

“MANY A MAYA MOVE EVEN IN TRIPURA LIKE ANITA DESAI’S NOVEL, CRY, THE PEACOCK”

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ABSTRACT

Many a Maya move even in Tripura like in Anita Desai’s novel ‘Cry, the Peacock’ (1963). The culture in Tripura is to get one’s daughter marry to a double aged man for financial support or other reason. Nanaji (female child Mother’s father) says to the growing child, “Maa muni Jekhon tomar Thakur maa mara jaabe ki tumi aamar sange bihah korbo” it means my dear daughters daughter will you may me when your mother’s mother will die” ‘Cry, the Peacock’ is one of the earliest novels to evoke such spirit. Maya bears witness to the personal trauma. Anita Desai is a significant and prolific woman novelist of modern Indian fiction. She has undoubtedly given a new outlook to Indian English novel. She deserves special mention of her treatment of women in her novels, with the focus on her women characters undergoing mental struggle. This paper focuses on the ill effects of the universally spirited young aged girl’s marriage with a twice-aged man with special study of one of the women characters, Maya, in the novel “Cry, the Peacock” to enable young women to be aware of the results. It depicts the chaos and incoherence, the confusion of sensations and emotions that constitute the human consciousness. It depicts the theme of marital relationships and ruptures in an emotional manner. The married life of Maya and Gautama results in a break because the two are temperamentally different and mutually opposed. same situation is prevailing in Tripura in most of the families. Maya is ecstatic and wants to enjoy life to the lees. She is interested in all good things of life. In contrast, she is married to Gautama cultured, rational and practical, too much engrossed in his own affairs, friend of her father, prosperous middle-aged lawyer and very senior to her age who looks upon her love nothing more than sentimentalism and makes disparaging remark. Anita Desai is concerned with the hysterical mind of the Indian homemakers. Maya’s embarrassed mind, mental agony, fear of fate and eventual fall into the labyrinth of insanity form the core of the novel. This is the study of stillness, seclusion, glum and gloomy world of shadows in her life. It is the study of motion and commotion in the heart and mind of the protagonist for establishment of human values.

Introduction-

The study of literature has always two aspects, one of simple enjoyment and appreciation, and the other of analysis and exact description. A small song sensitizes our ear and a noble novel to our heart, and for the moment, we discover a new world, a world so different from our own that it seems a place of dream and magic. We all know that literature is the mirror of society. Society is built of characters and characters are bond of traits. Traits are the interests, attitudes and values of an individual. Thus, William J Long observed, in his book 'English Literature' that-

“Behind every book is a person, behind the person is a race and behind the race are the natural and social environment whose influence is unconsciously reflected.”(William J Long: 2)

All art is the expression of life in forms of truth and beauty, which remain unnoticed until brought to our attention by some sensitive script- submerged soul. When we talk of a protagonist, we have to meander to Mother Mary who was sensitive. Most of the women are sensitive since the traits are inherited from the Mother of Mankind. Thus, the Researcher's intention is to unravel the protagonist's personal traits in the novel to reform the society for the development.

Anita Desai is famous for her colourful and touching studies of Indian life. Her work is full of gentleness and empathy with its often poignant and amusing characters, struggling to achieve their personal dreams in a complicated and unsympathetic world. One of her recurring themes is the struggle of women to assert their independence in a restrictive Indian society. She is a significant and prolific woman novelist of modern Indian fiction. She has undoubtedly given a new outlook to Indian English novel. She deserves special mention of her treatment of women in her novels, with the focus on her women characters undergoing mental struggle. A novel exhibits the author's views and criticism of life. 'Cry, The Peacock' is presenting a realistic picture of life. It depicts the flux of emotions and sensations passing through the consciousness of character. The novelist places us within the mind of characters and shows what is happening in Maya's soul at the subconscious level. It depicts the chaos and incoherence, the welter of sensations and emotions that constitute the human consciousness.

Socio-Economic-Moral and Cultural Milieu

Anita Desai was born in 1937 to a Bengali father and a German mother. Writing is an obsession with her. She is a novelist deeply concerned with the changing rainbow of human relationships in all their colours and shades. Her novels offer us artistic and absorbing pictures of the relationship between man and woman, parent and child, individual and society

and so on. The sense of frustration that troubles her and her tireless search for the truth of existence is the motivating factors behind her creative effects. The recurring themes of her novels are human relationships, alienation, loneliness, east-west encounter, violence and death. Since most of the writers confined themselves generally to the portrayal of outward reality, the credit of exploring the inner reality goes to Anita Desai. Regarding her novels, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly observes that-

“Since her (Anita Desai’s) preoccupation is with the inner world of sensibility rather than the outer world of action, she has tried to forge a style supple and suggestible enough to convey the fever and fretfulness of the stream of consciousness of her principal character.” (Iyengar, K.R.Srinivasa: 464)

Let us understand the fact that, amid all the truths in men and women relationship, the body is base of all binding human interest, attitude, values, ties and relationship. The neglect of physical and its vibes may lead to malevolent consequences and affect the entire human personality. Thus, Anita Desai is making modern woman independent, self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-motivated, revengeful, sexy, angry, argumentative escapist, romantic, dual altitudinal, hungry for mental bliss, emotional, mechanical, and decision-making commander to dictate the terms as per her choice to rule the man in the man dominating country even by pushing husband. Anita Desai became a powerful voice in the 1970s and 1980s. Her finely crafted novels explore the sensibilities of Indian men and women of the English-educated middle classes in the post-independence era. In *Clear Light of Day* (1980), Desai portrays the relationship among siblings in a Delhi family against the background of partition. Desai’s *In Custody* (1984) is the story of a college lecturer seeking to meet a great poet who has been his hero since childhood.

Maya is the Moving Protagonist

‘*Cry, The Peacock*’ is Anita Desai’s first novel and in it she has depicted the theme of marital relationships and ruptures in a poignant manner. The married life of Maya and Gautama results in a rupture because the two are not only temperamentally different, but mutually opposed too. Maya is full of life and wants to enjoy life to the lees. She is interested in all the good things of life, in the life of birds, animals, poetry and dance. She loves herself in enjoying beautiful sights and sounds.

Maya suffers due to her filial relations. Her causes of sufferings are her marriage to Gautama, a man of her father’s age who is detached and reserved even to an extent of not fulfilling her physical and emotional needs. Gautama is a friend of her father very senior to her age and a prosperous middle-aged lawyer. He is kindly, cultured, rational, practical, too much engrossed in his own affairs and of prosaic personality. He looks upon her love for

good things as nothing more than sentimentalism and once makes a disparaging remark about her that she has the mind of third-rate poetess. Maya responds:

“Because when you are away from me, I want you. Because I insist on being with you and being allowed to touch you and know you. You can’t bear it, can you? No, you are afraid, you might perish ...” (Desai Anita :113)

In addition, the indifferent behaviour of the members of her husband’s family, the solitude and silence of the house after her marriage and the death of her pet dog accentuate her sense of loneliness that gradually develops into an actual sense of alienation. In her own eyes, she is as one doomed already and throughout her life, there hovers an uncanny oppressive sense of fatality. In society women without issue starts behaving like Maya. Thus, one must avoid marriage with one’s father’s age or twice of her age. The same situation is still prevailing in Tripura. Most of the girls are suffering like Maya. When I interviewed my honours and pass class students I found the truth and thought of ravelling it. In one of the birthday party I heard a shocking statement from a sixty plus man whispering into the ear of a cute baby of eight years old,

“Maa muni Jekhon tomar Thakur maa mara jaabe ki tumi aamar sange bihah korbo” it means my dear daughters daughter will you may me when your mother’s mother will die”as per the Groebel’s Theory it is injustice to person.

Maya’s Love for Physical

Maya meanders around the physical world, which is generally hurdle to have spiritual love. Maya strongly feels that the nuances of physical desire have an undeniable truth and existence. Women needs are unique and incomparable. Anita Desai tells us that pure, perfect serene union couple will come only after understanding the requirements of the body. However, to have such spiritual attainment in this regard, some natural instinct and societal pressure ensures fear, defence ever against their husbands. This leads to a disharmony and soon there ensures a cleavage between them. It is only a glorious illusion to feel satisfied with our manly duties of finding woman and meeting her materialistic requirements. The notion of woman being a possession is meaningless. Man must know the real need of the woman is to lead happy and pleasure giving life. The protagonist is highly preoccupied with the body and its throbs. She is unable to control the uproar of her physical body. Her impatience has an impenetrable influence over her conscience.

Maya’s love knot is based on the foundations of the physical frame. She has hunger of oceans and Gautama a dying river. The mind of modern man is misfit for multi-sensuous passions. Anita Desai makes us realize that we have moved from a typical Indian culture to the western culture. Many marriages in the past flourished only in the name of marriages and meant the

continuation of family life as extension of genealogical pattern. The body has its existence and it is the same for man as well. We cannot attain spiritual bliss at the cost of starving the body. We know face is the index of mind and conversation reveals the character. What the author tries to focus is the truth of the body, which cannot be belied. She writes through Maya's sentiments of disgust:

"All day the body lay rotting in the sun... the reek of the dead flash was overpowering crows sat in a circle around the corpse, and crows will eat anything- entrails, eyes, anything". (Desai Anita: 33) Maya further speaks that, "To live here like two mice in one small room..." (Desai Anita: 50)

Thus, we find disgust in the protagonist's mind about the house and husband. The practical responsibilities of human life cannot be on the false promises and pretty poems in praise of the physical pursuits. This is in respect of not only Maya but also other women follower of the age who do not follow social, economical, moral and cultural values for materialism and selfishness.

Anita Desai has tried forging a style supple and suggestive enough to convey the fear and fretfulness of the street of consciousness of her protagonist. The intolerable grapple with thoughts, feeling and emotions is inevitably reflected in her language, syntax and imagery. Maya's husband came home. He was very late but as soon as he came, he did all that was to be done, quickly and quietly like a surgeon's knife at work. Maya's bewildered dilemma:

"I am toned between two worlds- the receding one of grace, the approaching one of madness. My body breaks in the battle" (Desai Anita: 148).

On another occasion, in spite of her seductive postures, Gautama remains rigid and cold. Maya herself describes her predicament:

"I turned upon my side, close to him, conscious of the swell of my hip that rose under the white sheet which fell in sculptured folds about my rounded forms."(Desai Anita: 41)"

Peacocks represent the evolutionary instinct of struggle for survival. She describes how they danced and remarkable impact produced on her mind that peacocks searching for mates, peacocks tearing themselves to bleeding shreds in the act of love, peacocks screaming with – agony at the death of love. The night sky turned to a flurry of peacocks' tails, each star a staring eye. Fusion of figures with the emotions of characters the use of emotional epithets, etc., which give lucidity, directness and force are conveying a sense of fatherly love even at the time of love –making. Maya says-

“When he touched my hair, smoothing it down carefully as a nurse, I was flooded with tenderness and gratitude, thought of him as my guardian” (Desai Anita: 15).

In addition, she says-

Panic, like a piston, does not cease to live immediately on shuts it off but continues to beat with a slow, dying rhythm, until it fades naturally away (Desai Anita: 98).

Maya’s preoccupation with death had been actually planted long ago in her childhood by the Albino astrologer’s prophecy foretelling of the death of either of the couple after the marriage. She being intensely in love with life turns hysteric over the creeping fear of death. She says-

“Am I gone insane. Father, Brother, Husband. Who is my saviour? I am in need one. I am dying, God, let me sleep, forget, rest. But no I’ll never sleep again. There is no rest anymore. Only death and waiting” (Desai Anita: 98).

Anita Desai is more specifically concerned with the hysterical mind of the Indian homemaker, Maya. Maya’s distraught mind, her mental agony, her fear of fate and her eventual fall into the labyrinth of insanity form the core of the novel, *Cry, The Peacock* and her actions are read by others in the light of traditional beliefs and customs. In his book, *Indian Writing in English*, K.R. Srinivasa Iyengar aptly states,

“Maya is at once the centre and the circumference of this world. Her sanity – whether she is sane, hysterical or insane fills the whole book and gives it form, as well as life.” (Iyengar, KR Srinivasa, 468)

As a complex psychological work, the novel “gives expression to the long smothered wail of a lacerated psyche, the harrowing tale of blunted human relationship being told by the chief protagonist herself” (RS Pathak:18). As a very sensitive soul Maya, the protagonist, is caught in a crisis of irreconcilable realities. *Cry, The Peacock* as a novel is both poetic and intensely evocative. While justifying the title of the novel, the allusion to the mating of the peacocks in the wild signifies the conceptual dimensions of both “desire” and “death”, and thus sets the tone and the texture of the work. As Maya says,

“Do you not hear the peacocks’ call in the wild? Are they not blood chilling, their shrieks of pain? “Pia Pia”, they cry. “Lover, lover, Mio, mio. I die, I die ... Have you seen peacocks make love, child? Before they mate, they fight. They will rip each other’s breasts to strips and fall bleeding with their

beaks open and panting. When they have exhausted themselves in battle, they will mate. Peacocks are wise. The hundred eyes upon their tails have seen the truth of life and death. Living, they are aware of death. Dying they are in love with life” (Desai Anita: 95).

With extraordinary sensitiveness, Desai underlines the truth about life and death. What is true in case of the peacocks is also true in case of the human beings. We are aware of death while living and are in love with life while dying. Between life and death, it is love, grounded in the physical and moving beyond that makes life meaningful. “Death” as an inevitable fact is Maya’s truth. It is her painful reality. She is obsessed with it. The Albino priest’s prediction of death during the fourth year of her marriage has become an unconscious fixation threatening her with an unexplained terror. Gautama’s understanding of death is scriptural and in his actions and relations with Maya, he projects a counter point of view. Having an indulgent and somewhat over-protective childhood, Maya is an introvert woman. She looks forward for a warm and secured habitation after her marriage. Unfortunately, she enters into a reality that shatters her dream of a comfortable life; instead plunges her into neglect and tension. Her husband ignores her needs and considers her emotions as that of a spoilt child.

The novel opens at the death of the pet, the very death that has made Maya inconsolable as she felt that her last straw of attachment is snatched away. Childless women develop fanatic attachment to their pets. Maya’s childlessness haunts her for which the death of the pet immensely anguished her. She does not feel the same on the death of her husband, Gautama who was indifferent to life. There is no real bond between them. Finally, it is her own disappearance into silence and darkness that puts the lid on all her physical and mental agonies and allowing her to enter into the world of freedom. Maya identifies herself with the peacocks and experiences life and death meaning to be the same:

“It was I, I who screamed with the peacocks, screamed at the sight of the rain clouds, screamed at their disappearance, screamed in mute horror”. (Desai Anita: 98)

Even in our Hindi movie song, heroine sings a song that- “Barsaat mein Aayega jab savan ka mahina sajan ko bana lungi anguthi ka nagina” which means in the rainy season when shraavan month will come then I will capture my husband like a ring gem. And in another movie of Rajasthni culture set up the protagonist sings out the same scream “Mor bole bagan maan mor bole O!Kunwar ji mor bole” which means that O my dear Prince the peacock are screaming in garden. Maya’s scream is neither reciprocated nor heard by her lover. In the absence of love, she becomes intensely lonely and alienated. Her philosophically detached husband totally ignores her physical needs. As Maya demurs:

“How little he knew of my suffering, or how to comfort me ... Telling me to go to sleep while he worked at his papers, he did not give another thought to me, to either the soft, willing body or the lonely, wanting mind that waited near his bed” (Desai Anita: 09).

Escape from the Reality

Maya is romantic in spirit. She wants to escape from the real world. She does not want to be a typical Indian woman. She intends to adopt the western culture. For gratification of body's needs, Maya, within the permissible limits of the society, can look forward to her husband. Gautama's lack of understanding viewing love with its accompanying horror of copulation left Maya wanting and unfulfilled. Both Maya and Gautama are ranged against each other on the issue of physical sex. When Maya wanted to involve him in her world, she is snubbed being considered as childish, boring and distasteful. Maya's childlessness is obvious as physical consummation with her husband eludes her. She is not strong enough to rebel against physical and emotional deprivations. She suffers her fate and naturally gives expression to the ungratified emotions as hysteric feats what Gautama considers as the symptoms of madness. There is no real bond between them as Maya confesses:

“Had there been a bond between us, we would have felt its pull...But, of course, there was none....there was no bond, no love – hardly any love.”
(Desai Anita: 108)

Desai, in fact puts the theme of attachment and detachment both from earthly and spiritual angles like the peacock. Maya wants to bleed and fulfil her desire in physical union. The symbols, images and frequent allusions to the body and needs of the body make compulsive insistence to consider desire as an important factor. It is desire in its physical sense that evidently becomes pertinent and crucial to the overall development of the plot. Maya's happy childhood, her marriage with its changed reality and relations are significant for suffering and for its resultant effects. In course of the narrative of the novel, it is clear that Maya undergoes a situation of sexual deprivation and emotional insecurity. Maya has tried her best to love Gautama but her love never has been reciprocated. Maya's agony has been internalised without ensuring a possible means of release.

The death consciousness therefore is an outcome of her failure in terms of physical gratification. The actions of both Maya and Gautama in their understanding of issues such as life, death, love and above all the interpersonal relationship opposite determinants without ever having the possibility of a meeting point. Maya is unable to have her happy childhood recreated in a house where everything is determined by others for her. She is caught between two worlds; one lost permanently and the other unbearable, both physically and emotionally. She is aware of her failing health and pities herself as she expresses-

“My blouses hang on me, my rings slip off my fingers. Those are no longer my eyes, nor this is my mouth (Desai Anita: 179).”

Along with physical deterioration, all order has gone out of Maya’s life. Like PB Shelley is saying in his poem “*Stanzas Written in Dejection Near Naples*”-

*“Alas! I have nor hope, nor health,
Nor peace within, nor love, nor calm around,
Nor that content surpassing wealth,
The sage in meditation found,
And walked within inward glory crowned-
Nor fame, nor power, nor love, nor leisure,
Others I see whom these surround-
Smiling they live, and called life pleasure!
To me that cup has been dealt in another measure (Sharma BR: 135).*

Maya too has no plan, no peace, nothing to keep her within the pattern of day-to-day living and doing. Both Gautama and Maya talk about death. Maya refuses to ignore the world where Gautama advocates a detached view. For him the real man of wisdom is he who is free from all attachment neither rejoices in receiving the good nor is vexed on receiving evil, his wisdom is well established. She longs the life that would permit her to-

“Touch him, feel his flesh and hair, hold and tighten her hold on him”
(Desai Anita: 102)

Conflict in character

Anita depicts the plight of an Indian woman. Her delineation of character, throws ample light on how the public ravenously ogles the features of a hungry woman. In case of Maya, we witness such a situation when she sins. Maya is obsessed with death and is haunted by an astrological prediction that her marriage is going to end in its fourth year with the death of either wife or husband. She fails to establish an effective communication with her husband.

One day there is a dust storm followed by a few drops of rain. Unaware of everything, Gautama accompanies Maya on the roof of the house at her request. The pale moon rises and Maya is fascinated and bewitched by it. Both of them are at the low parapet’s edge and he casually moves towards her and hides the moon from her view. Maya waxes into a sudden frenzy and pushes him over the parapet:

“Pass through an immensity of air, down to the very bottom”
(Desai Anita: 208)

In the end, Maya is not saved from becoming insane like lady Macbeth. Having tried, in vain, to transfix all that she experienced, she becomes once again, a part of a fairy tale, a toy princess in a toy world. Three days later Gautama's mother and sister take Maya to her father's house at Lucknow in order to put her in an asylum.

Love for spirituality

Maya's sense of guilt troubles her conscience and she deems it a sort of disloyalty to Gautama's soul. Her mental conflict is described. This shows the woman dominance over the man. It shows the intention of taking revenge on men and making man to understand and feel the change over their dominance. "Cry the peacock", bears the conjunctions of different sentiments with the ultimate purpose to overwhelm the reader with aptness of sentiments. As Maya says-

"Sometimes I saw a flurry of small, tortured peahens, drab, colourless, though in their breast, their hearts were great and rich with scarlet blood—" lover, I die" now that I understood their call I wept for them and wept for myself knowing their words come to be mine (Desai Anita: 84)".

Maya's statement about her mother-in-law's passive life-

"She looked at me absently, yet smiled warmly, before she rushed aw, like some busy rhinoceros charging through the forest, to her dispensary, or her crèche, or her workshop for the blind, the disabled, the unemployed" (Desai Anita: 44).

"Cry, The Peacock", is embellished with aptness of creative genius too. Desai finds out the truth after the futile marriage of Maya and Gautama as Maya herself explains:

"It was discouraging to reflect on how much in our marriage was based upon nobility forced upon us from outside, and therefore neither true nor lasting" (Desai Anita: 38).

Desai's novel is expression of impassioned feeling and emotions. Her emotional flow abounds in emotional states exhibiting the propriety of genius.

Objectives

After independence, female writers became more prominent in India. They wrote for emancipation of the women. This paper aims at freedom of the women and their striving hard

to achieve the goal set by the sufferers. The women folk must look forward for the emancipation with maintaining the human values desired by the society. Many women writers dominate in man dominating society to bring out change. Women seek for the equal rights to bring out the change in the society. The aim of this paper is that women should understand their worth and must interact with their parents about their liking and disliking openly about their life and marriage. They should avoid obeying the decision of their parents when they are ordered to marry twice-aged man.

Methodology

The methodology used for this research paper is descriptive method. The main aim of research is to find out the truth which is hidden and which must have been discovered but not expressed yet. To portray accurately the characteristics of a particular individual, situation or a group is known as descriptive research studies. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs, as it exists at presents. Research studies, concerning human behaviour carried on with a view to make generalisations about human behaviour.

Erosion of Human Values

Presently, in human character we find violence, bloodshed, murder, impersonation, treachery, deceit, betrayal, bribery, adultery, jealousy, hatred, ill-will, infidelity, prostitution, selfishness, caste discrimination, lust, pride, anger and revenge etc. conspiracy is all pervasive. Even husband and wife relationship have become vicious. There is no place for positive values like faith, sincerity, devotion, love, affection, attachment, gratitude honesty and purity of thought and action. The prayer is also desecrating now a day. Inordinate ambition for power and wealth is contaminating and polluting human values. This can be read in newspapers and watched on the TV screens. Some of the programmes in news channels show men and women relationship in this context daily.

Suggestions

The freedom of women is practically the greatest egoistic movement and the most intense affirmation of the right of the self that history has yet seen. Woman should confront with the necessity of freeing herself from freedom. Ever since, there have been women able to make their sentiments known by their writings, an increasing number of them have recorded protests against their present social condition. Thus, women should come out to demand their equal rights in respect of all socio-economic-moral and cultural values. They should revolt their marriage done for the sake of parents' meagre benefits that may lead later their life to destruction like Maya.

Findings

At last, Researcher finds that the novel delves into the domain of human mind that makes us realize that all that body does germinates first in the mind in dubious game of the body and the soul, nobody remains an exception. Now a day, concepts are changing. All causes, social and natural, combine to make it unlikely that women are collectively rebellious to the power of men. They are so far in a position different that their masters require something more from them than actual service. All men desire to have, in the woman most nearly connected with them, not a forced slave but a willing one, not a slave merely, but a favourite one. The masters of all other slaves rely for maintaining obedience, on fear. All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self-will, and governed by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. Therefore, scientifically, attitudinally and behaviourally tested practice shows that, man with human values in his heart is in harmony with himself and with others. This influence manifests in the form of harmony with other living beings and with nature and environment. It had the emotional content too for it is said that spiritual love is the original nature of the self. It had also the experimental aspect, for it mentions peace. It also referred to the relationship of the self with God. Since, both of these are complement to each other.

Conclusion

At last, Researcher concludes that Maya is determined, self-willed, independent, self-motivated, self-controlled, revengeful, angry, argumentative escapist, romantic, dual attitudinal, hungry for marital and mental bliss, emotional, mechanical, and decisive. Maya is the main mover. She is a physical lover, materialist and dynamic in spirit. She wants to be an escapist like romantic lover. The action of the novel takes place in the darkness the brooding darkness is more potent than the outer forms and noises. Maya's pet dog Toto's death left effects on Maya's mind and lead her to despair. Her husband Gautama is a busy rich, middle-aged lawyer. She approaches an astrologer who prophesies death for either the wife or the husband four years after the marriage celebration. They have lived together for three years. The crucial fourth year is still upon them. The sense of spiritual reflection is keenly depicted. One day in the course of a dust storm, they are apart. They go up to the balcony and there Maya in a fit of frenzy pushes him and he falls down.

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