



Participation of Women in Inclusive Development Pathways: A Study of Initiatives of Government of India

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ABSTRACT

The issues of gender inequality have always remained a hindrance in the development path. It has been observed that even when a nation has achieved economic propensity social inequality has always been a concern. Women, in this area are the most vulnerable group. Socio-economic and political discrimination against women has always been the crux of the problem of deterrents from achieving inclusive growth. On the other hand, women have been the central of development initiatives of the nation. They are capable of contributing to the development process. In fact, a country's prosperity depends much on the involvement of women in mainstream development programmes. Instead, many international organizations, and Government of India have observed that the issues related to women and, therefore their participation are mostly left out of the primary development goals, which result in a further delayed and disjointed process of change. As a result, international organisations have suggested measures to reduce gender discrimination and evolve a holistic approach to development. In this context Government of India has initiated proactive measures to incorporate the issues of women in its development agenda. For decades, such initiative has brought a positive change in the lives of the people and as a result, to the entire nation.

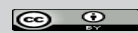
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The world is divided into two halves: men and women. They share an almost equal percentages of the population approximately. Women contribute the same as men can contribute towards the development of a nation. Such part of the population must be given a chance to associate with policy framing and key decision-making process of development programs of a country. The society depends on the participation of women in the development of policies towards transformation through contribution to positive direction of change for the country, such as 'changes in laws, policies, services, institutions, and social norms'(Social Statistics Division, 2022). They can

bring development by preparing themselves for economic independence, shaping the future society through educating their children, and participating in political activities as well (Women and girls: half of the world's population, full of potential, 2024) United Nations has mentioned in a report that throughout the world, women are subjected to gender discrimination in every corner of society. However, in many cases, it has been observed

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that development initiatives are not inclusive for women at all. Being not included in such initiatives, somehow, they are being excluded from the mainstream development path. Therefore, gender discrimination has arrived. This leads to a difficult situation for the women to survive in the society. They are considered as weaker sex than men. They face a lot of problems in every aspect of their livelihood, from health to education, from economic stability to decision-making ability. Moreover, they suffer from violence against them, both physical and mental, and consequently, sometimes, they often face difficulties in living a life peacefully. Even if women can enjoy political, social, and economic privilege as much as men do technically, however, to enjoy the same freedom, women have to struggle harder than men. Therefore, women are considered less important in the main course of development. Their problems are not addressed properly due to the lack of representation of women in development initiatives throughout the world (Women and Men in India 2022). In recent times, some major initiatives have been taken for the upliftment of the status of women in society by the United Nations and other international organizations (As Women Worldwide Still Struggle to Achieve Basic Rights, Third Committee Emphasizes Importance of Access to Citizenship, Education, Work, Justice, 2023). UN Women, a special wing, has been introduced for the overall upliftment of women in their lives. Like such international initiatives, Indian government has also offered different schemes for women's empowerment and inclusive development. Khan *et al.* confirm in their paper that 'the wage differentials, health inequalities and educational disparities among genders, which required momentous policy framework to reduce gender discrimination in education, health, and labor market' (Khan, Zaman, Nabi, Hishan, & Islam, 2016).

This research paper tries to analyze the difficulties faced by women in every stage of their life throughout the world, the global initiatives to establish a stable situation for them, and the Indian perspectives for addressing such issues to bring changes in their social as well as economic status. This study is based on secondary data only. Here

a narrative review of literature has been made comprehensively. Some of the international and national reports and journals have been considered in this research paper.

Women issues in the society

Though we are now in 21st century, we can see many difficult social issues which are really harmful to women all over the world. A girl child faces discriminative attitudes from her childhood, and such discrimination continues throughout her lifetime. She experiences many difficult situations in her family, society, and also her workplace, whether it is organized or unorganized sector. In this section of this research study, different issues of such gender discrimination have been discussed.

Lack of education

Jawaharlal Nehru has said, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women". But there are several factors for a low rate of women's education in different societies. Barman has observed that girl children face both social and economic difficulties. In economically weaker families, girl children are neglected from proper education. Their parents are not willing to spend more on their education. Because they think that after a few years, the girl will get married and all the money they have spent on her education will go in vain.

On the contrary, their perception of educating a boy is completely different. Because in that case, they think that if the boy can get a proper education, he will be able to earn bread and butter for the family in the future. Barman has also observed that the lack of sanitation in the schools is another barrier to women's education in Indian society (Barman, 2014).

Violence against women

Gender-based violence has been defined as "any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring

in public or private life” (United Nations, 1995, Platform for Action D.112).

Russo and Pirlott have identified that women face violence from their families to the workplace and everywhere in society. They also experience mental abuse along with sexual and physical harassment (Russo & Pirlott, 2006).

United Nations Human Rights has mentioned some of the violence against women, such as domestic violence, forced marriage, child marriage, femicide, dowry-related violence, etc.

Poverty

CRY has pointed out some important issues in this context (Gender Inequality in India – Causes & Solutions, 2024):

1. Child marriage is still a problem in India, 8.9 million of girls out of 12.15 million children are married in India, girl’s marriages are three times higher than the number of boys (Census 2011).
2. 51% of all trafficking victims were children, of which more than 80% were girls (NCRB 2018).
3. 102 million girl children below 15 years of age were married out of 223 million child brides in India (UNICEF)’.

As girl children from financially weak families do not get a proper education, they are unable to get a job of their own. So, they always suffer from chronic poverty throughout their lives. It’s very difficult for a woman in such poverty to bring her children properly.

Inequal payment

Due to the course of gender inequality, it is seen that inequality exists in every corner of society. This is a very common practice to pay less to women for the same job as men. Even if women take the same or more responsibilities in the workplace, such discrimination remains in practice.

There are several studies that pointed out that gender discrepancy in wages is a global phenomenon. India is no exception. As women have obligations to their families, they generally get less chance to compete

with men for a job. Even if they get a job, they face difficulties in balancing the family responsibilities along with the job responsibilities. After all these complications, they also suffer from unequal payment. This is a common picture in both the organized and unorganized sectors.

Nutritional deficiency

As girl children are neglected from their childhood, sometimes they suffer from nutritional deficiency, anemia, and other physical issues. Smile Foundation has mentioned that malnutrition is manifested in the forms of low BMI index, anemia, and obstetric problems due to being underweight. Reports say that anemia occurring due to malnutrition is on the rise among children, adolescents, and women in India. ‘NFHS 5 reveals that 57% of women of child reproductive age and 67.1% of children under 5 years of age in India are anemic’ (Women’s Nutrition In India: A Closure Look, 2023). The situation may turn from bad to worse if appropriate measure is not being taken now.

International initiatives for women development

According to UN Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality is a mandatory condition for establishing a world with prosperity, sustainable development, and a peaceful world. Women consist of fifty percent of the total population and their potential. But, gender inequality is still there in every corner of society, which is considered a stagnant to development. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, gender equality is the 5th goal to achieve by 2030.

UN Sustainable Development Goals have come up with some awful predictions regarding child marriage and related issues. In the following diagram, such estimations are being reproduced (Table 1).

UN Women has stated gender equality as a right. To fulfill this right, all the areas, from the economy to health care, from climate change to violence against women, are to be considered. After COVID – 19 pandemic, the revised version of gender equality

among the other Sustainable Development Goals has emerged with The Gender Snapshot, where the issues of the immediate effect of COVID – 19 on women’s well-being and the threat to future generations are mentioned (Women and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)).

Table 1

| Problem | Estimated time to be taken to resolve the problem (in years) |
|--|---|
| Child marriage | 300 |
| Gaps in legal protection and discriminatory laws | 286 |
| Unequal positions of power and leadership in the workplace | 140 |
| Representation in national parliaments | 47 |

(Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024 – 2030

This is a strategy of World Bank Group Evolution Roadmap. The objective of this strategy is to ‘accelerate gender equality to end poverty on a liveable planet’. It basically emphasizes action, financing, and programs to support the economic participation of women, their leadership, and wellbeing. This strategy includes –

- ⊙ Progress in ending all forms of violence against women
- ⊙ Stronger and more resilient human capital
- ⊙ More and better jobs, including jobs of the future
- ⊙ Greater ownership and use of economic assets
- ⊙ Wider access to and use of enabling services
- ⊙ Advances in women’s participation in decision-making

Further, it includes a strategy 10-years retrospective on Gender and Development (World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024 – 2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet, 2024).

On September 2011 in the General Debate of 66 sessions of the General Assembly, held in, Ban Ki-

Moon, the Secretary-General of United Nations, pointed out in his report “We the Peoples”, that the discrimination against women in the social, economic, and political arena is still very widespread. Gender equality is a primary condition to be fulfilled to achieve overall development. (Gender Equality and Womens Empowerment).

G20 EMPOWER

The G20 Alliance for the Empowerment and Progression of Women’s Economic Representation (G20 EMPOWER) has been inaugurated in 2019. The goal of this G20 EMPOWER is to accelerate women’s leadership and empowerment in the private sector. It has been initiated with representation from the government and private sector. G20 EMPOWER endeavors to be the most comprehensive and action-driven association among businesses and governments to promote women’s leadership and empowerment across G20 countries (About G20 Empower) Under G20 EMPOWER, the Indian Government has taken some initiatives in different sectors, such as:

- ⊙ Health and nutrition:
 - Pradhan Mantri Surakshit Matritva Abhiyan
 - Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana
 - The Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0
 - Anaemia Mukh Bharat Programme
 - Ayushman Bharat
 - The Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana or ‘Saubhagya’
 - Janani Suraksha Yojana
- ⊙ Education:
 - *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*
 - Sukanya Samridhi Account Scheme
 - Vigyan Jyoti Programme
 - WISE-KIRAN
- ⊙ Skilling and Digital inclusion:
 - National Apprenticeship Promotion Scheme
 - Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana
 - Jan Shikshan Sansthan
 - Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan

- National Commission for Women (NCW)
 - ⊙ Financial inclusion:
 - Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana
 - Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana
 - Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Rural Livelihoods Mission
 - Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana
 - Startup India Seed Fund Scheme
 - Prime Minister's Employment Generation Programme (PMEGP)
 - The Solar Charkha Mission
 - Suryamitra, Vayumitra and Jalurjamitra
 - ⊙ Other Women Empowerment Schemes:
 - Meri Saheli
 - Menstrual Hygiene Scheme
 - Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana
 - Atal Bhujal Yojana
 - Palna, Samarthyaa
 - The One Stop Centre (OSC)
 - Women Help Line (WHL)
 - Nari Adalat
 - Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme
 - ⊙ Missions for MoWCD:
 - Mission Shakti
 - Mission Vatsalya
 - Mission POSHAN
3. Education: *Beti Bachao Beti Parao*;
 4. Sustainable development: Hostel for Working Women; Creches; Sabala/NPAG/KSY;
 5. Relief, Protection and Rehabilitation programme to women: Swadhar; Compensation to Rape victims
 6. Health: Indira Gandhi Matritya Sahyog;
 7. Empowerment and livelihood programme: National Scheme for Empowerment of Women; Priyadarshini; Ujjawala;
 8. Recognition to women: Stree Shakti Purosaskar
 9. Laws related to women's protection: The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Act 1986; Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Bill 2021; The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005; The Dowry Prohibition Act 1961; National Commission for Women 1992.
 10. International Cooperation for Women Empowerment
Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women; Beijing Platform for Action; India-US Women's Empowerment Dialogue

Schemes for Economic Empowerment

In accordance with the global initiatives, the Government of India has taken a number of initiatives to improve the conditions of women. The major initiatives are listed briefly discussed below:

Women in Agriculture

- ⊙ **Swa-Shakti:** This scheme was launched by Government India in collaboration with the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and World Bank in October 1999 and culminated in June 2005. The prime motto of the Swa-Shakti program was to empower women socially and economically through income-generating activities, Self-Help Groups (SHGs), and micro-credit (Schemes for Economic Empowerment) This program was started with a pilot study in 9 states consisting of 57 districts. This scheme was sponsored by the Central Government

Socio-economic empowerment of women: Government of India initiative

Over a period Government of India has paid special attention to improving the condition of women in their economic, social, and political lives. All these initiatives have been classified by different researchers into several categories. These are

1. Economic empowerment through Agriculture: Swa-Shakti; Swayamsiddha; Swawlamban program.
2. Schemes for support: STEP (Supports to Training and Employment Programme); Mahila e-Hatt; One Stop Centre Scheme.

of India, which has covered 2,44,000 women under its arena (Singh, 2017).

Prakash has noticed that to establish as an active member in the country, this project was successful in accounting a broad perspective. It directly influenced the women to make their own decisions and to prepare themselves as more self-reliant and self-confident (Prakash, 2021).

- ⊙ **Swayamsiddha:** This scheme has been launched in February 2011. The objective of this centrally sponsored scheme is holistic and sustainable women empowerment through mobilization by enhancing the opportunity to access economic resources and micro credits. In the XI Plan, the wide scopes of the Swayamsiddha scheme have been proposed. Further, Swa-Shakti and Swayamsiddha have been merged under the program Swayamsiddha, Phase – II. It has offered an integrated approach to women’s empowerment, considering the social and economic aspects by training and developing different skills in traditional and non-traditional sectors (Singh, 2017).

Prakash has mentioned that Swayamsiddha has made an outstanding development in the rural areas. The rural poor women have become stable in their socio-economic status. It has been considered an important project for providing skill-based training to enhance their income (Prakash, 2021).

- ⊙ **Swawlamban Programme:** This economic scheme was initiated in 1982-83 with the assistance of Norwegian Agency for Development Corporation. The target of this programme is to offer a skill-based training programme to economically weak women for their self-employment. Further, in 2006 it was transferred to the State Governments for better implementation (Singh, 2017).

Schemes for Support

- ⊙ **Supports to Training and Employment Programme (STEP):** This central scheme was launched in 1987. Under this programme beneficiaries are categorized into viable and cohesive groups. The motto of this programme

is to offer different skills (ten specific traditional skills) and new knowledge for women in traditional sectors. Here, a complete page of services, including health care and elementary education, are provided. Further, the output has been evaluated, and Indian Government has decided to merge this programme with Rashtriya Mahila Kosh and to offer both traditional and non-traditional skill-based training for needy women (Singh, 2017).

- ⊙ **Mahila E-Hatt:** In March 2017 Mahila E-Hatt was introduced by the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Under this project, women can sell their products on online marketing platforms. This initiative is considered a part of Startup India and Digital India. The objective of this project is to provide to opportunity to sell their products directly to the customers. It basically promotes women’s entrepreneurship (Prakash, 2021).
- ⊙ **One Stop Centre Scheme:** The prime objective of such scheme is ‘to provide integrated support to women affected by violence, in both space public and private spaces under one roof and also to facilitate immediate, emergency and non - emergency access’ (Prakash, 2021).

Education

- ⊙ **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao:** This project has been introduced in October 2014 to improve the deteriorating sex ratio (as per the census 2011) in Indian society. The prime objective of this programme is to save the girl children and to educate them properly so they can get their self-identification in the social structure. Prasad has identified two major reasons for such adverse sex ratio, such as female foeticide and female infanticide. This is a joint initiative of the Government of India and Ministry of Women and Child Development, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, and Ministry of Human Resource Development (Prakash, 2021).

Sustainable development

- ⊙ **Hostel for Working Women:** Prakash has observed that with the changing socio-

economic conditions, many of the women are employed in the urban industrial sectors, and they are searching for a safe residence there because they have to leave their homes for the purpose of their jobs (Prakash, 2021). Keeping this in mind, this programme was initiated in 1972-73 by the Government of India. Here, working women who are living away from their home-town for their jobs and the women who are being prepared for employment are being offered safe and reasonable hostel accommodation. Urban municipal bodies, Panchayati Raj Institutions, reputed colleges and universities, and Self-Help Groups – all these are included in this programme (Singh, 2017).

- ⊙ **Creches:** This scheme is for the infants of working women. It offers a safe place for the children of the working women when they are at work. This scheme has been launched under the Report of the Working Group on Child Development (Singh, 2017).

Relief, Rehabilitation and Protection of Women in Difficult Circumstances

- ⊙ **Swadhar:** This scheme has been launched in 2001-2002. The main objective of this programme is to provide basic needs, like food, clothing, and shelter, to the economically unstable women in any difficult situation. Other than this, it offers rehabilitation through education, awareness, and different skill development programme for their social and economic recognition and clinical, legal, and emotional support. Here, the women, deserted by their families, released from jail, trafficked, victims of any extreme violence or survivors of any natural disasters are considered as the beneficiaries under this programme.
- ⊙ **Compensation to Rape Victims:** The National Commission for Women has been directed to launch a programme 'to wipe out the tears of unfortunate victims of rape' by the Domestic Working Women's Forum of the Supreme Court and Union of India. According to this direction, National Commission for Women has initiated a scheme named 'Relief to and

Rehabilitation of Rape Victims.' This scheme has been estimated as ₹ 250 crores.

- ⊙ **Sabla / NPAG/ KSY:** This scheme was introduced in 2010 and is being executed in 205 designated districts across the country. The prime objective of this programme is the holistic or sustainable development of adolescent girls who are from 11 to 18 by their ages. The girls of this age group have been considered as 'Sabala'. Further this programme of Sabala has been replaced by Nutrition Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) and Kishori Shakti Yojana (KSY). This scheme offers nutritional and non-nutritional benefits for adolescent girls. It provides proper nutrition and health care services along with the guidance for family welfare and vocational training under National Skill Development Programme for those girls who are 16 and above.

Health

- ⊙ **Indira Gandhi Matritva Sahyog Yojana (IGMSY):** This is a centrally sponsored Conditional Cash Transfer Scheme. It has been launched in October, 2010 for pregnant and lactating (P & L) women to provide cash incentives to improve their health condition and nutritional deficiency. The beneficiaries are considered in both the prior and after the delivery of their children. Further, the Direct Benefit Transfer programme has undertaken this scheme for implementation.

Women empowerment and livelihood programme

- ⊙ **National Mission for Empowerment of Women (NMEW):** This scheme has been introduced in March, 2010 with the motto of coordinating 'assessment of current Government interventions.' The National Resource Centre for Women (NRCW) has been set up to fulfill its operational purposes. It also has state-level operational institutions. "The objective of the national Mission for Empowerment of Women is to empower women socially, economically and

educationally by securing convergence of schemes of different Ministries of Government of India as well as state Government” (National Mission for Empowerment of Women).

- **Priyadarshini:** This programme has been launched for holistic empowerment of vulnerable women in 2 districts of Bihar and 5 districts of Uttar Pradesh. This programme has been drafted to improve the livelihood through the establishment of Self-Help Groups and the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).
- **Ujjawala:** This scheme has been drafted in December, 2007 for the trafficked women who are sexually exploited. This programme has five key objectives, such as ‘prevention, rescue, rehabilitation, reintegration and repatriation.’ One of the mottos of this programme is to implement its objectives through NGOs (Singh, 2017).

Recognition of women

- ⊙ **Stree Shakti Puraskar:** To recognise the success of women, the Government of India has introduced 6 national awards, named Stree Shakti Puraskar, for different sectors in the year 1999. The awards are titled with the name of Jhansi Ki Rani Lakshmi Bai, Kannagi, Rani GaidnliuZeliang, Devi Ahilya Bai, Mata Jija Bai and Rani Rudramma Devi. Each of these awards is worth of Rs. 3 Lakh. The objective of such recognition is to public the success stories of the women as the next generation can motivate themselves by the inspiration of such role models.

Laws related to Women protection and empowerment

- ⊙ **The Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition), Act, 1986:** This Act was enacted with the objective to prohibit the misrepresentation of women in any publication, writing, advertisement, or painting.
- ⊙ **Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal), Bill 2012:** This Bill has been passed for the right to

work with dignity in the workplace and for the protection from sexual harassment. This Bill covers all the workplaces of both the private and public sectors.

- ⊙ **The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act (PWDVA), 2005:** This Act has been enacted to support the victims of domestic violence. As per this Act, women victims are supported with shelter, medical facilities and compensation. PWDVA also covers domestic violence from non-matrimonial relationships, like mother, daughter, sister etc.
- ⊙ **The Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961:** This Act has been implemented to prohibit such an evil social practice as taking and giving dowry.
- ⊙ **National Commission for Women:** The National Commission for Women (NCW) has been introduced in 1992 under The National Commission for Women Act, 1990. This is an apex statutory body. The key objectives of this Commission is to supervise all the matters regarding the legal safeguard for women and to review and suggest necessary corrections through amendments.

International Co-operation for Women empowerment

- ⊙ **Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW):** In 1980 Indian government signed in the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ‘to undertake appropriate legislative and other measures to eliminate discrimination against women and for guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedom on the basis of equality with men.’
- ⊙ **Beijing Platform for Action:** In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing. From their set of women empowerment projects, India has adopted 12 concerning areas, including health, education, poverty, violence against women, economic stability, decision making, human rights of women, media, environment etc.

- ◎ **India–US Women’s Empowerment Dialogue (WED):** In June, 2012 India and US participated in the India-US Women’s Empowerment Dialogue (WED), Chaired by Ms. Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State, US and Co-chaired by Shri S.M. Krishna, Honourable Minister of External Affairs. This was held in Washington DC.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion the findings may be represented in four different sections:

1. Women are an integrated part of social structure. No country can prosper without the progress of women. Women can participate and contribute substantially to the development initiatives. Women approximately share fifty percent of the population. Therefore, without the better off of the life of the women development cannot be achieved. If a nation has to prosper, it has to ensure the change of women’s condition in the society.
2. However, it is often alleged that women are one of the most vulnerable and neglected section of the social structure. They often suffer from discrimination socially, economically as well as politically. Even in family and in work place they face many adversities. In case of health, education and safety, women often face extreme adversity in the social structure. Therefore, much attention is to be paid by the state to elevate the state of women in all respects.
3. The global organisations such as United Nations, UNICEF, World Bank, International Labour Organisation, G20 etc. have identified the issues related to the empowerment of women and their participation in the mainstream development pathways as a priority initiative of the present time. SDG has specifically identified the development of the condition of women as a core area of the holistic development programme.
4. In accordance with global initiatives, India has taken a big leap in improving the position of the women. The government of India has initiated a number of policies, programmes, and projects

that will elevate the state of women in this country. The major areas of initiatives are empowerment through achieving economic independence, encouraging the education of girl children, health issues, self-employment, and skill development. Further, social security in terms of economic protection and legal support through different laws have been implemented. In addition to all, recognition of women’s power has also been identified as one of the major areas of concern of the government.

Therefore, this may be concluded that there is appropriate and desirable effort and initiative from government to implement a gender-neutral society through its inclusive development goals. Although this is not easy to achieve, however, with the destination set and the journey which has begun, it is expected that the nation will soon arrive at its goal of achieving a gender equal society.

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