

The Religious Life of the Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara

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Abstract

Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara practice their religion in accordance with Islamic law. The Muslims differ to the Hindus or other indigenous people in terms of religious beliefs and its practice. Hindus usually view them as the opposite religion. Because of the cultural assimilation and modernization of the society perception has been gradually changing among Muslims. Muslims of Pokhara practice their religion rigorously and liberally. Instead of young adults with modern education, religious leaders (such Maulana, Imams, and others) are reported to have very strong religious standards and values. In modern non-Muslim culture, religious belief and practice: people have forgotten the philosophical and spiritual advantages of faith. Muslims continue to follow Sariyat in all facets of their religious practice. It should be seen as a fortunate event, and we should take lesson from them. This article is based on qualitative research and aims to look at Muslim religious practice in Miya Patan of Pokhara. It makes an attempt to address the general situation of Muslim religious practices in Pokhara. In-depth interviews and library research are being used to gather data about the subjects under discussion. It is limited to historical study on the subject. Finding of the research can be generalized to study the entire situation of Muslim religious practice in Nepal.

Keywords: Barelvi, Deobandhi, Orthodox, Quran, Sariyat **Introduction**

According to Dictionary of Word Origins, the Latin word religio means obligation or bond. It derives from the verb religare, which means to tie back and tight. It developed a specialized sense of bond between humans and gods, and it was used for monastic life (Ayto,2011). Religious practices arose as a result, but the modern meaning did not emerge until the 16th century. Emile Durkheim defines a Church as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices that unite all those who adhere to them into a single moral community. Many religions are practiced throughout the world, but the major religions are Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, Taoism, Jainism and so on. Individuals interpret religion in accordance with their own distinct personality and inner experience. Most religions contain important truths that can greatly benefit other religions. According to Immanuel Kant (Rohlf,2020), religion is the recognition of all our duties as divine commands. Faith is a radical heart commitment to entrusting oneself to God, resulting in a radical shift in one's way of life. Faith is a radical commitment of the heart that transforms the way of life. As we know, Muslim religion has been derived from the dogmas of Quran. Quran, the holy text, is the central point of entire religion and culture of Muslims. So, it is difficult to know religious behaviour of Muslims without understanding Quran (Ojha,2016). The role of religion is extremely important to Muslims. The holy Quran directs the life of a Muslim. Without Quranic interpretations, Muslim rites and rituals are incomplete. To be a Muslim, one must believe in one God and the holy Quran and the five pillars of Islamic directives.

Many of the studies conducted by the native and foreign scholars such as Abdul Salam Khan (2071 B.S.) concerned with the socioeconomic standing of Muslims in Kapilbastu, Study conducted by Arjun Gurung (2059 B.S.) focuses on the rituals and belief system. Shanker Thapa (1985) in his research paper "Marriage in the Muslim society: A case study of Birgunj based Muslims", based on microanalysis of Muslim settlements in Birganj. Quresha Banu, (1980) examines the social structure, religion, holiday customs,

status of women, and family life of Kathmandu's Muslims throughout history. David Seddon (2018) focuses on the political and sociocultural circumstances of Terai's Nepali Muslims, Niranjana Ojha and D.S. Kunwar (2018) analyzes critically the history, social status and economic life of the Nepali Muslim community. All the authors have focused their study on different aspects of Nepali Muslims. At international level, the modernization theory argues that the superhuman and supernatural forces, gods and spirits, with which nonindustrial cultures populate the universe and attribute responsibility for natural and social phenomena. In their place, it introduces the modern scientific interpretation of nature as a competing cosmology, in which only the laws and regularities discovered by the scientific method are accepted as valid explanations of phenomena. It is not because the gods are angry that it rains or does not rain, but because of atmospheric conditions as measured by the barometer and photographed by satellites (Britanica,2022)). Assimilation theory refers to the adoption of a majority or dominant culture's religious practices and beliefs by a minority or subordinate culture. It is an important form of cultural assimilation (Wikipedia, 2022). Durkheim (1912) defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, beliefs and practices that unite all those who adhere to them in a single moral community. Religion, according to him, provides social cohesion and social control in order to keep society in social solidarity.

Nepal, a small Himalayan nation, is home to many different ethnic groups. Many castes, ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups reside harmonically in this tiny country. Diversity in society and culture is reflected in lifestyle, thought, and religious practice. Hindus constitutes 81.34%, Buddhists - 9.04%, Muslims-4.38%, Christianity- 1.41%, Kirat- 3.04% and others- 0.44% in Nepal (CBS, 2011). If we look at the religious composition of Pokhara, we will find - Hindus- 405141, Buddhists- 66266, Muslims-4437, Christians- 10538, Kirat- 453 and others- 165 (CBS,2011).

Muslims of Nepal are the migrants, and they arrived in Nepal at various points in time and for various reasons. They are scattered all over Nepal from east to west, from hill to Terai. They have orthodox as well as liberal views on religion but they follow the same religious believe – Islam. In comparison to Terai Muslims, Indian immigrants, and followers of the Deobandhi sect, hill Muslims and Bareilvi sect adherents are very liberal in religious matters (Ojha, 2016). The history of Nepal has witnessed sorrowful presence of Muslims during the twenties of the 14th century. An Arabic book "Hudood Al" Alam", which was published in 781 A.D. mentioned the term 'Nepal' as a trading partner of Arabia (Regmi, 2026). In 1324 A.D. Gyasuddin Tuglak from Delhi Sultanate came to Simraungadh as an invader. His troops attacked the Simraungadh. Like him, Shamshuddin Iliyas Shah of Bengal invaded Kathmandu Valley in 1349 A.D. He looted and plundered for seven days and all the three cities of valley were destroyed. These two events showed the presence of Muslims in Nepal but that was not the permanent settlement. Neither the invaders nor none of their followers stayed permanently in Nepal (Kunwar and Ojha, 2017). Until the reign of King Ratna Malla, Muslims were not permanently settled in Nepal. The Kashmiri were the first Muslims to come Nepal from Kashmir via Laddakh and Tibet for commercial purposes. Since then they engaged in various occupations such as scent manufacturing, court musicians and bangle seller and so forth. They permanently settled in Kathmandu. From this point permanent settlement of Muslim in Nepal has started (Kunwar and Ojha, 2017). Since then, the Muslims came to Nepal in different times for different purposes. The arrival began in the Malla period in the 15th century and even until now they are coming to settle here. The Muslims of Indian origins came in the 14th century and were permitted to build a mosque at Bagbazaar which is known as the Jame Masjid which originally was a Shia Imambada but later it has changed to Sunni Mosque by Maulana Sargana Ali Shah who arrived with Begam Hazrat Mahal in 1857 (Kunwar and Ojha, 2017). The petty hill ruler of Western Nepal had also invited various skilled labourers from Northern India to their states to manufactures fire arrow, agricultural implements, utensils, ornaments etc. Now, they live in Western hills and popularly known as the Churautey (Bangle Sellers). A larger number of Muslims came to Nepal in the 19th century as the wage laborers (Kunwar and Ojha, 2017). Majority of Nepali Muslims are Sunni's. Shia's are insignificant in number. Within Sunni they have orthodox as well as liberal views on

religion but they follow the same religious believe – Islam. In comparison to Terai Muslims, Indian immigrants, and followers of the Deobandhi sect, hill Muslims and Barelvi sect adherents are very liberal in religious matters (Ojha, 2016). The Muslims differ to the Hindus or other indigenous people in terms of religious beliefs (Ojha, 2016).

By profession Muslim people of Miya Patan were the bangle sellers. Formerly they used to sell their bangles in the villages and urban centers such as Mahendra pool, Prithivichwok bus park areas, etc. Because of the modernization of the society and change in perception now they have changed their occupation. Besides bangle selling, they also spend their time in agriculture. In those-days there was a perception of maintaining low profile instead of sophistication. Because of modernization of the Pokhara Valley the outsiders came to Pokhara for business opportunities. Pokhara industrial area is their ancestral property. Now it is a land of businessmen. Because of lack of the education the native Muslims sold their property to the new comers in cheaper price thus they became poorer in modern time. They were marginalized by the other ethnic and caste people. Abdul Rahim of Miya Patan said that the local Hindu people contributed a lot for their education. They have a very good tie as well as understanding with non-Muslim family. He further added that Muslims of Miya Patan were never exploited nor marginalized by the local Hindu community (Rahim, 2022).

Muslims in Pokhara have a liberal outlook on social, cultural, and religious issues; as a result, they are amiable and understanding. The pillars of Islam i.e. Shahada, Namaz, Roza, Jakat and Haj are such factors which play vital role in the life of a Muslim. Terai Muslims are found strict on following Islamic pillars whereas hill Muslims are liberal. The primary focus of this study is the gap left by the previous researcher to identify unrecognized problems on religious life of the Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara and their religious practice. It attempts to address the following questions:

1. What is attitude of the Muslims of Miya Patan in religious matters?
2. How do they practice their religion in Miya Patan?

Methods and Materials

The descriptive and analytical research methods underpin this study. Both primary and secondary sources have been utilized. The in-depth interview has been given the utmost emphasis in order to collect primary data. In addition to several local social/religious groups and organizations, researchers, and a variety of papers, books, reports, and other printed resources, the researcher also conducted side-by-side consultations with them. Primary sources have received special emphasis. To collect the first-hand information field observation has been done on Miya Patan Masjid on 12 March 2022 and Chipledhunga/ Mahendra Pool Masjid on 15 March 2022. And in-depth interviewed with un-structured questionnaire has been conducted with Abdul Rahim (Masjid Committee Chairman of Miya Patan), Nuradil Miya (Haji) of Miya Patan, Ashique Ali (Chairman of Masjid Committee of Chipledhunga) of Pokhara, Moulana Mohasin (Moulvi) of Nepal Jame Masjid, Hanif Miya (Muslim Elder) of Miya Patan and Fajir Miya (Imam) of Kashmiri Taquia, Kathmandu. The religious theory of Emile Durkheim (Durkheim, 1912) has been used as the theoretical foundation for this study. Durkheim defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, beliefs and practices that unite all those who adhere to them in a single moral community. Religion, according to him, provides social cohesion and social control in order to keep society in social solidarity. The primary way of secondary information research is library research. The necessary number of pertinent books, journal articles, online resources, and publications has been utilized. Special emphasis has been placed on primary sources. Interviews and discussions with respondents were conducted with the

goal of acquiring first-hand information. All of the qualitative data for this study was coded, classified, analyzed, and some reflection was provided. The historical examination of Islamic religious activity in Miya Patan is the exclusive focus of this work. This article excludes the theological, sociological, political, legal, economic, and other facets of religion and other religions.

Data Presentation

The majority of Muslims in Miya Patan are Sunni Barelvi. They came from the Uttar Pradesh town of Lucknow. They were invited by Kaski's petty hill ruler and settled in Kundar, which is now known as Miya Patan. There were only Barelvi Muslims at first, but as they interacted with Indian Imams and Terai Muslims, a few of them became Deobandhi. Nonetheless, the number of Deobandhi adherents is insignificant (Rahim,2022).

All Muslims, whether Deobandhi or Barelvi, adhere to the five pillars of Islam. Concerning Barelvi, they stated that there is a mediator who passes the prayer on to God, whereas Deobandhi believes that there is no mediator between God and the prayer (Rahim, 2022). This is the primary distinction between the Barelvi and Deobandhi sects of Islam. Everything else they have in common.

Although ritual is not so frequent and common in Islam. The Muslims observe many ritualistic celebrations imbedded in their belief. The ritual has become as important as the religion itself there by making it part of the religious belief. So, the Muslims of Miya Patan had developed their own belief and ritual system. If we mention the hill Muslims, their ritualistic behaviour has been intermixed with that of the Hindus. In Terai, Muslim belief system and culture has been borrowed from their counterpart in India. Miya Patan Muslims are neither orthodox nor traditional comparing to other Muslims but they follow their rites and rituals in their way (Filed Observation,2022).

In comparison to Hindus the Miya patan Muslims do not observe ritual practice so much. The entire Islamic culture is set by the citations of Quran and Hadith. It prefers simplicity in behaviour. However, the long association with Hindus, regional cultures has introduced in Muslim cultural practices and evolved ritual as a part of cultural behavior (Ojha,2016). Since birth to death and even after, there are certain rituals prescribed so far to observe. The rituals during life cycle have become very much forceful in the Muslim community. Not only limited to life cycle rituals, there are, other ritualistic phenomenon observed so far even in prayers such as- Jummah, Id and Zanjara prayers. The practice of Namaz everyday everywhere further developed ritualism in religion. Usually on religious terms Muslims believe on some commandments: -

- * Faith on Allah
- * The practice of chastity
- * Justice for all
- * Respect to the seniors
- * To love children
- * To help poor (alms)
- * Good will towards friends
- * To excuse enemies
- * To respect scholars, and

The Muslims have staunchly believe on seven important things listed below-

- * In the existence and role of *Allah*
- * To believe on *Quran*
- * The role of the *Prophet*
- * In the existence of Angel (*Farista*)

- *The day of *Qayamat*
- * Existence of Soul after death, and
- * Every good and bad depends on Allah and so forth.
- * Basic Beliefs in Islam (Miya, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Theoretically, Islam makes no distinction between man and man. However, there is usually no distinction in their mosques during prayer. In Islam, the concepts of ritual, purity, and pollution have no place (Rahim, 2022). However, as a result of interactions with Muslim counterparts in India and the Terai, the elder Muslims of Miya Patan have become more rigid about Islam. It is fortunate that the youth Muslims of Miya Patan are more liberal than the rest of Nepal's Muslims. Muslims are directed towards their dress, ornaments, rites and rituals according to Muslim law (Miya, 2022). Except for Miya Patan, the majority of Muslim women wear Hijab. Similarly, Muslim males wear Islamic caps during prayer, but Miya Patan Muslims wear Nepali caps, which are un-Islamic in nature (field observation, 2022). This is an example of a liberal Muslim attitude. Liberal Muslims support progressive values such as democracy and modernization opposing theocracy and rejecting Islamic extremism.

Religious Life of Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara

The religion of Islam is equally and significantly observed by Muslims in Pokhara. The regional differences always have variations in the degree of faith observed so far. It is in fact very much true among minority religions (Thapa, 1999). The Muslims, who live in Pokhara, follow the religion in the proper way and established very good relations with their counterparts in Kathmandu, other hill areas, Tarai and India (Gurung, 2059 B.S.) The Muslims in Pokhara have been living in the Hindu cultural neighbourhood, and they have almost lost many of their original characteristics and culture, which has been mixed with that of their Hindu counterparts. The Pokhara metropolitan Muslims include both -those who pray and those who do not. There are Muslims who go to Masjid for prayer and Muslims who do not go to Masjid for prayer. The Friday prayer is spectacular in Pokhara. A large number of Muslims gather for Jummah (Friday Namaj). During this time, Miya Patan Masjid, Prithivichwok and Mahendrapool Masjid are almost crowded with Pilgrims (Namazis) stretching up to several hundred (field observation, 2022). The composition of the congregation at prayer keeps greater importance in understanding the religiosity of Muslims of Pokhara. There are some persons who do not think it necessary to attend prayers at Masjid. Those who do not go to Masjids, they pray wherever they feel comfortable (Rahim, 2022). The religious norms and values are found to be very strong mainly among adults and religious leaders (such as Maulana, Imams, Maulvis and others) rather than modern educated youths. Muslim women aren't allowed to pray at Masjid. They pray at their home. There is a separate room for women at Miya Patan Masjid premises to pray who are willing to pray at Masjid (Miya, 2022).

The Muslims of Pokhara are mainly divided into two major religious groups according to their belief system.

The Barelvi /Bareli Tradition

The traditionalists of Islam, or Barelvi, adhere to conventional laws. They have faith in the angels, Rasulla, and Hadith (Gurung, 2059 B.S.). The primary distinction between Barelvi and Deobandhi is that the former

practice Saint Mazar worship, Saint Sawl offerings, and Saint prayers on behalf of Allah (Miya, 2022). They hold that there are great Saints standing between people and the Almighty God, whereas Deobandhi do not adhere to such customs and pray to God directly. They reject the idea of a God-to-human intermediary. Deobandhi do not pray for renowned Saints or offer Sawl to their Mazar. Despite sharing a belief in the same holy text, the Quran, their interpretations vary according to their respective Islamic schools of thought (Rahim, 2022).

Shah Ismail Shahic's contemporary, Allamah Fazl-i-Haqq Khairabadi, who took influence from the Khairabadi School and with whom he disagreed on several theological matters, founded the Bareilvi movement (Rahim, 2022). The reason the school is known as Bareilvi is that Maulavi Ahmad Raza Khan, a reputable "alim," organized it and provided it with a violent stand against the Deobandi School and others that refused to denounce Shah Ismail Shahid as a "Kafir" or the misled and stood for the reform and rebirth of the Indian Muslim community. Bareilvi is a town in Uttar Pradesh (Ali, 2022). It supported the cause of saint worship and other accretions while accepting the prevalent superstitions and corruptions. It adheres to the Hanafi Mazhab in terms of law, like Deobandi, and "allows no modern re-interpretation of the law" (Gurung, 2019 B.S.).

The Deobandi Tradition

Deobandhi is a contemporary interpretation of Islam that adheres to all Islamic tenets on their own. According to the Deobandhi school, Muhammad and the angels are both human persons who serve as messengers rather than the all-powerful God. Muslims must pray to God directly without using any intermediaries (Gurung, 2019). The Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 was participated in by Muslims in Northern India, mainly in Oudh (the first Indian independent movement said by the Indian historians). Following their defeat, the Christians were inspired to spread the word and publicly started to claim that Jesus had given India as a gift and in his trust. The influence of Western culture and education, on the other hand, had left the Muslims in a state of spiritual and moral disarray, and they were gradually losing their understanding of their religion (Faridi, 1992). Therefore, at the time, there was concern that their next generation would essentially convert to Islam. As a result, the *Ulemas* became aware of the necessity of creating religious education institutes that may help Muslim youths stay connected to their faith while also maintaining and advancing Islamic religious and moral knowledge (Ali, 2022). When the Darul ulum Deoband was created, it assumed the status of Muslim religious institution of the highest importance.

It made steady progress and became the largest center for Muslim Islamic education in all of Asia (Ali, 2022). The main elements of the Darul-uloom legacy can be characterized as unwavering fidelity to the Prophet's Sunnah, strict devotion to the Hanafi School, sustaining the tradition of the pious forebears, and defence of their way (Ojha, 2016). The work or assistance of Darul Uloom has been crucial in establishing the Madrasha educational paradigm in this area. It has also had a striking impact on religious education in Nepal.

In the Jama Masjid of Deoband, Hafiz Saiyad Abid Hussain founded an Arabi makhatab in 1857. He also objected to moving the Makhtab to a roomier location in the great edifice that was being designed, but he eventually agreed. After being given the title of Darul-ulum, it attracted students from all over and was regarded as the mother institution by numerous Madrashas and Makhbab, who turned to Deoband for inspiration. Darul-ulum was among those who were opposed to British rule and devoted to the Hanafi Mazhab (Islamawareness, 2022). Later, it made a bigger contribution to the education of indigenous Muslims.

Its curriculum was modeled after the well-known Dars-i-nizamiyah system of Muslim education. Maulana Nanawtawi supported the study of contemporary sciences in Darul-ulum.

The other relevant authorities, however, lacked the motivation to foster an environment that would steer Madrasha students toward contemporary fields of study. Contrarily, the Darul-ulum itself fostered a sense of spiritual superiority among all students by promoting religious studies in contrast to those of their peers in the secular schools. English was not included in the Darul-ulum curriculum as a topic to be studied. Islamic theology studies are the focus of each course given (Pakistanlink,2022).

Most Muslims in Nepal are Hanafis who fervently adhere to the Deoband tradition. The well-known Ulemas, Maulwis, and Imams, as well as their Indian equivalents, are educated in the Deoband tradition. Therefore, a sizable portion of Muslims adhere to the Darul-ulum Deoband's philosophical tradition. The famous Muslims in Nepal share the same dogmatic interpretations and occasionally even the same names as the Darul-ulum (Nuradil Miya,2022).

Religious Activities among the Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara

Islam is a religious tradition with fully developed on the base of philosophical grounds. The faith in the unity of God, the finality of the prophethood of Hazrat Muhammad, acceptance of the five pillars etc. make one a Muslim follower (Rahim, 2022). The acceptance of all such tenets of religion makes the entire community Islamized. Islamization of the society differs in the degree and manner of their exposure to Islam, time span of such exposure to Islamic tenets, the nature of the contact, the availability of religious education and training, their interaction with other Muslims, their own attitude towards religion and activation of the religious tenets as such (Rahim, 2022).

But in the context of Nepal, the hill Muslims are found to be more liberal in religious practice they are not far behind the Muslims of Pokhara. But it is obvious to note that the hill Muslims are a little ignorant of their own religious dogmas and philosophies as they have been separated from interacting with the Islamic culture in the country since many centuries. The hill Muslims found themselves within the disintegration of culture and excessive impact and penetration of Hindu culture and practices. In comparison to Kathmandu's Muslims, most young people in Miya Patan are unaware of theological concepts (Field observation, 2022). Only 5 people out of 15 (male and female) samples were interested in theological interpretation. Others adhere to Muslim tradition but are unaware of religious practice. The Muslims in the cities are normally found influenced by modern components of culture and lifestyles. Observations in Miya Patan reveal that the majority of Muslim youth are dressed in non-Islamic attire, such as Nepali caps rather than Muslim traditional caps. Muslim girls are also wearing modern clothing rather than traditional Muslim attire. According to Sariyat, Muslim women are not permitted to converse with men while dressed in parda and wearing Hijab while walking down the street. No Muslim female has been seen on the street wearing a Hijab. In Islam, Muslim women are required to wear a hijab. They are not practicing Islam religiously properly due to a lack of Islamic education and proper training (field observation,2022). As per the different groups of Muslims in Pokhara, these communities are very much liberal in the religious-cultural matter. But it does not mean that they do not follow religion and religious tenets. The modern impacts and influence of surrounding dominant cultures made them liberal in terms of religious behaviours and dogmatic standards. The community of Ulemas or the Maulvis and Imams who are trained in religion and dogmatic studies are far more orthodox in religious matters in comparison to the ordinary followers. Of course, the hard-core attitude and their feeling towards their own religion are directed to the traditional type of Islamization of the society or activation of the Muslim society towards strict religious behaviour. This phenomenon is not only limited to Islam, the Hindu Saints and ritual-performing Brahmins are also found to be orthodox and fundamentalists on religious matters. (Ojha,2016).

Conclusion

Religion is more than just a set of customs; it is a commitment to faith. Religion became so formalized in Nepal, particularly in the Hindu community, as a result of the community's modernization and westernization. Modernization of civilization is moving toward Western culture under the guise of freedom. Religious belief and practice are regarded as farcical in modern non-Muslim culture. People have lost sight of the philosophical and spiritual advantages of faith. Religion, according to Durkheim, is a unified system of beliefs and practices. Beliefs and practices form a moral community for all who adhere to them. Miya Patan's Muslims form one community based on their religious beliefs. The common issue that unites Muslims in Miya Patan's single brotherhood society is religious practice.

Except for Nepali Muslims, other religious groups have lost the importance of religious practice. Most of the Hindu youth aren't aware of their religious values. They are just celebrating their rituals without knowing its significance. As for example birthday rite celebration is meaningful in Hindu society. Philosophically lighting a candle in the birthday means move towards enlightenment but the youngsters are copying western culture they turn off the candle light to move towards darkness. They aren't aware what they have to do and what they are doing? But the Muslims adhere to Sariyat in all aspects of their religious practice. It should be viewed as a fortunate circumstance. Muslims in Pokhara are observed to be sensitive to the elements of contemporary urban culture while also being heavily affected by Islamic religious practices. The Muslim elders and those involved in religious matters are passionate about upholding their own culture and faith. However, the conflict between modernization and religion has received a lot of attention, and the former always prevails because it receives little ongoing support from the population. In the course of the Muslims' three-century relationship with the local religious customs, social mores, worldviews, and way of life in Pokhara, they eventually started to follow local customs as well. Religious acceptance as well as modernization without losing its philosophical value is the beauty of the Muslims of Miya Patan of Pokhara.

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