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## LOCATING THE MOVEMENT FOR TELANGANA'S STATEHOOD: A CRITICAL INQUIRY

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### ABSTRACT:

**T**he present paper explores trajectory as well as consequences of regional movements with special reference to Telangana movement for statehood. It appears that the mandate for a separate Telangana state goes back more than half a century till 'Mulki Movement', August 1952. However, an ambition of getting a historical identity, unrest with current development, rooted discrimination, etc. seem to be major consequences that gave a social environment for demanding separate statehood.

Osmania University which is regarded as the center for Telangana movement is chosen for the study. It is located in Hyderabad. This study focused only on members of student Joint Action Committees (JACs) of Osmania University. The main aim of the study was to explore perceptions of students about the involvement of students in the on going Telangana movement. A qualitative method was chosen for this study. A qualitative approach was found more useful to explore the perceptions of students' about Telangana movement. The semi-structured interview schedule was used for the collection of data, and in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face with the students. The respondents for this study were student leaders of OUJAC and interviews were conducted on the university campus. Other data used in the research has been taken from books, articles, reports, brochures, newspapers and the web. The current Telangana movement has seen a large number of internet sites devoted exclusively to reporting and highlighting this issue.

Keeping in view above arguments, the paper deals with few epistemological questions for instance whether Telangana movement for statehood was a mass movement or a students' led movement and supported by authority. What were the significant trajectories and strategies for making its successful? Apart from the political goal, has this movement succeeded or reached till the expected socio-cultural goals? Have students, minority and backward sections been benefitted since its declaration i.e. June 2014? What are the new challenges for current government in order to carry forward the legacy of Telangana movement for separate statehood?

**KEYWORDS:** Regionalism, Student, Social Justice, Telangana Movement.

### INTRODUCTION:

In general, the regional movements have emerged across the globe based on political, racial, ethnic, economic, religious factors, and geographical area. Regionalism or regional consciousness basically develops from a sense of identity within a region. People living in a particular region over a period of time tend to develop an identity affiliation with it because a region is a homogeneous area with physical and cultural characteristics and that make it distinct from those of the neighboring areas (Vance, 1973:39). The close association with such

particular region gives birth to 'regionalism', which can be subjective and objective (Rasheeduddin, 1997). On one hand, subjective components of regionalism include customs, traditions, art forms, language, literature, social heritage, beliefs, attitudes as well as values related to a particular group of people. On the other hand, the objective components include the territorial region and the accompanied social-environment complex within which the group lives. Misra hints that regionalism is a secular phenomenon in a relative sense because it tends to encompass caste, faiths, and varied caste affiliations to work together for a common cause (1988:12).

There are few criteria for recognizing a region in India. A region represents 'maximum homogeneity within and minimum identity'. Although homogeneities are established on the basis of few variables for instance language/dialect, social composition (communities/caste), ethnic regions, demographic features, geographical area (geographic contiguity), cultural patterns, economic condition, historical antecedents, political background, psychological makeup and felt consciousness of group identity (Mishra 1988:10). Mishra claims that geographical area, history, culture, economic underdevelopment, and language are the major constituents of regionalism (Ibid: 10-15). Thus, language itself shows a cultural ethos of the inhabitants who are living in the particular region. Therefore, language is one of the most significant components of regionalism in India. Keeping in view the importance of language, 'State Reorganization Commission' in 1956 recommended the reorganization of states in India accordingly. Moreover, after examining some literature and major debates on regionalism, it can be said that regionalism can be grouped into three major categories: i) supra-state regionalism, ii) inter-state regionalism and iii) intra-state regionalism.

It appears that 'supra-state-regionalism' is formed with the ambition of forging an identity by a group of states against other groups of states with certain socio-political interest, for example, there is strong conception about South India versus North India on the issue of Hindi language. Apart from this, 'inter-state-regionalism' is quite deferent from previous one. In this regard, Misra suggests that 'one state identity or group of states identities are juxtaposed against the identities of other states on certain issues that "clash with the interest of one another"' (Ibid: 16). In addition, it can be said that mutual interests of two states create such situation by which the demand for unified regional identity is raised, for instance, the border dispute between Maharashtra and Karnataka has created many derogatory remarks for each other (Hindu, 2016) while it seems that the water dispute between Punjab and Haryana has created same ethical and political saga (Sharma, 2016). These consequences are responsible factors for kind of regionalism in deferent continents of India. The third one, 'intra-state regionalism, indicate towards fighting within a territory/state for self-identity and self-rule. It also expresses a psyche of exploitation, underdevelopment, political and economic discrimination in relation to the other regions of the same state. Vidharbha region in Maharashtra state, Bundhelkhand region in Uttar Pradesh state, and Gorkhaland in West Bengal, etc. shows intra-state regionalism. It means Telangana movement also falls under the intra-state regionalism. The demand of separation from their respective parent-states indicates into intra-state disparities either it may be over water or revenue sharing.

According to Singh (1992:1), 'regionalism may be defined as a counter-movement to any exaggerated or oppressive form of centralization'. In essence, regionalism is some kind of response to unequal development and sharing the fruits of economic development. The regional movements arose for separate states due to the failure of the governments and political parties at various levels. The government focused on some part of the region and neglected other regions in terms of setting up industries, irrigation facilities, and other developmental activities. The demands of smaller states have the following characteristics:

1. The demand for a separate state had a distinct culture and needed a separate state of its own to safeguard this distinct culture (e.g. the demand for separate Telangana)
2. The demand for a separate statehood as a result of being more backward than other regions within the state and also the rulers of the state failed in the development of the region (e.g., the demand for Vidarbha region in Maharashtra state, Saurashtra in Gujarat state and Bundelkhand in Uttar Pradesh state).
3. The demand for a separate state as a result of higher revenue from the region was spent in other regions in the state (e.g., high income from the excise business (liquor) in Telangana region is being spent in Andhra Region).
4. The demand for a separate state as a result of demographic and social characteristics. The example of Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh with predominately tribal people did not enjoy a right share in matters of political

and administrative importance in their parent state. Such movements bring excluded social groups to assert themselves to break hegemonies space and restructure them in a democratic way, where equal distribution and equitable development has to be practiced. Weiner (1978:54-55) has assigned five areas for what he refers to as Native movements in India which correspond to regional movements:

1. The area with a nativist movement has migrants from outside the cultural region.
2. There must be cultural differences, no matter how small, between the migrants and local community.
3. In an area with a nativist movement, the local population is likely to be immobile relative to other migrant groups in the population.
4. A locale in which there is a high level of unemployment among the indigenous middle-class and a substantial portion of middle class jobs are held by culturally alien migrants is a likely candidate for a nativist political movement.
5. Areas with nativist movements have experienced a rapid growth of educational opportunities for the lower middle classes.

Further, after a demographic study of the Assam problem in his book "Sons of the Soil" Weiner (1978:54-55) classified theories of Nativism into five general groups:

1. Economic competitive models that explain the rise of nativist movements in terms of employment fears.
2. Status mobility models that emphasize the threats posed by migrants to the social status of the upper and middle class.
3. Political interest models that stress the fears of certain social classes to the political threat, of migrants to their interests.
4. Psychological models that emphasize the relationship between frustration and aggression and the importance of displacement, particularly as exemplified by the hostility often expressed by one minority group against another.
5. Demographic models that suggest that the rate and volume of migrants into a given social space may pass some optimum threshold of tolerance by the native population.

In particular, customs, traditions, art, language, literature, social heritage, beliefs, attitudes, social values, etc. play very important role in creating a social milieu in which a regional movement takes shape. Although territorial boundary and its historicity as an objective component give strong unified notion by which a movement gets legitimacy. In terms of universality, the regional movements have been emerged across the territorial boundaries based on political, racial, ethnic, economic or religious factors but a certain geographical area is a prime factor for emerging a regional movement. Thus, regionalism or regional consciousness is basically developed from a sense of identity with certain ethos among the people who live in a particular region over a period of time.

### NATURE OF REGIONALISM

In India, regionalism had two phases the first phase is linguistic regionalism (e.g. the demand of separate Andhra state from Madras province). The second phase of regionalism was economic backwardness and economic discrimination between developed regions and underdeveloped regions and, political discrimination and dominance e.g. in the demands of separate Telangana, Vidarbha and Bhundelkhand states from their respective parent states).

In December 1953 central government announced the State's Reorganization Commission (SRC) headed by Syed Fazal Ali, HiridnathKunzru and K.M. Panikkar. The committee submitted its report in 1955. The committee suggested removing the colonial four categorized states and also posting of Raj pramukh. The committee recommended 16 states and three centrally administered areas. Andhra Pradesh was the first linguistic state in India. The Report of the States Reorganization Commission failed to satisfy the rising aspirations of regional leaders. As a result, many regional movements came up in India.

### HISTORICITY OF TELANGANA MOVEMENT

Telangana remained a separate state before the formation of Andhra Pradesh in 1956. But in 1956, as

per the recommendations of SRC, Telangana area was merged with the state of Andhra Pradesh. This merger created strains and tensions between the people of Telangana and Andhra. According to Misra (1988:31), 'historical factors are equally responsible for the development of Telangana consciousness. Most of the Andhra regions remained under the British rule and were exposed to modern development while people of Telanganaremaind backward under the feudal rule of Nizam of Hyderabad'.

The inhabitants of Telangana who were under the lordship of Nizam of Hyderabad lagged behind in education and economic development when compared to people of Andhra region who were under British rule. The result of this union in the new state of Andhra Pradesh was that people belonging to Andhra region had a better advantage over Telangana people, and as a result Andhra people cornered important jobs at the expense of natives of Telangana. People of Telangana strongly protested this issue and demanded that erstwhile people of Madras Presidency leave Telangana region and its jobs must belong to 'the sons of the soil'.

According to Mishra, under the initiative of the then union Home Minister G.B. Pant, an agreement was reached between the leaders of Telangana and Andhra region called "A Gentleman's Agreement 1956" (Misra 1988:31). As per the agreement: i) all the members representing Telangana in the state Assembly would form a Regional Committee for the purpose of dealing with matters relating to their region, ii) the entire revenue from Telangana area, after making some allowance for the common expenditure of the state would be spent on the development of region, iii) recruitment to certain posts in the region would be made from amongst the persons who had lived in Telangana for at least fifteen years, and iv) either the Chief Minister or the Deputy Chief Minister must be taken from Telangana. A Telangana Regional Committee was formed to safeguard the economic, social and political interests of the people of Telangana. However, Gentleman's agreement was not honored, and the recommendations of the Telangana Regional Committee were by-passed and ignored. Apart from Telangana consciousness, the economic exploitation and domination of Andhra political leaders in administration and policy making created tensions and political factionalism between two regions. All these developments and factional politics in the Congress Party ultimately resulted in the demand for a separate state of Telangana in 1969. "Having undergone a long period of misrule, the area of was scarcely developed and its subsequent union with the Telugu speaking areas of former Madras Presidency created the first fissures in a unilingual state. Telangana became a prominent expression of sub-regional impulses and ethos of a people who after a long period of subjugation, witnessed the dawn of the freedom only to be disappointed by the lack of developmental prospects in a united state of Andhra Pradesh (Singh 1993)". Owing to these reasons the demand for separate Telangana is strong even today.

### The role of student in Telangana Movement

Students in India have been actively involved in various movements both during colonial rule and since independence. Student movements protest a wide range of issues. The problem of student unrest in India can be attributed to the following causes: i) the defective and inadequate system of education, ii) the generation gap and the alienation of the student community, iii) social changes and impact of western civilization, iv) the influence of mass media, v) gap between planning and performance, vi) unemployment and the absence of youth policy and vii) interference of political parties.

Student participation in the freedom movement forms a glorious chapter of modern Indian history. Philip (1975:139) contends that "for over century student unrest has been one of India's most serious educational and political problems. The partition of Bengal in 1905 can be treated as a land mark in the history of student political activism in India. Students of Calcutta's Eden Hindu Hostel burned Lord Curzon's effigy and boycotted examinations to protest against the partition of Bengal." Gandhi's non-cooperation movement of 1920 galvanized the Indian National Congress into a mass movement which attracted large numbers of students and youth into the intense political struggle. Students provided much of the manpower for mass demonstrations and in some areas, they assumed the leadership of the freedom movement when congress leaders were arrested. The first All India college students' conference was held in Nagpur in December 1920 under the presidency of LalaLajpatRai to provide coordination for the growing student political movements (Hazary, 1987). The students also actively participated in the 1930 civil disobedience movement and the "Quit India" movement

in 1942, both a landmark of students' political participation in national movements. In India after independence, no massive national students' movement is seen, but some states are affected by the students' movements, like West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Assam, Orissa, and Andhra Pradesh.

If we go little back, the region of Telangana has been the homeland to the Sathavahanas and Kakatiyas. Kotilingala in Karimnagar district was the first capital of the Sathavahanas before Dharanikota. Excavations at Kotilingala revealed coinage of Simukha, the first Satavahana emperor. The region experienced its golden age during the reign of the Kakatiyas, a Telugu dynasty that ruled most parts of what is now Andhra Pradesh from 1083 CE to 1323 CE. Ganapatideva was known as the greatest of the Kakatiyas and the first after the Satavahanas to bring the entire Telugu area under one rule. He put an end to the rule of the Cholas, who accepted his suzerainty in the year 1210. He established order in his vast dominion that stretched from the Godavari delta in the east to Raichur (in modern day Karnataka) in the west and from Karimnagar&Bastar (in modern day Chattisgarh) in the north to Srisaillam&Tripurantakam, near Ongole, in the south. It was also during his reign that the Golkonda fort was first constructed by the Kakatiyas. Rani Rudramadevi and Prataparudra were prominent kings from the Kakatiya dynasty.

Later on, the Islamic invasion in Telangana left imprints on its spatial, social and cultural spheres of life. Telangana came under Muslim rule in the 14th century by the Delhi Sultanate, followed by Bahmanis, QutbShahis, and the Mughals. As the Mughal Empire began to disintegrate in the early 18th century, the Muslim Asafjahi dynasty established a separate state known as Hyderabad. Later, Hyderabad entered into a treaty of subsidiary alliance with the British Empire and was the largest and most populous princely state in India. Telangana was never under direct British rule, unlike the Coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions of Andhra Pradesh, which were part of British India's Madras Presidency.

Telangana region was part of the erstwhile Hyderabad State till 1956, ruled by the AsafJahiNizam VII (Mir OsmanAli Khan Bahadur). During his days, he was reputed to be the richest man in the world, having a fortune estimated at \$2 billion in the early 1940s, which is double the annual revenue (\$1 billion) of the newly independent Union Government of India in 1950 (Union Government of India's treasury).

Telangana was historically well known as a prosperous state. The princely state of Hyderabad consisted of three linguistic regions: Marathi, Kannada, and Telugu. The Hyderabad state had jurisdiction over 16 districts: Warangal, Karimnagar, Adilabad, Nizamabad, Medak, Nalgonda, Mahboobnagar and Hyderabad (Telugu-speaking districts); Gulbarga, Raichur, and Bidar (Kannada-speaking districts); and Aurangabad, Bheed, Parbhani, Nanded and Osmanabad (Marathi-speaking districts). The state of Hyderabad was the largest of the princely states in pre-independence India, among other 600 princely states; with an area of 86,000 square miles (223,000 km<sup>2</sup>). The capital of the state was Hyderabad. The Nizam VII who was the highest-ranking prince in India, entitled to a 21-gun salute, held the titles of "Nizam", "His Exalted Highness" and "Faithful Ally of the British Crown".

## RAZAKAR MOVEMENT

After Independence in 1947, the Nizam was very anxious to become independent and it had been Nizam's ambition to secure Dominion Status for his State. He tried to achieve this ambitious desire with the help of KhasimRazvi of the IttehadulMuslimeen and its storm troopers, the Razakars. The Hindus of the Hyderabad State accounted for 93 per cent of its population. They launched the "Join India" movement with the cooperation of a few patriotic Muslims for the integration of the State with the rest of the country. The State Congress leaders, led by Swami RamanandTirtha, whole-heartedly supported the movement. The Nizam banned the State Congress. Its leaders were forced to conduct their activities from places like Vijayawada and Bombay. The negotiations between the Nizam's Dominions and the Indian Union proved abortive. The Nizam Government did not agree to accession to the Indian Union. The activities of the MajlisIttehadulMuslimeen and the Razakars within the Dominions were posing a serious threat to peace and harmony. The growing violence by the Razakars seriously jeopardized law and order. The Government of India tried to persuade the Nizam to sign the instrument of accession with India. After tortuous negotiations, the Nizam finally entered into a "Stand Still Agreement" on November 29, 1947, with India for one year to maintain status quo. Meanwhile, Nizam sent a delegation to the

United Nations organization to refer the Hyderabad case to the Security Council. Thousands of peasants in the entire state of Hyderabad revolted against the Nizam. The Andhra Mahasabha mobilized and encouraged the people against the local landlords and Nizams. The Communist Party of India leaders also joined the fight against the Nizam and Razakars. The Communists on their part organized village defense squads to protect people from the attacks of the Nizam Police and Razakars.

The Telangana people's movement or Telangana rebellion was an important mass movement in Indian history. According to Thirumali, "The Telangana rebellion was a people's movement, perhaps beyond comparison, in Indian history in terms of mass participation and intensity. What was significant about the struggle was the participants' ambition to demolish the unjust power structure headed by the doras (landlords). It was not a struggle just for land or for food as was often projected. It was against the exploitative ethics and cultural and social practices based on Pethanam (dominance- cultural and social). It was a struggle for the establishment of Prajarajyam (people's state) in place of the existing 'doras' rajyam (rule of the doras)" (Thirumali, 2003: 1-2). Because of the oppressive circumstances, the notions of nyayamu (justice) and anyayamu (injustice) became the actual guiding principles of the common folk.

Thirumali further argues that, with the introduction of the new land revenue policy in the Nizam's dominions, during the period of Salar Jung I, the local landlords (doras) came to occupy a predominant position as pattadars (land owners with a legal right). The emergence of big landholdings and the compulsory payment of annual land revenue abetted the continuation of the practice of extraction of vettibegar (the practice of caste-based customary forced labour extraction). During the late 19th century, the vettibegar had transformed into two main forms of labour extraction, vetti and bhagela (Bhagela means servile labour attached to a dora family). Vetti was the major forms to which a large number of lower caste people were subjected to serve the private ends of the landlords. (Ibid, 2003: 3-9)

The common folk realized the exploitation on two counts: first, they were hungry despite working hard and second, the work itself had become excessive and indeed almost impossible to perform. In such conditions, they viewed the relationship between them and the landlords as exploitative. Some of them were from the non-labour castes, which had relatively enjoyed greater freedom and respect earlier. However, under the rule of Nizam's, they were reduced to the position of ordinary labourers and subjected to hard labour with insufficient wages and food. The long experience of vetti, hunger, starvation, disease and miserable life made them suspect the prevailing injustice. Such notions of unjust expression in dora's rule were expressed and propagated by folk singers in their daily song, story recitations, and proverbs. These folk songs form a crucial part of the rural Telangana culture and even today we find songs are a popular part of the present struggle.

The communists' participation into the mass movement was an important factor that intensified the struggle from 1946's onwards against the Nizam's rule. The movement had turned into an armed confrontation with the doras. According to Thirumali, the Communist party's perceptions and programmes were propagated through cultural shows turning at least a section of the masses into political ideologues. The folk singers influenced by the left Andhra MahaSabha's (AMS) ideas have played a major role in propagating the ideas since the singers were from the local people and the language they used helped the easy internalization of the party programmes. The people, because of their association with the AMS, could raise above their sectional interests or identities and demanded not only the destruction of the Nizam's rule but also to establish a new state based on 'equality of all'. The communists had coined slogans like 'land to the tiller' to bring all anti-landlord agrarian classes under their leadership. All the agrarian classes considered the land distribution programme as the destruction of the landlords' rule, as primarily the landlords' land was distributed. Though the labourers did not benefit from the land distribution, they were the real beneficiaries of the seizure of food grains of the landlords. (ibid)

With the growing violence by the Razakars and the Nizam's attempts to get himself independent, the Government of India decided to curb these tendencies by launching a 'Police Action' against the Nizam. The Indian Army, led by Major-General J.N.Chaudhuri entered the Hyderabad state from five directions and the military action was a great success. On 18th September 1948, Nizam's forces surrendered to the Indian army and Mir Laik Ali, the Prime Minister of the Nizam, and KhasimRazvi were arrested. The merger of Hyderabad



Dominions into the Indian Union was announced. Major-General J.N.Chaudhuri took over as Military Governor of Hyderabad and stayed in that position till the end of 1949. In January 1950, M.K.Vellodi, a Senior Civil Servant was made the Chief Minister of the State and the Nizam was designated "Raj Pramukh". After the 1952 General Elections, the first popular ministry headed by B. Rama Krishna Rao took charge of Hyderabad State. (ibid)

It is also important to notice that during Indian Independence, Hyderabad was a separate state till 1956. Andhra Pradesh state came into existence on 1st November 1956. The state was the first linguistic state in India following the States' Reorganization Commission recommendation. The Telugu-speaking districts of Andhra state (Madras Presidency) and Telangana (Hyderabad state) region merged together consisting of 23 districts to form the new state of A.P. "The merger of Telangana with Andhra took place against the wishes of the people of the region and contrary to a categorical recommendation of the States Reorganization Commission, besides the reluctance of the Prime Minister of the time Jawaharlal Nehru. Merger was facilitated by a number of solemn promises made and constitutional safeguards given to the people of Telangana as a protective umbrella against the possible exploitation. These promises were made a number of times, but none of them were ever honored" (Reddy 2011:7).

The people of Telangana revolted during 1968-69 demanding separation of Telangana from the state of Andhra Pradesh because a number of agreements like the Gentlemen's Agreement of 1956, the All Party Accord of January 1969, the Eight Point Formula and Five Point Formula were not honored. The people of Telangana became restive and pressed their demand for a separate state. Reddy (2011:8) argues that "it is to be realized that the demand for Telangana state is not a mere political slogan; it has an economic angle; it has socio-cultural and linguistic dimensions; it is blended with a feeling of self-respect and the desire for self-rule".

## CONCLUDING REMARK

The paper tried to capture and understand the scope and impact of the involvement of students in the formation of a separate state of Telangana. It appears that "Region" has been a contentious issue in the Indian state formation, but in recent years, voices of regional identity and self-respect are other issues for the same. Regionalism in the Indian context is linked to both, socio-economic inequalities and unequal sharing of benefits and regional identity and self-rule. Both these trends were visible in the Telangana movement.

The decades of a unified AP state have only seemed to worsen matters between the regions, with accusations of exploitation and domination growing louder. The Telangana movement was an outcome of this perceived sense of injustice.

The educational access to the new generations (most of them first generation learners) has created a space for the sustenance of the Telangana movement. These students came from rural areas to understand the on-going conflicts and political fights over the issue of Telangana. Having grown up in the culture of the region and its socio-economic environment that was quite different from the other two regions, these young students recognized the importance of Telangana region and its socio-cultural history. Hence, their presence was inevitable and thoroughly supported for a separate Telangana state.

To sum up, the present study is carried out in order to understand the relation between regionalism and political movements and the role of students in this process. The geography of a region matters in its social and cultural construction that explains the differences and similarities. Regionalism is a secular phenomenon in a relative sense- encompassing affiliations of various castes and faiths, to work together for a common cause. One observes this secular coming together in the case of the Telangana movement. Major observations from the study are the following:

- + Social and cultural aspects have become stronger in the recent demands for separate states. Because the regional identity has been ignored or given less attention in the united Andhra Pradesh it has affected the sentiments of the people of Telangana region. This has become a collective shared perception of injustice that fed the current mass upsurge.
- + Majority of the students belong to deprived sections of society, are first generation learners and have strong hopes which they think can be fulfilled only if Telangana state is formed. For these students employment opportunities, once they pass out are the biggest concern and they feel threatened by the

more dominating second generation students of Andhra.

- + The collective platform and sharing of responsibility on part of students is a positive sign of the movement and suggests a secular trend. The OUJAC in its initial form also was a model of inclusive representation of marginal groups, cutting across caste, class, religion and gender.
- + Equality, equitable development, social justice, and availability of economic opportunities are some of the important areas of concern for the students participating in the demand for Telangana state.

Finally, the study questions the formation of states in India. The growing demand for new states across the country points to a major problem in the way many states have been drawn up. There is a need to open up the debate on small states in the Indian context and be more open to the possibility of the formation of many such states in the near future. The study shows that students may play a leading role in such movements.

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