Hanumannātakam: Date and Place of Its Origin*

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The play Hanumannātakam bristles with almost intractable problems ranging from its authorship, antiquity, genre, form to the date and the place of its origin. Hanumannātakam as its title indicates has Hanumat as its author, which is another euphemistic way of stating that its author is not known. The play has got some unique features which set it apart from any other form of Sanskrit drama prevalent in Classical Sanskrit literature. It has got another version in vogue in Bengal known as Mahānātakam the appellation more current among the scholars. This version is ascribed to Madhusudana Miśra, who might be regarded as a redactor of the version. The version prevalent in western India, under the name of the Hanumannātakam with which we shall deal presently in this essay, is ascribed to Damodaramiśra. Apart from these two main-stream versions, there are as many versions as there are manuscripts. Pischel's remark made with regard to the Dūtāṅgada that there are as many Dūtāṅgadas as there are manuscripts is applicable with greater force to the versions of the Hanumannātakam. So that is also one of the insurmountable problems connected with this play.

As a play it has some unique features, To mention a few, it has no prologue or prastāvanā. Though it starts with some benedictory stanzas some of which seem to have been

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taken from earlier sources, it has no nāndī in its usual sense. Moreover it has no Prakrit which has been an ubiquitous feature of the classical Sanskrit drama, it has very little dramatic form worth the name. It has very little prose by way of dialogues. It has a string of generally striking poetic verses some of which are from earlier sources and some of which are not traceable. Some of the scholars like S.K.De\(^3\) and S.P. Bhattacharya\(^4\) who have paid some attention to the play have discussed whether it would be called a chāyā-
nātaka.

On account of these peculiarities, Maxmuller had opined that the work was more of an epic than a true drama and that it carries us back to the earlier stage of development of the Indian drama. But the case seems to be contrary to what Maxmuller supposes to be. The stringed verses are of a very striking nature and a result of वैद्युत्प्रभणिति and hence they do not seem to be the product of the earlier stage of development. In fact this play seems to have come into existence at a time when the rigours of the classical Sanskrit drama were slackened and the cannon of the prescriptive works of dramaturgy was loosened. So this situation obtained in the second millenium A.D. So it is more plausible to date the play in the second millenium, and it should belong to the medieval times, so to say historically. We shall endeavour to narrow down the span of time of the origin of the Hanumannātakam.

As the legend goes\(^5\) the work was composed by the son of the wind (Hanumat) but was cast into the sea by Vālmīki who feared that the play would eclipse his own Rāmāyana. Later it was retrieved by the king Bhoja and redacted by Damodara Miśra. In his commentary on the verse incorporating this legend, Mohanadasa ‘explains that Hanumat wrote this work and engraved it with his nails on
the rocks. To allay the fears of Vālmiki who thought that it would be an excellent work which would throw his Rāmāyaṇa into oblivion Hanumat threw it into the sea and after many ages it was retrieved by his avatāra Bhoja with the help of fishermen.

Bhojaprabandha has one more anecdote to recount. Once some fishermen found an engraved stone in the river Narmada and brought it to Bhoja. Bhoja recognised it to be the work of Hanumat. He then got it completed by his courtpoet. In the Mahānāṭaka version, at the end of the every act, it is stated that the ‘work of Hanumat was rescued by Vikrama and then it was redacted with proper context by Madhusūdana (Sandarbhya Sajjikṣe).9

From these legendary accounts it emerges that certain portion was a sort of a nucleus and then either Madhusūdana Miśra or Damodara Miśra redacted it. As S.K.De puts it ‘the three versions of the story certainly suggest the redaction of an old anonymous work or at best the writing of a new work with the embodiment of old matter’.10 And S.P. Bhattacharya interprets the legend, it is not at all strange that such a work should be associated in critical tradition with the name of king Bhoja of Dhara, the author of Śrīgāraprakāśa, a greater name than of whom it is difficult to mention amongst the collectors of precious literary gems and of Hanumat-The monkey-warrior well-known for his devotional fervour.11

So from this chaf of legendary accounts, a grain of historical truth that the Hanumānāṭaka acquired the present shape, more or less in the days of Bhoja who flourished in the 11th century A.D. can be obtained. It is not unlikely that the play has gone on acquiring some more verses from the different later-day sources.
So we can tentatively endorse the upper limit of the play Hanumanṇāṭakam as the 10th century A.D.

Further it is to be noted that the play Hanumanṇāṭakam devotes one entire act i.e. VIII act to the episode in which Aṅgada goes as a messenger of Rāma to the assembly of Rāvaṇa and very hot exchanges take place between Aṅgada and Rāvaṇa. Now this act has a close resemblance to the Dutāṅgadam a one-act-play, thematically but there are certain verses which are also found in the Dutāṅgadam. Dutāṅgadam is also culpable of borrowing the verses from its preceding sources, but the Hanumanṇāṭakam is a wholesale borrower. And the verses found in the Hanumanṇāṭakam in the eighth act are also found in the assembly-scene of the Dutāṅgadam, which has elicited a high encomium from his junior contemporory Someśvara, who stated

सुभटेन पदन्यासः सः कोशि समिलौ क्रृतः ।
येनाधुनापि धीयनां रेमाञ्चो नापनीयते ॥

(Kirtikaumudi 1-24)

In the assembly Subhaṭa planted his foot (arranged his words) in such a way that even now the horripilation on the part of the brave people (also learned people) does not subside.

The verse, by way of pun, clearly alludes to the Dutāṅgada play and the remarkable assembly scene in the Rāvaṇa’s Laṅkā.

Subhaṭa, the playwright of the Dutāṅgadam was connected with the literary circle of Vastupāla, a minister of the king Viradhavala, a feudatory of the king Bhīmadeva II of Caulukya dynasty of Aṅhilvad Pātan, in the first half of the 13th century A.D.
And the Hanumannāṭakam in the VIII act draws very heavily upon the Dūtāṅgada play. So it can be safely surmised that, Hanumannāṭakam followed Dūtāṅgada in time and the date of the Hanumannāṭakam is around the 13th century.

Further this Hanumannāṭakam apart from the Dūtāṅgadams bears some affinity with some of the plays composed during this period in Gujarāt. Candralekhā-vijayaprarakaraṇa by Devacandragaṇi, a disciple of Hema-candragaṇya, a multi-splendored personality of the medieval Gujarāt and India, is one of them. Another play by the same author Mānamudrābhāṇjikā, still in a manuscriptural form has also a resemblance to this Hanumannāṭakam. Then there is one more play Ullāgharāghava by Somesvarā who flourished in the second half of the 12th century and probably beyond the first half of the 13th century, during the reign of the Cauḷukua kings of Anahilvād Pāṭaṇ in Gujarāt. So these three plays viz. Candralekhāvijayaprarakaraṇa, Mānamudrābhāṇjikā and Ullāgharāghava along with the Dūtāṅgada form a homogenous group of plays having the close resemblance with the play Hanumannāṭakam under discussion.

As noted above there are some peculiar features of the Hanumannāṭakam. Hanumannāṭakam has very long stage directions, at times turning into descriptions and verses. Sometime there is a mix-up between a stage-direction and a description. To illustrate, in the Hanumannāṭakam 1-19, there is a stage-direction श्रीरमः नाटयन् and then what does Śrīrāma nāṭayan is described in a verse. The entire passage runs like this :

श्रीरमः नाटयन्
कपोले जानक्यः करिकलभदन्तदृशतिमुषि
स्मस्मेरेण गण्डोहुपुलकं चक्रब्रक्रमलम्।
Looking to his own image of his lotus-like face in the cheeks of Janaki, which excel the lustre of the tusk of the elephant-cub bloomed open and horripilated, on the other hand, listens to the tumultuous noise of the armies of the demons, Rama is tying the not of his matted locks.

In the *Candralekha vijayaparakaraṇa*, the character Vijayendra speaks.

प्रिये निशीधसमयप्रवृत्तो वर्तितं सौधमलंकितातम् इति वदन् प्रियां हस्ते विधृत्य तत्त्वप्रभुक्तेन समं सपरिवारं परिकामति क्षणान्: सोपानमलंकुर्वाण: सौधमधिरोहिति 1

One more curious feature of the *Hanumannāṭakam* is that there is a proseportion in the form of an explanation, a sort of a *tīkā*. The proseportion gives itself out when, like usual *tīkā*, it ends with the word इत्यमिन्नाय: as in a passage which purports to explain the preceding verse 14. Similarly in the *Candralekha vijayaparakaraṇa*, some verse like अजित-देवचन्द्रशेषः: (2-28 and 5-46 of the *Candralekha vijayaparakaraṇa*) is a गृह or कुटम्पलोक and there is a sort of commentary explaining the verse in the body of the play itself.

Further we must also remember that *Hanumannāṭakam* is also called a *chāyānāṭaka*. Now the *Dūtāngada* play, the oldest *chāyānāṭaka* available hails from Gujarat as noted above. Moreover, *Ullāgharāghava* by Someśvara is also referred to as *chāyānāṭaka* in the play itself.

Ramaji Upadhyaya has observed that, that age i.e. of the 12th and 13th century A.D. was the age of *chāyānāṭaka*. *Hanumannāṭakam* is also termed as *chāyānāṭakam*. The two most genuine *chāyānāṭakas* i.e. *Dūtāngada* and *Ullāgha-
rāghava have originated in Gujarat and during the 12th and 13th century. And so, Hanumannāṭakam also must have originated during this time, perhaps following Dūtāṅgada, as it incorporates in the VIII act, a scene from the Dūtāṅgada, as remarked earlier.

Then I have received further succour in this matter from an unexpected quarter, a source which would not normally be available to the scholars not knowing Gujarati language.

In Gujarati, there is a Rāmāyāna in a versified form composed by a certain Giradhara who flourished in the eighteenth century A.D. The remarkable thing about this Rāmāyāna is that it constantly draws upon the Hanumanāṭakam. He acknowledges two sources for his Rāmāyāna, viz. Vālmiki Rāmāyāna and the play Hanumannāṭakam. He says in the beginning of the Giradhara-rāmāyāna

वाल्मीकि रामायणोः अर्थं माहे नाटक कृतं हनुमानंत्री ।
ते थकी भाषायंधाम कर्यं छे, लेि दृश्यतं अनेतं जीं ॥

Further in the Aranya-kanda of the Giradhara-rāmāyana, also, the poet says

आधारं रामायणं तणो वाल्मीकि जेनुं नाम ।
हनुमाननाटकं कथा माहे मेघवी अविषयं ॥ (3-1-5)
ए अर्थं वाल्मीकि तणो हनुमाननाटक सार ।
ए जुगमसंयं मेघवीने कर्यं छे विस्तार ॥ (3-२२-२७)

Then in the Yuddhakanda also the author says

वाल्मीकि रामायण स्थकि प्रकृतं कर्यं विस्तार ।
हनुमाननाटक मेघवी पदबंध रचना सार ॥ (६-९-७)

Apart from this candid admission on the part of the poet, even in some specific instances also, he indicates that the source of this episode is Hanumannaṭakam or for example the episode of the confrontation of Rāma and Paraśurāma.
Further *Giradhara-Rāmāyana* has a very curious puṣpikā, at the end of every capter
इति श्रीगौमधवसिद्धात्रे जाल्पीकिसम्मतनालकधारायं जाताकाण्डे प्रधमोध्यायः।
(Kāṇḍa and adhyāya will change)

Giradhara, of course, has been influenced by that epoch-making work *Ramacaritamānasa* by Tulsiḍāsa, Ānandaramāyana and Bhavartha-Rāmāyana in Marathi as well. However, nowhere, he mentions these works by name, except the *Hanummātakam*.

Can this deep influence of the *Hanummātakam* be not attributed to the geographical proximity of the play *Hanummātakam*, which in all likelihood, must have originated in the land of Gujarat or in the vicinity of Gujarat and it was easily accessible to the poet Giradhara who profitably utilised the play.

The relationship between the *Giradhara-Rāmāyana* and the *Hanummātakam* and other Rāmāyanas require further probings.

But for the present, in all probability I think, the *Hanummātakam* originated in Gujarat during the 12th or 13th century A.D.

**References**

1. In the Histories of Sanskrit Literature, the play is discussed under the title of *Mahanātakam* as in Sanskrit Drama by Keith, History & Sanskrit Literature by De and so on. The scholars like De and S.P. Bhattacharya have also discussed the play under the title of *Mahanātaka*. See their articles entitled ‘The problem of Mahanātaka’ by De and ‘The Mahanātaka Problem’ by S.P. Bhattacharya in Indian Historical quarterly, September 1931 and September 1934 respectively.
2. Quoted by S.P. Bhattacharya, Indian Historical Quarterly, September 1934.
3. As referred to in the first fn.
4. Ibid
5. संचितमन्त्रेनाभ्ये बालभौकनामः
   नित्यमर्मवृत्तविषयोऽपि
   महानादिकेषु यतृ ।
   सुमहनविषयोज्यातु वालकवेण
   प्रक्षिप्तवेणु विष्णु सरस्वतीदेरे ॥

   (Hanunannātakaṁ, 14-96)


6. अंजेन कथा-पूर्वमेते-नखरोध्वःरिशिनामः
   विलिखित ततू च वालमिकिनान दृष्ट तदेतस्यतिमंसुरकर्मकार्यम् समायनमांचायारावशस्य
   हनुमानः प्रक्षिप्तस्तम्भेततु समुद्रे निष्प्रक्ष्यति । तयथः तेनाभ्या प्राप्तं तदवतारेण भोजेन
   सुमहनविषया वालकारूपयथविष्णु ।


8. The whole verse restored runs like this
   शिवविशालसि सिरसि यानि रेखुः
   शिव शिव तानि लुटकनि गृहपादे ।
   अथि खलु विशयः पुरुषकर्तनाः
   भवति हि जनसु वर्णमा विज्ञ।: ॥ Ibid p. 305


11. S.P. Bhattacharya, Mahānataka problem, Indian Historical Quarterly, 1934 p. 505