

SOCIO-ECONOMIC ANALYSIS AND CHALLENGES OF WOMEN HANDLOOM WEAVERS

Abstract

The present study provides a comprehensive exploration of the socio-economic profile of women handloom weavers and the challenges they encounter in their profession. The research analyzes data from a diverse sample of women weavers to offer essential insights into their demographic characteristics, family dynamics, household income, housing, and reasons for choosing the weaving profession. Moreover, the study investigates the most influential challenges faced by women weavers, including Long Working Hours, No Incentives, Lower Wage, and Financial Problems. Utilizing chi-square analysis, the study reveals intriguing associations between these challenges and key demographic variables such as age, educational qualification, and average monthly income. The findings shed light on the distinct experiences of women weavers based on their life stage, educational background, and financial circumstances, and emphasize the need for targeted interventions to empower and improve the well-being of this vulnerable workforce. Additionally, the article highlights the low awareness and limited access to government schemes, emphasizing the significance of effective communication and outreach efforts. The study concludes by underlining the potential role of self-help groups in supporting and empowering women weavers, laying the groundwork for informed policy and programmatic interventions in the weaving community.

Keywords: self-help groups, government sources, formal finance sources.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Handloom weaving holds a cherished position in the cultural and economic landscape of rural India, serving as an ancient livelihood for millions of skilled artisans and reflecting the nation's rich artistic heritage and traditions. This decentralized industry has not only preserved India's cultural identity but has also emerged as a crucial source of employment after agriculture, with women weavers playing a significant role in its sustenance and growth. The present study endeavors to delve into the socio-economic intricacies and challenges faced by women handloom weavers in this unique and resilient sector. The handloom industry has deep-rooted historical significance, with artisans being renowned for their craftsmanship in hand spinning, printing, and dyeing, creating an array of products that fulfill the primary clothing needs of the people. Sarees, dhotis, bed sheets, and lungis are among the major products produced using cotton as the primary raw material, sometimes combined with other fibers. Despite confronting formidable challenges from modern textile production and rapid urbanization, the handloom sector continues to flourish due to its unique artistic skills, diverse product range, and simplistic yet effective technology.

Recognizing the vital role of the handloom industry in preserving the nation's cultural identity and promoting rural employment, the government has undertaken several initiatives to support its development. These measures include providing looms, facilitating training programs, offering rebates, and extending market assistance through various organizations. Consequently, 95 percent of the handloom industry in India operates under the cooperative sector, with the remaining 5 percent being owned by private entrepreneurs. Cooperative societies have been established, some exclusively catering to women weavers, aimed at empowering them and improving their living conditions. Despite these endeavors, many women weavers still grapple with poverty and the associated challenges. As we embark on this journey of exploration into the world of women handloom weavers, we hope that the knowledge gained through this research will contribute to the preservation of India's cultural heritage, while also enhancing the socio-economic well-being of the resilient artisans who have held the threads of tradition for generations. The handloom industry's survival and resilience in rural India are intricately tied to the livelihoods and aspirations of its female workforce. Women handloom weavers, often the backbone of this ancient craft, have defied conventional gender norms and played a significant role in sustaining their families and communities. By engaging in handloom weaving, these women have not only contributed to the economic fabric of their villages but have also taken up leadership roles within their cooperative societies, breaking barriers and defying stereotypes.

This research aims to uncover the intricate web of socio-economic factors that influence the lives of women handloom weavers. It recognizes that gender plays a pivotal role in shaping the weavers' experiences and seeks to understand how gender dynamics interact with economic forces in this traditional yet evolving industry. Furthermore, this study will explore the role of women's empowerment within the context of the handloom industry. The emergence of cooperative societies exclusively for women weavers represents a significant step towards gender equity and social inclusion. It will explore the intricate relationship between traditional handloom weaving, women's empowerment, and the overall socio-economic fabric of rural communities.

The study will also examine the challenges faced by women weavers, as they strive to sustain their ancient craft amidst the onslaught of modernization and globalization. By

shedding light on the socio-economic struggles and triumphs of women handloom weavers, this research endeavors to identify potential strategies for sustainable growth and empowerment within the handloom sector. In addition to gender-related challenges, the study will critically examine the broader socio-economic issues faced by women handloom weavers. These may include limited access to financial resources, fluctuating market demands, competition from mechanized textile production, and inadequate infrastructure. Understanding these multifaceted challenges is essential for formulating targeted policies and interventions to bolster the economic prospects of women weavers and uplift the communities they support. The study's findings could provide valuable insights for policymakers, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders to formulate targeted interventions and support mechanisms for the upliftment of women weavers in India's handloom industry.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1. **(Ahmed & Sheereen, 2022)**The findings reveal a predominance of male workers, with limited representation of women in the profession. The majority of weavers in Uttar Pradesh belong to the Muslim religion or the Other Backward Class (OBC) social group. Many workers reside in kutcha houses, particularly in rural regions, while a significant number of handloom workers own homes in rural areas.
2. **(Devi & Basumatary, 2022)**The objective of this paper is to examine the economic aspects of reelers, spinners, and weavers, who play a crucial role in the silk industry. The research identifies variations in income levels between reelers and spinners and also between those using modern machines and traditional devices for reeling and spinning. Additionally, the study reveals a positive correlation between the income of weavers and the presence of designs in their products, as products with designs tend to fetch higher wage rates.
3. **(Mishra et al., 2022)**This study looks at how, in a global context, intellectual property rights (IPR) protection might benefit handloom weavers. It explores the present issues the handloom sector is facing, which give rise to legal worries. These difficulties include the weavers' socioeconomic circumstances, the handloom industry's profitability, the difficulties the weavers face, the accessibility of financial aid, and the development of creative marketing strategies.
4. **(Panda & Bhuwania, 2022)**By examining 30 papers released between 2015 and 2021, this paper seeks to conduct a systematic literature review (SLR). With the goal of gaining current knowledge in these areas, the emphasis is on the socioeconomic difficulties, health risks, and commercial difficulties handloom weavers confront. Intriguing discoveries were noted by the researchers using Google Scholar as a search engine for this review. The findings show that handloom weavers' social and economic circumstances are deteriorating.
5. **(Sivakkolundu & Sheeba, 2021)**This study explores how financial hardships, health problems, and generally depressed economic situations affect weavers' vulnerability. This article's primary goal is to evaluate the socioeconomic situation of the handloom weavers in the Vellore District. The research used interviews to get the data. The report lists a number of obstacles and suggests solutions to overcome them.

6. **(Siddiqui et al., 2021)** This research aims to explore the risk factors associated with Musculoskeletal Disorders (MSDs) in handloom and power loom weavers, focusing on different body regions. The results indicate a higher prevalence of MSDs among handloom weavers, especially in the upper and lower back and shoulders, in comparison to power loom weavers. The study strongly advocates for preventive measures and treatment strategies to alleviate the burden of MSDs among handloom weavers.
7. **(Khan, 2022)** The goal of this study was to evaluate the socioeconomic position of weavers and offer alternative solutions to help them. The results highlight the enormous difficulties faced by weavers on both an economic and non-economic level. Their spending habits on both essential and non-essential products and services, including education, healthcare, food, and non-food items, as well as their use of alcohol and tobacco during the study period, are also examined.
8. **(Chatterjee, 2020)** The research indicates that weaver households in the studied areas experience subpar living standards and a compromised quality of life. Specifically, the handloom weavers of Kota Doria face challenging social and economic circumstances, and various government initiatives have not effectively improved their financial situation.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This research focuses on addressing the enduring and complex long-term problems faced by women weavers in the handloom industry, which are intertwined with socio-economic factors. It aims to empower women handloom weavers by identifying effective strategies to enhance their socio-economic well-being, considering the importance of the handloom industry in the rural economy. Despite the high demand for handloom products, challenges persist in encouraging rural communities to support the industry. The study explores how incentivizing rural consumers can boost the industry's growth and sustainability. Financial struggles among women weavers due to inadequate earnings are also highlighted. The research aims to assess the socio-economic conditions of women handloom weavers and proposes solutions to improve the institutional infrastructure and overall development of the handloom sector.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine socio-economic conditions of the women handloom weavers
- To analyse the problems faced by women handloom weavers

V. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to comprehensively investigate the socio-economic conditions of women handloom weavers, focusing on the handloom sector in Trivandrum district. It aims to analyze the challenges faced by the workers and examine their wage conditions. By providing detailed insights into the handloom industry in this specific region, the research aims to propose effective strategies to enhance the livelihoods of weavers, improve the sector's overall performance, and promote sustainable development in Trivandrum district.

VI. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The importance of adopting a suitable and reliable methodology for research is emphasized in this study. Researchers aim to conduct a scientific and objective analysis of economic problems, utilizing dependable statistical data to address complex challenges. In this specific research, the chosen methodology involves selecting a representative sample of 100 participants from the designated research area using non-random sampling. This approach ensures the acquisition of accurate and robust data, facilitating rigorous analysis and providing comprehensive insights into the economic issues under investigation.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents: It was found out from the analysis that majority of the women weavers are of the age of above 40 years (66 per cent). Around 57 per cent of the respondents are of having only a primary level of education. Majority of the women weavers are a part of nuclear family system (56 per cent). It was also found out from the analysis that 57 per cent of the respondents earn an average monthly income of ₹5000 to ₹10,000 and majority of their savings are held with bank (57 per cent). The analysis of the same is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic Profile	Variable	N	Percentage
Age	Below 30	4	4
	30-40	30	30
	40-50	33	33
	Above 50	33	33
Educational Level	Illiterate	37	37
	Primary	57	57
	Middle	6	6
Family Type	Joint family	44	44
	Nuclear Family	56	56
Average Monthly Income	₹2000-₹5000	43	43
	₹5000-₹10000	57	57
Sources of Savings	Bank	57	57
	LIC	16	16
	Post office	27	27
Total		100	100

Source: Primary Data

2. Socio-Economic Profile of the Weavers: The socio-economic profile reveals essential insights about the women weavers. The data indicates that the majority of weavers have 2 to 3 children (45 per cent), followed by respondents with 1 to 2 children (23 per cent) and above 3 children (22 per cent). Regarding children's educational status, a considerable proportion (53 per cent) is at the school level, while 22 per cent are in college. However, 15 per cent of children are not yet at an age to receive formal education. Looking at the total number of family members, a substantial portion of weavers have more than 3

members (56 per cent), followed by families with 2 to 3 members (26 per cent), and those with less than 2 members (18 per cent). Concerning the number of earning members, a significant proportion of respondents have 2 to 3 earning members (48 per cent), while 32 per cent have less than 2 earning members, and 20 per cent have more than 3 earning members. When it comes to the number of dependents, a significant number of weavers have above 3 dependents (54 per cent), and 22 per cent have 2 to 3 dependents. Only 11 per cent of families have 1 to 2 dependents, and 13 per cent have no dependents. In terms of housing, the data shows that a substantial number of respondents are renting their houses (46 per cent), while 31 per cent own their homes, and 23 per cent have them on lease. The primary occupation for the majority of respondents surveyed is weaving (67 per cent), with 33 per cent indicating it as a secondary occupation. It is worth noting that nearly half of the respondents engaged in weaving (45 per cent) have other sources of income besides weaving, possibly indicating diversification attempts to supplement their earnings. Understanding the reasons for entering the weaving profession is crucial. The data indicates that 13 per cent of women entered weaving due to it being a hereditary occupation, while for 50 per cent, it was the only work they knew. Additionally, 37 per cent entered weaving because they couldn't find alternative job opportunities, which highlights the challenges faced by the community in accessing different employment options. Unfortunately, the income from weaving is sufficient to assist only a small minority of families (15 per cent), leaving the majority (85 per cent) struggling to meet their household expenses. As a result, 64 per cent of families resort to borrowing money for household expenses, which highlights the financial challenges they face.

Analyzing the sources of borrowings, money lenders are the most common source (45 per cent), followed by master weavers (20 per cent), banks (20 per cent), and friends/relatives (15 per cent). This reliance on borrowing suggests that the weaving community faces financial constraints and limited access to formal credit sources. Awareness of government schemes available for the weaving profession is relatively low, with only a quarter of the surveyed weavers (25 per cent) being aware of such schemes, while the majority (75 per cent) remain unaware. This lack of awareness might indicate the need for improved communication and outreach efforts from the government to ensure the benefits reach those in need. Out of those who are aware of government schemes, only 26 per cent have received any benefits from them, indicating potential challenges in the effective implementation of these schemes. This finding calls for a deeper examination of the barriers and bottlenecks in the distribution of government benefits to the weaving community. On a positive note, a vast majority of individuals engaged in weaving (91 per cent) are members of self-help groups (SHGs), which might serve as a support system and platform for collective initiatives. These SHGs could potentially play a crucial role in empowering and supporting the weavers in their economic endeavors. The analysis of the same is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Socio-Economic Profile of the Weavers

Socio-Economic Profile	Variable	N	Percentage
Number of Children	No Children	10	10
	1-2	23	23
	2-3	45	45
	Above 3	22	22

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Childrens Educational Status	Not Applicable	10	10
	Not in an age of Education	15	15
	School Level	53	53
	College Level	22	22
Total number of members in the family	Less than 2	18	18
	2-3	26	26
	Above 3	56	56
Number of earning members	Less than 2	32	32
	2-3	48	48
	Above 3	20	20
Number of dependents	No Dependents	13	13
	1-2	11	11
	2-3	22	22
	Above 3	54	54
Possession of house	Owned	31	31
	Rent	46	46
	Lease	23	23
Is weaving primary or secondary occupation?	Primary	67	67
	Secondary	33	33
Are there sources of income other than weaving?	Yes	45	45
	No	55	55
Reason for entering weaving profession	Hereditary Occupation	13	13
	The only work known	50	50
	Didn't get any other job	37	37
Is the income from weaving sufficient to assist family?	Yes	15	15
	No	85	85
If No, do you borrow money for household expenses?	Yes	64	64
	No	36	36
If yes what are your sources of borrowings	Master Weavers	20	20
	Money Lenders	45	45
	Friends/ Relatives	15	15
	Banks	20	20
Are you aware of the govt. schemes provided in this area of weaving?	Yes	25	25
	No	75	75
Have you received any such benefits?	Yes	26	26
	No	74	74
Are you a member of any self-help groups (SHGs)	Yes	91	91
	No	08	08
Total		100	100

Source: Primary Data

- 3. Problems Faced by Women Weavers with respect to Demographic Profile:** The findings demonstrated that Long Working Hours, No Incentives, Lower Wage, and Financial Problems were universally significant challenges faced by women weavers.

These factors negatively impact their livelihoods and overall well-being, creating hurdles in their professional advancement. The chi-square analysis revealed intriguing patterns of association between certain challenges and demographic variables. Lack of Training, Domination of Workers, No Incentives, and Lower Wage exhibited considerable variations concerning age, educational qualification, and average monthly income. This suggests that women weavers' experiences with these challenges vary based on their life stage, level of education, and financial situation.

Similarly, factors like Financial Problems, Health Problems, Long Working Hours, Delay in Getting Wage, and Higher Medical Expenses were found to be influenced primarily by age and average monthly income. Younger weavers and those with lower incomes were more susceptible to these challenges, indicating the need for targeted interventions to support this vulnerable subgroup. Interestingly, Lack of Tools and Lack of New Technology were challenges primarily influenced by educational qualification. This implies that the implementation of advanced tools and technology might require tailored training programs aimed at enhancing the skill set of women weavers with varying educational backgrounds. Furthermore, the factor of Abuse by the Owners was predominantly influenced by age, suggesting that older women weavers may be more susceptible to exploitative practices in the weaving industry. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Problems faced by Women Weavers with respect to Demographic Profile

Variables	Mean Score	Age of Respondents		Educational Level		Average Monthly Income	
Lack of Tools	3.67	0.91	0.235	1.56	0.043*	2.25	0.292
Lack of New Technology	3.61	1.80	0.512	0.56	0.032*	1.77	0.859
Lack of training	3.25	7.20	0.024*	2.33	<0.001**	0.49	0.032*
Financial Problem	4.28	2.27	0.019*	1.54	0.733	1.45	<0.001**
Health Problem	3.90	1.33	<0.001**	0.65	0.564	6.85	0.022*
Long Hours of Work	4.55	2.01	0.443*	1.09	0.362	4.45	0.045*
Delay in Getting Wage	3.52	1.59	0.015*	5.87	0.698	7.92	0.021*
Domination of Senior Weavers	3.01	4.56	<0.001**	2.34	<0.001**	0.52	<0.001**
Abuse of the Owner	3.22	4.21	<0.001**	3.59	0.782	8.32	0.992
No Incentives	4.50	6.49	0.039*	5.90	0.024*	6.41	0.014*
Lower Wage	4.49	8.92	<0.001**	2.09	0.015*	3.02	<0.001**
Higher Medical Expenses	3.10	0.29	<0.001**	3.49	0.681	2.98	<0.001**

Source: Primary data

* Significant at 1% level

** Significant at 5% level

VIII. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

- 1. Socioeconomic Profile of Women Weavers:** The majority of women weavers in the study were aged above 40 years (66%), indicating a significant proportion of experienced artisans in the workforce. A considerable number of respondents had only a primary level of education (57%), emphasizing the need for educational interventions to enhance their skill sets. Moreover, the majority belonged to nuclear family systems (56%), reflecting the evolving family structures in the weaving community. The data revealed that 57% of the respondents earned an average monthly income of Rs. 5000 to Rs. 10,000, highlighting the prevailing income levels in the profession. A significant portion (57%) also relied on savings held in banks, showcasing the importance of financial security for the weavers.
- 2. Family Dynamics and Economic Dependence:** The data shed light on the family dynamics of women weavers, with 45% having 2 to 3 children. Educational status of the children showed that a substantial proportion (53%) was at the school level, indicating the need for educational support. Additionally, 54% of the weavers had above 3 dependents, suggesting the burden of financial responsibility on these families. Interestingly, 48% of respondents had 2 to 3 earning members in the family, signifying the role of multiple earners in supporting the household.
- 3. Challenges Faced by Women Weavers:** The study identified several key challenges faced by women weavers. Notably, Long Working Hours, No Incentives, Lower Wage, and Financial Problems emerged as universally significant challenges impacting their livelihoods and overall well-being. The findings underscored the need for targeted interventions to address these issues effectively.
- 4. Influence of Demographic Factors on Challenges:** The chi-square analysis revealed intriguing patterns of association between certain challenges and demographic variables. Lack of Training, Domination of Workers, No Incentives, and Lower Wage exhibited considerable variations concerning age, educational qualification, and average monthly income. This highlights the nuanced experiences of women weavers based on their life stage, educational background, and financial circumstances.
- 5. Vulnerable Subgroups and Specific Challenges:** Factors like Financial Problems, Health Problems, Long Working Hours, Delay in Getting Wage, and Higher Medical Expenses were found to be influenced primarily by age and average monthly income. This suggests that younger weavers and those with lower incomes are particularly susceptible to these challenges, warranting targeted interventions to support this vulnerable subgroup.
- 6. Educational Qualification and Technical Challenges:** The study revealed that Lack of Tools and Lack of New Technology were challenges primarily influenced by educational qualification. This emphasizes the importance of tailored training programs to enhance the skill set of women weavers with varying levels of education and promote the adoption of advanced tools and technology.
- 7. Age as a Determinant of Abuse:** Interestingly, the factor of Abuse by the Owners was predominantly influenced by age, indicating that older women weavers may be more

vulnerable to exploitative practices in the weaving industry. This highlights the need for safeguarding measures and protection for experienced artisans in the workforce.

- 8. Financial Constraints and Borrowing:** A significant finding was the financial challenges faced by women weavers, with only 15% of families finding the income from weaving sufficient to meet household expenses. As a result, 64% of families resorted to borrowing money, primarily from money lenders (45%), indicating limited access to formal credit sources.
- 9. Limited Awareness of Government Schemes:** The study unveiled a lack of awareness regarding government schemes available for the weaving profession, with only 25% of weavers being aware of such initiatives. This calls for improved communication and outreach efforts from the government to ensure the benefits reach those in need.
- 10. Role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** A positive finding was that a vast majority of individuals engaged in weaving (91%) were members of self-help groups (SHGs). These SHGs could serve as a support system and platform for collective initiatives, playing a crucial role in empowering and supporting the weavers in their economic endeavors.

IX. SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY

- 1. Skill Development and Training Programs:** Given that a significant proportion of women weavers have only primary education, it is essential to implement skill development and training programs to enhance their weaving expertise. Collaborations with government agencies, NGOs, and weaving institutes can offer specialized training on advanced techniques, design development, and marketing strategies to improve the overall quality of their products.
- 2. Financial Literacy and Access to Formal Credit:** To reduce reliance on informal borrowing, it is crucial to promote financial literacy among women weavers. Workshops and training sessions on financial management, banking services, and accessing formal credit sources can empower them to make informed financial decisions. Collaborating with banks and financial institutions to offer customized credit facilities for weavers with flexible repayment terms can further alleviate financial constraints.
- 3. Targeted Interventions for Vulnerable Subgroups:** As identified in the study, younger weavers and those with lower incomes face specific challenges like Financial Problems, Health Problems, Long Working Hours, Delay in Getting Wage, and Higher Medical Expenses. To address these issues, targeted interventions should be developed, such as health and insurance schemes tailored to the needs of young weavers and financial assistance programs for those facing medical emergencies.
- 4. Empowerment of Older Weavers:** Considering the influence of age on the prevalence of abuse by owners, it is crucial to implement measures to protect the interests and rights of older weavers. Formulating and enforcing policies that safeguard their working conditions and ensuring access to social security schemes can create a more supportive and secure work environment for experienced artisans.

- 5. Promotion of Government Schemes:** To increase awareness and utilization of government schemes, an effective communication and outreach strategy should be developed. Utilizing local community channels, self-help groups, and weaving cooperatives can enhance the dissemination of information and encourage more women weavers to avail themselves of the benefits provided by these schemes.
- 6. Diversification of Income Sources:** Since nearly half of the respondents engaged in weaving have other sources of income, further efforts should be made to promote income diversification. Providing support for exploring additional income-generating activities, like handicrafts, value-added products, or ecotourism-related ventures, can enhance financial stability and resilience among women weavers.
- 7. Collaborative Marketing Initiatives:** Facilitating market linkages and collaborations with handicraft emporiums, government agencies, and e-commerce platforms can help women weavers reach a wider audience and fetch better prices for their products. Joint efforts in marketing and branding can enhance the visibility of Kerala's handloom products and increase the demand for their unique craftsmanship.
- 8. Strengthening Self-Help Groups:** Considering the significant membership in self-help groups (SHGs), there is an opportunity to strengthen these groups as effective support systems for women weavers. Training SHG members in entrepreneurship, financial management, and collective marketing strategies can enhance their capacity to support each other and improve overall economic well-being.
- 9. Research and Development:** Encouraging research and development initiatives in the handloom sector can lead to innovative product designs, sustainable weaving practices, and adoption of new technologies. Collaborating with academic institutions and design experts can drive continuous improvement and create a competitive advantage for women weavers in the market.
- 10. Advocacy for Policy Reforms:** Engaging with policymakers and advocating for reforms that support the handloom industry, like improved access to raw materials, better working conditions, and fair wages, can contribute to the long-term sustainability of women weavers in Kerala.

X. CONCLUSION

The study provides a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic profile and challenges faced by women handloom weavers in Kerala. It highlights their demographic characteristics, family dynamics, and income levels, revealing the diverse nature of their livelihoods. The research emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address challenges such as long working hours, low wages, and financial problems, which hinder the economic empowerment of women weavers. Tailored support for vulnerable subgroups, financial literacy, and access to formal credit are crucial to improving their well-being. Empowering self-help groups and utilizing government schemes can be effective in promoting collective initiatives and improving the sector's competitiveness. Implementing the study's practical interventions will empower women weavers and sustain Kerala's traditional handloom craft for the future. Collaborative efforts from various stakeholders are essential in ensuring the prosperity and preservation of the handloom legacy in Kerala.

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