father. With a fury he challenges Rāma to have a fight with him now! He is stopped by Ākāśavāṇī telling him that Vālin himself will avenge his death in his next birth.

Interpretative style like Kūṭiyāṭṭam is hinted upon. The following stanza can be interpreted to yield double meaning

एषा पञ्चवटी रघूत्तमकुटी यत्रास्ति पञ्चावटी
पान्थस्यैकघटी पुरस्कृततटी संक्षेपभित्तौ वटी।
गोदा यत्र नटी तरङ्गिततटी कल्लोलचञ्चत्पुटी
दिव्यामोदकुटी भवाब्धिशकटी भूतक्रियादुष्कुटी॥ III.22, p. 45

Hanumannāṭaka records some of the most piquant verbal duals-- dialogues – like *Paraśurāmasaṃvāda*, *Aṅgda-rāvaṇasaṃvāda* etc. The dialogues are full of fervor, rhythm and puns and they make perfect scripts for a *Līlā* theatre. (See the following passage from *Paraśurāmasaṃvāda*)-

रामः – यस्मादेकगुणं शरासनमिदं सुव्यक्तमुर्वीभुजा-
मस्माकं भवतो यतो नवगुणं यज्ञोपवीतं बलम्॥1.41
हारः कण्ठे विशतु यदि व तीक्ष्णधारः कुठारः
स्त्रीणां नेत्राण्यधिवसतु सुखं कज्जलं वा जलं वा॥1.45
प्राचीभागे सरागे तरणिविरहिणि क्रान्तमुद्रे समुद्रे
निद्रालौ नीरजालौ विकसितकुमुदे निर्विकारे चकोरे
आकाशे सावकाशे तमसि शममिते काकलोके सशोके
कन्दर्पेऽनल्पदर्पे वितरति किरणाञ्छर्वरीसार्वभौमः॥2.3
द्विः शरं नाभिसन्धत्ते द्विः स्थापयति नाश्रितान्
द्विर्ददाति न चार्थिभ्यां रामो द्विर्नाभिभाषते॥1.49

Āṅḍarāvaṇasaṃvāda is most prolonged And full of hyperboles heightened speeches challenging tones. (The following example may be cited)–

रावणः –

इन्द्रं माल्यकरं सहस्रकिरणं द्वारिप्रतीहारकं
चन्द्रं छत्रधरं समीरवरुणौ सम्मार्जयन्तौ गृहान्
पाचक्यं परिनिष्ठितं हुतवहं किं मद्गृहे नेक्षसे
रक्षोभक्ष्यमनुष्यमात्रवपुषं तं राघवं स्तौषि किम्?

VIII.23, p. 115

अङ्गदः

रे रे रावण हीन दीन कुमते रामोऽपि किं मानुषः
किं गङ्गाऽपि नदी? गजः सुरगजोऽप्युच्चैःश्रवाः किं हयः?

VIII.24

Considering the popularity of *Āṅḍarāvaṇasaṃvāda*, at the end of the play when Rāvaṇa is appears in the battlefield to fight for the last time, Āṅḍa is again brought to have dual of words with him. The accusations of Lava for Rāma in Bhavabhūti's Uttaraṛāmacaritaṃ (*vrddhās te na vicīraṇīyacartā* etc.) are placed in Āṅḍa's mouth here (XIV.22, p 205) reversing the whole context and implication.

During the medieval period, the process of the blend of popular theatre and classical theatre led to the making of a new genre of the Bhāṣānāṭakas, the specimen of which we have in the plays like *Goraṅṣavijaya* (by Vidyāpati) or *Pārijātaḥaraṇa* (by Umāpati). The Sūtradhara remains present on the stage right from the beginning till the end in these plays, and he goes on addressing the audience. The dialogues in Prakrit have now given place to songs in local dialects – Maithili or Asamia. We find here a different type of theatre emerging. This is the theatre of the Sūtradhāra. He stands here between the audience and the world of drama. The concept of time and space on the stage in this way undergoes through a change. New dramatic forms like *Harikathā* or *Rāgākāvya* (like Gitagovinda) are now emerging. These are precursors of *Līlā* plays. Several regional forms of theatre – viz. - Ankiya Nat, Lai Haroaba, Bare Chaharia in North East; Bhaona (from Assam), Manipuri Rasa, *Rāmlīlā*, *Rāslīlā*, *Swāng*, *Nautankī* from Northern India – have come up.

The later theoreticians in the field of Nāṭyaśāstra have been constantly categorizing and standardizing these new forms of theatre akin to *Līlā*, pointing out to interconnections between Nāṭyaśāstra, Sanskrit theatre and the emergence of *Līlā* plays.

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