

The Connotations of Lāsya

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Abstract

This paper shall majorly investigate the meaning of *lāsya* as per earliest of scholiasts and eventually try to map out a concatenation of the varied *lāsyaṅgās* explicated in the different treatises.

The different disquisitions that mention the *deśi lāsyaṅgās* shall be thoroughly examined. The paper shall implore into the possibility of observing a plausible association of the terms *deśi* and *mārga lāsyaṅgās*. This interconnection might also help the researcher in traversing and exploring an extension of the scope of the *deśi lāsyaṅgās*, in terms of their implementation in the process of communicating a sentiment. As an ultimate outcome the research might be able to establish the factuality of evoking a *rasa* with the *deśi lāsyaṅgās*.

Keywords: *lāsya*- feminine/graceful, *lāsyaṅgās*- parts/kinds of *lasya*, *mārga*- according to ancient text, *deśi*- local/provincial usage

Abbreviations of texts-

1. The *Nāṭyaśāstra* - NS
2. The *Bharatārṇava*- BN
3. The *Daśarūpaka*- DR
4. The *Samgīta Ratnākara*- SR
5. The *Nṛtta Ratnāvalī* - NR

Introduction

In its absolute basic nub, the *lāsya* aspect of dance is the movement of the body with grace, which helps induce varied sentiments. Certain connoisseurs also designate the term *deśi* with *lāsyaṅgās*, thus essentially claiming that these beauteous movements are also performed only on the rhythmic construct. Presumably, the *deśi lāsyaṅgās* in particular, can also be surmised to be non-representational in nature. It is a well acknowledged fact, that movements which are rendered on *tāla* or rhythm, are cleped to be those which are incapable of evoking any sentiment. The *deśi lāsyaṅgās*, as it shall be observed, are an elaborate elucidation on the engagement of the variegated parts of the *āṅgika*, *only* on the rhythmic construe in most of the primordial texts.

On the other hand, the *lāsyaṅgās* of the supposedly *mārga* nature, are always associated with a situation of the *nāyika*. The employment of the *āṅgika* is always delineated after the situation has been hinted at, which is proffered to be conducive of evoking a *rasa* as per the texts.

Methodology

An exploratory methodology shall be adopted for the paper. A descriptive study of the *lāsya* aspect of

dance shall find mention in the segments, hereafter. An explanatory methodology with respect to the habituated terms often utilized with the *lāsya* aspect shall also find a mention.

The NS

Infrequently termed as the gentler counterpart of the *tāṇḍava* aspect of dance, the *lāsya* is an artform initiated by goddess *Pārvati* as per the traditional origins. The NS mentions-

'recakairāṅgahārāisca nṛtyantam vīkṣya śaṅkaram/ sukumāraprayogeṇa nṛtyati sma ca pārvatī//' (Ghosh, 91)

‘Seeing Śaṅkara (Śiva) dance with Recakas and Aṅgahāras, Pārvatī too performed a gentle dance (lit. danced with delicate forms)...’ (Ghosh, 92)

The *tāṇḍava* which is inclined towards a strenuous and a robust format of dance, was taught to *Tāṇḍu* by Lord Śiva himself and *Tāṇḍu* in turn, made a dance with the songs and instrumental music. Hence this dance came to be known as the *tāṇḍava*.

'..sṛṣṭva bhagavatā dattāstāṇḍave munaye tadā//....nṛtaprayogaḥ sṛṣṭo yaḥ sa tāṇḍava iti smṛtaḥ//' (Ghosh, 93)

‘..Śiva communicated them to the sage Taṇḍu....hence this dance is known as Tāṇḍava (i.e. Taṇḍu’s creation).’ (Ghosh, 93)

The purpose allocated by *Bharata* for both forms of dance has been mentioned as follows-

'prāyeṇa tāṇḍavidhirdevastutyāśrayo bhavet/sukumāraprayogastu śṛṅgārarasasambavaḥ//' (Ghosh, 95)

‘The Class Dance (tāṇḍava) is mostly to accompany the adoration of gods, but its gentler form (sukumāraprayoga) relates to the erotic sentiment.’ (Ghosh, 95)

As observed from the above statement the *sukumāra* or the *lāsya* aspect is akin to the performance of the erotic sentiment, the *śṛṅgāra rasa*. The *lāsya* aspect of dance, thus holds a significant position in the process of awakening a *rasa*, specifically according to the NS.

The NS explains the varied kinds of *lāsya* in the twentieth chapter of the text. The *lāsyaṅgās* in the NS have been described as per the moods of the *nāyika* or the heroine of the play. The researcher shall move on to elucidate the eclectic listicle of *lāsyaṅgās* according to the NS.

Lāsyaṅgās in the NS

The NS mentions a total of twelve *lāsyaṅgās* -

'geyapadam sthitapāṭhyamāsīnam puṣpagaṇḍikā/ pracchedakam trimūḍham ca saindhavākhyam dvimūḍhakam// uttamottamakam caiva vicitrapadameva tna/ uktapratyuktam bhāvam ca lāsyaṅgāni vidurbudāḥ//' (Ghosh, 500)

‘The (twelve) types of Lāsya are Geyapada, Sthitapāṭhya, Āsīna (pāṭhya), Puṣpagaṇḍikā Pracchedaka, Trimūḍha, Saindhava, Dvimūḍhaka, Uttamotamaka, Vicirapada, Ukta-Pratyukta and Bhāvita. (Bhāva).’ (Ghosh, 500)

The researcher shall mention explanations of a few, briefly-

‘if a separated woman burning with the fire of love, recites anything in Prākṛta while resting on her seat, it is an instance of the Sthitapāṭhya.’ (Ghosh, 501)

‘When a woman in the guise of a man recites something sweetly in Sanskrit for the pleasure of her female friends, it is an instance of the Puṣpagaṇḍikā’ (Ghosh, 502).

‘When one represents a lover who has failed to keep his tryst and is using Prākṛta to express his grief through well performed Karaṇas, it is an instance of the Saindhavaka.’ (Ghosh, 502).

As observed, the situation takes lead of defining the characteristics of the body language used by the *nāyika* in emoting a *rasa*.

A succinct overview of the other texts mentioning the types of *lāsya*

Apart from the NS, the BN, the DR, the SR and the NR mention the types of *lāsya*. As mentioned in the introductory segment, the definition of *lāsya* by Bharata and their segregation, gives the researcher a breviloquent overview of the meaning of the word and its use in performing arts.

However, the explanation and bifurcation of the term *lāsya* finds difference in certain ancient disquisitions. For example, in the BN by Nandikeśvara, the author describes seven kinds of *lāsya*-

‘(1) Śuddha (2) Dēśi (3) Prēraṇi (or Pēruṇi) (4) Prēṅkhaṇi (5) Kuṇḍali (6) Daṇḍika and (7) Kalaśa. They are also called Sapta-lāsya...’ (Sastry, 370)

After enumerating the seven kinds of *lāsya*s the author of the BN goes on to mention the fact that the first two types of *lāsya*s i.e., the *śuddha* and *deśi lāsya*s from above, have been explained as *śuddha* and the *deśi tāṇḍavas*-

‘Of these Śuddha and Dēśini have already been described under the names of Śuddha Tāṇḍava and Dēśinī Tāṇḍava.’ (Sastry, 370)

As observed, the author of the BN equates the explanation of *deśi tāṇḍavas* with *deśi lāsya*, and also equates *śuddha tāṇḍavas* with *śuddha lāsya*.

Also, the *nāṭya* is described to be of two kinds in the same text- *śuddha* and *deśi*.

‘The seven varieties of Tāṇḍavas form part of Śuddha Nāṭya...’ (Sastry, 364)

‘The seven kinds are:

1. Dakṣiṇa bhramaṇa (clock-wise rotation)
2. Vāma bhramaṇa (anti clock-wise rotation)
3. Leelā bhramaṇa (playful rotation)
4. Bhujāṅga bhramaṇa (serpentine rotation)
5. Vidyud bhramaṇa (lightning rotation)
6. Latā bhramaṇa (creeper like rotation)
7. Ūrdhva Tāṇḍava (dance with one leg raised upward)’ (Sastry, 367)

‘The Tāṇḍavas in Dēśi Nāṭyas are of five kinds. They are- (1) Nikuṅcita (2) Kuṅcita (3) Ākuṅcita (4) Pārśvakuṅcita and (5) Ardhakuṅcita..’ (Sastry, 367)

Thus, in a nutshell, according to the BN, the *nāṭya* is divided into *śuddha* and *deśi*, wherein the kinds of *tāṇḍavas* used in *śuddha nāṭya* are known as *śuddha tāṇḍavas* and are seven in numbers. In the *deśi nāṭya*, the *tāṇḍavas* are *deśi* in nature and are of five kinds. The seven *tāṇḍavas* in *śuddha nāṭya* and five *tāṇḍavas* in the *deśi nāṭya* differ from each other in names as well as in explanation.

The author of the BN presumably treats the *deśi* type of *tāṇḍavas* used in *deśi nāṭya* as kinds of *lāsya*s only. As observed, he uses only female gaits to explain certain types of movements utilized in the *deśi tāṇḍavas*. For example-

‘First is Kēkini gati or the gait of the female peacock. The second is Rājahamsi gati or the gait of the female swan. The third is Hariṇī gati or the gait of a female deer...’ (Sastry, 367)

The art of *deśi tāṇḍavas* utilized in *deśi nāṭya* is also seen as that originated by Goddess *Pārvati* herself-

‘This combination has been designed by Sri Pārvati Devi and in the five kinds of Deśi Tāṇḍavas created by her,..’ (Sastry, 367)

However, the specifics of gaits used in *śuddha nāṭya* on the other hand does not describe specifically female gaits-

‘In these Tāṇḍavas the following gatis or gaits are also added... (1) Mayūra gati or the peacock’s gait (2) Rājahamsa gati or swan’s gait (3) Kṛṣṇasāra gati or the deer’s gait (4) Gaja gati or the elephant’s gait....’ (Sastry, 364)

Moreover, these gaits i.e., the ones utilized in the *śuddha nāṭya* with *śuddha tāṇḍavas*, are said to be used by Lord Śiva himself-

‘These six gaits have been used by Lord Paramaśiva in his Tāṇḍava.’ (Sastry, 364)

Hence ordinarily, *śuddha nāṭya* supposedly could have been equated with only the *śuddha tāṇḍavas* aspect of dance and *deśi nāṭya* danced with *deśi tāṇḍavas* could have been equated with the *lāsya* aspect, thus essentially allotting *śuddha* with *tāṇḍavas* performed by Śiva and *deśi* with *lāsya* performed by Pārvati according to the above-mentioned definitions. However, the mention of *śuddha lāsya*, in the seven kinds of *lāsya*, as described earlier, and equating it with *śuddha tāṇḍavas* gives an extended perspective to the explanation of *lāsya* itself.

Moreover, as observed in the NS in the segment above, the *tāṇḍava* and *lāsya* are two distinct aspects of dance. In the BN however, this distinction is almost akin to none, as the author juxtaposes the *tāṇḍava* and *lāsya* aspects, not in an ordinary manner which it is mostly known to be. In his own way, the author of the BN, provides the researcher with a descriptive insight, as to how the elements of dance are also interlaced with one another, in a broader scheme of things.

The BN thus creates some significant demarcations with respect to *deśi* and *śuddha nāṭya* as well as *deśi* and *śuddha tāṇḍavas*. However, the terms *deśi* and *śuddha* used for kinds of *lāsya*s are never really explained separately as *Pēruṇi* or *Prēnkhaṇi* or any other types of *lāsyaṅgas*, and are only assumed to be similar to the explanation of the *śuddha* and *deśi tāṇḍavas* respectively by the researcher.

This however, gives an overview of how within the basic structure of the concept of the *lāsya*s, which is essentially the usage of the body gracefully, there also can be presumable numerable extended other explications and associated varied types. In this instance the term *śuddha lāsya*, used in the same connotation as the *śuddha tāṇḍava*, might give rise to the aspects of *śuddha tāṇḍava* which are more than often rigorous in nature, being performed with elegance, or vice-versa. Thus, giving the researcher an understanding of an extended scope of movements, with respect to implementing the transitions of the body.

Interestingly in other treatises such as in the DR by Dhananjayan, the author never really mentions the terms *deśi lāsyaṅgas*. It is observed that the *lāsyaṅgas* mentioned in the DR, are similar to those that Bharata mentions in his text. The only difference is regarding the numbers. The DR mentions ten *lāsyaṅgas*.as opposed to Bharata, who mentions twelve *lāsyaṅgas*. Otherwise the explication of the *lāsyaṅgas*.is quite similar-

‘*geyam padaṃ sthitam pāṭhyam āsīnam puṣpagaṇḍikā pracchedakas trigūḍhaṃ ca saidhavākhyam dvigūḍhakam uttamottamakam caiva uktapratyuktam eva ca lāsye daśavidhaṃ hy etad aṅganirdeśakalpanam.*’ (Haas, book three, 99)

‘The tenfold enumeration of the subdivisions in the Gentle Dance (*lāsya*) is: the Geyapada (Song), the Sthitapāṭhya (Recitation by one standing), the Āsīnapāṭhya (Recitation by one Seated), the Puṣpagaṇḍikā,

the Pracchedaka, the Trigūḍha, the one called Saindhava, the Dvigūḍha, the Uttamottamaka, and the Uktapratyukta (Amoeban Song).’ (Haas, book three, 99)

From the above particulars, it thus might be assumed, that the *lāsyāṅgas* mentioned in various other expositions that differ from those that Bharata mentions, use the term *deśi* with *lāsyāṅgas*. and those authors and scholiasts who agree with *Bharata*, never really use the term *deśi* with *lāsyas*. This point shall further be investigated in brief in the next segment of the paper.

The *deśi lāsyāṅgas* are also mentioned in the SR by Śāraṅgadeva, and are dissimilar to those mentioned in the NS or the BN-

Lāsyāṅgas in the SR

The *lāsyāṅgas* in the SR, which is a treatise on music majorly, enumerates ten *lāsyāṅgas* which are termed to be *deśi* in nature.

‘*Cāli, Cālivaḍa, Laḍhi, Sūka, Uroṅgaṇa, Dhasaka, Aṅgahāra, Oyāraka, Vihāsī and Mana-* these ten elements of *Lāsyā* are known in the *Deśī* style...’ (Burnier, et. all, 182)

The researcher shall mention a few explanations, briefly.

‘*Cāli* is the simultaneous movement of the feet, thighs, hips and arms. (It should be) soft, graceful, and attractive, in accordance with the *Tāla-s* and neither too quick nor too slow, and mostly oblique.’ (Burnier, et. all, 182)

‘*Laḍhi* is accepted to be the simultaneous movement of the hips and the arms, which is soft, oblique, and graceful.’ (Burnier, et. all, 182)

‘*Oyāraka* is accepted to be the slightly oblique, downward movement of the head.’ (Burnier, et. all, 183) and so on.

As observed from the aforementioned explications, the *lāsyāṅgas* of the *deśi* kind, are explained according to the rhythmic design and majorly by the movements of the *āṅgika*. There is no mention of any situation or a specific emotion to be displayed.

Moving further, in the *Nṛtta Ratnavali* (NR), authored by Jaya Senāpati, the *lāsyas* are mentioned by Bharata, as well as the *deśi lāsyāṅgas* find mention separately in the first and the sixth chapter of the treatise respectively. The researcher shall explore a few of the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*. of the NR in brief.

Lāsyāṅgas in the NR

The *lāsyāṅgas* mentioned in the first half of the NR are as follows-

‘*geyapadaṁ sthitapāṭhyamāsīnam puṣpagaṇḍhikā
pracchedakastrimūḍhakhyam saindhavākhyam dvimūḍhakam /
uttamottamakābhikhyamuktapratyuktakābhidham /
lāsyāṅgāni daśaivātra teṣāṁ lakṣmābhidhīyate //*’ (Rao, et. all, .20)

‘*Lasya* has only ten parts. *Geyapadaṁ, Sthitapāṭhyam, Āsīnam, Puṣpagaṇḍhikā Pracchedaka, Trimūḍhakam, Saindhavakhyam, Dvimūḍhakam, Uttamottamakam, Uktapratyuktam.* Their qualities will now be enumerated.’ (Rao, et. all, 20)

The *deśi lāsyāṅgas* again, lay emphasis on the *tāla* and use of *āṅgika* on the rhythm. The researcher shall mention a few in brief-

‘If the body moves firmly like a water-droplet would on a lotus leaf when a light breeze blows, it is *Ḍālah.*’ (Rao, et. all, 370)

‘If the feet, hands, waist and thighs move in beautiful coordination in slow and medium tempos, mostly in the horizontal direction, in *sama* (equilibrium), it is called *Cāliḥ*.’ (Rao, et. all, 370)

‘The seamless immense joy caused by the beauty that emanates from a sumptuous combination of abstract dance and instruments is *Lali*. To move the *upāṅgas*, etc delicately and pleasantly, in rhythm is *Lali*...’ (Rao, et, all, 371)

‘To please the audience by using the beautiful movements of the head in agreement with rhythm and emotion is *Trkaniḥ*.’ (Rao, et. all, 371)

‘The experienced dancer does the *cārī*, *lāsyāṅgas*, *pādapāṭas* and other movements, delightfully interspersing them with the music of song and instrument. This is *Sukalāsam*.’ (Rao, et. all, 372)

‘If the danseuse would have executed in rhythm, abstract dance, song and instrument to a state of joy and ecstasy and quickly wound up the *nṛtta*, it would be called *Bhāva*’ (Rao, et, all, 373)

‘The danseuse moving the breasts, shoulders and waist gracefully in harmony with rhythm is *Kittu*.’ (Rao, et. all, 373)

Thus, as examined by the researcher, the employment of the *deśi lāsyāṅgas* have been separated and disarticulated in most of the ancient texts, thus essentially designating the *lāsyāṅgas* that are explained by Bharata as *mārga* and the *deśi lāsyāṅgas* with those movements which are inherently danced on just rhythm. The researcher shall now attempt to explore and analyze the rationale behind segregating the *mārga* and the *deśi lāsyāṅgas* by a few ancient connoisseurs in brief.

The terms used- *mārga* and *deśi* with *lāsyāṅgas*.

The argument of the specifics of the terms *mārga* and *deśi* has been going on for quite some time. This research shall not dwell in deep into these definitions. However, an extremely brief mention of what they mean as per certain scholiasts shall find mention.

‘...an art that is created and popularized by Masters is called *mārga* and an art that is practiced by different people of various regions in keeping with their taste is called *deśi*.’ (Varma, 9)

Hence, *mārga* means as per the text, (essentially Bharata’s text as mentioned above) and *deśi* means local usage or that which has not been prescribed by the text.

The reason as to why certain authors found a purpose to introduce the term *deśi* with respect to the *lāsyāṅgas* separately can only be presumed to a certain extent.

The very first motive could be that since sage Bharata was the one who laid down the principle elements of *lāsyā*, no other author specifically some who came after Bharata, wanted to cause ripple in the otherwise calm ocean and go against the tide. For instance, Dr. Raghvan in his book, *The Number of Rasas* with respect to the inclusion and acknowledgement of *śānta rasa* points out the reason for the various authors denying the existence of *śānta*. The reason, as peculiar as it may seem to be was that Bharata never speaks of it-

‘...one need not recognize it as a special and separate Rasa with the name Śānta which Bharata does not speak of.’ (Raghvan, 48)

Dr. Raghvan opines that, the writers who do not acknowledge the *śānta rasa*, probably do so in order to remain loyal to Bharata’s excursion of *rasas* specifically in the NS-

‘The writers who do not accept Śānta are mainly writers on Dramaturgy proper. They think they are loyal to Bharata by denying it.’ (Raghvan, 45)

Going by the same logic then, the word *deśi* for *lāsyāṅgas* could have been coined firstly, for the purpose of acknowledging Bharata’s supreme explication of the *lāsyāṅgas*, and terming them as *mārga*, and

secondly, also including other explanations as conceived by some early pioneers apart from Bharata, who wanted to acknowledge other forms of movements in diversified art forms as well.

The other seemingly logical reason could also very well be the inclusion of various provincial styles used by people from varied regions. For example, in the treatise NR, the author acknowledges the *deśi* movements and stances used in non-representational artforms, in the last four chapters of the treatise that were prevalent in the Āndhra region while the *kākatīya* dynasty ruled the region.

The research shall not dwell in deep into the exact time of the authorship of the NR. Presently it would suffice to know that the NR authored by *Jaya Senāpati*, was written during the *kākatīya* rule-

‘The treatise *Nṛtta Ratnāvalī* by Jāyasenāpati on classical and regional dance forms during the *kākatīya* rule is a very significant contribution in the field of art.’ (Rao, et. all, 10)

Āndhra Pradesh was known for imbibing provincial styles of dance during that time specifically.

‘Historically the Āndhra region has always been endowed with various ancient traditional dances not always based on the treatises.’ (Rao, et. all, 19)

Hence the author of the NR possibly mentions the *deśi* elements of a non-representative art form exhaustively, also due to his allegiance towards the dynasty rule and to include various provincial styles prevalent during that time.

These reasons might have given rise to the rationale of including the term *deśi* with *lāsyāṅgas*. However as observed, none of the treatises designate any solid difference between the *mārga lāsyāṅgas* and *deśi lāsyāṅgas* with respect to the basic definition of the *lāsyāṅgas*. All the *lāsyāṅgas* described in the previous segment of the paper, are explained to be feminine and graceful movements, be it *mārga* or *deśi*.

Moreover, as observed from earlier, the associated connotations of the term *lāsyā* in the BN, gives rise to the possibilities of the extension of the scope of the usage of the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*. The *deśi lāsyāṅgas*, which are refined and delicate movements on the *tāla* and rhythm, also could therefore possibly give rise to that exquisite and unadulterated joy, termed as the *Rasa*.

Observations – scope of communicating a sentiment with the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*

In this segment the researcher shall humbly try to explore the possibility of communicating a sentiment with the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*.

The situation or a mood can also be added to enhance the communication process even in the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*, which are only adherent to the rhythmic construct.

‘Let us suppose that a particular theme is so treated that in it a particular *bhāva* gains supremacy over other things, that is, it stands out in the spectator’s mind...When such a theme is performed with the help of *nṛtya*, it may become one variety of it, but it cannot be everything and in fact it should not be such.’ (Varma, 9)

The author thus believes, that a particular theme or an emotion can be conveyed not just from one aspect of art. The process of communication thus should not be restricted to any one way of communion whatsoever. As per researcher’s observation the statement bodes well for the understanding of the expansiveness of the *deśi lāsyāṅgas* with respect to conveying a *rasa*.

Also, the simple and ordinary movements with elegance only on rhythm, may also evoke *Rasa*. With respect to the non-representational art forms, Varma mentions-

‘...there is no reason why it should be devoid of *rasa*. if it be said that this is so because of its non-representational nature, then what about architecture, or music, i.e., such forms of it as are not

accompanied by words, like *rāgālapa* or instrumental music? Are they also, then, devoid of *rasa*? (Varma, 61)

The *mārga lāsyāṅgas* on the other hand so as termed, could already be having rhythm and *tāla* as a companion to a situation in which the *nāyika* is adherent to. It is a well acknowledged fact that *nr̥tta* was a major part of *nāṭya* initially. So, the elements of *deśi* could also be in the *mārga* design of the *lāsyāṅgas*. ‘Apart from this, *mārga* and *deśi* are inseparable...’ (Varma, 10)

For these reasons the difference between the *mārga* and *deśi lāsyāṅgas* holds no solid terrain with respect to communicating a sentiment, as per the researcher’s observations.

Whether *mārga* or *deśi*, the underlying crux of the *lāsyāṅgas* remains the same in both and both are equally capable of evoking a sentiment in the *rasikās*.

Conclusion

A thorough investigation of the *lāsyāṅgas* mentioned above compels the researcher to state, that the purpose of any art form remains constant, i.e., to communicate a sentiment (evoke *rasa*). The *lāsyā* aspect of dance which is intrinsically the utilization of the *āṅgika* for emoting a situation successfully by the *nāyika*, can also simply be the movement of the body in elegance on rhythm and *tāla*. The possibility of evoking a *rasa* is also extremely eminent, in the latter or the *deśi lāsyāṅgas*.

The *deśi lāsyāṅgas* are capable of emoting a specific *rasa* by adding a situation which might only be performed on the rhythmic structure without employing any lyrical aspect, thereby using all elements of the *deśi* structure in communicating a specific *rasa*. Also, the plain movements on the rhythm might help evoke that unequivocal and extraordinary impression, that one might get after witnessing a performance known as evoking of the *Rasa*.

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