



## **POST WAR :- THE WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL IN PERSPECTIVE OF LESSING'S NARRATIVES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Post-war era reflects many cultural and philosophic crises in political, social and economical perspectives. Many western societies have abandoned their traditional bearing still searching for a new one. In many ways, it was an era of uncertainty and ambiguity. In a broad sense, Culture has translated itself into an easygoing relativism and spirit of tolerant pluralism, which allows individuals to forge their meaning and choice at will. Hence, post-war land is considered as "war of all against all." Conversely, all the speculative narratives produced by Lessing illustrate a particular concern of philosophic and cultural perspectives of post-war era. The term war is related to the conflict or dispute between two or more different dialectics. Post-war can be considered as a disturbed age, when the generations were seeking for a strong perception for living. Philosophic and cultural perspective demand elucidation. Philosophy and Culture the words are proper in themselves. These words are capable of multiple interpretations as psychological as well as conflicted. Changes have occurred in conjunction with literary theories and ways of thinking about historical dystopia and contemporary utopia. This paper therefore is an attempt to examine how philosophy and culture has been a work within a variety of consideration and subjective standpoints. It is a specific type of journey based on ideas and bitter experiences from the post-war anxiety to the vision of digital utopia. Chapter focuses on the significant role of philosophic and cultural perspectives in Lessing's novels, journals, articles, interviews and critical narrations presented by philosophers and ideological concepts by Lessing herself. Major concept of philosophy and dialectics presented by Foucault, Marx, Thomas More, Freud, Lewis, Idris Shah and Science-Fiction culture match with the thoughts of Lessing in the present works. This paper also throws lights upon multi-philosophic and multi-cultural ideologies of post-war era and their importance in present age of science and technology.*

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1P a g e



*Leading arguments are presented by post-colonial, post-modern and post-war philosophers in the critical studies of major writers like, Tim woods, Macleod and Leela Gandhi. Their Purpose is to expand ideas taken from the dead world and evolve them into utopian concept. Consequently, women writers from diverse cultures created their literary works for diverse purposes aiming to achieve liberating goals.*

## INTRODUCTION

Doris Lessing is an author deeply concerned with the cultural inequalities of her society. Thorough interrogations of cultural studies require an established definition of the term *Culture*. Within this paradigm, culture does not associate with art, literature and classical music as before; instead, it refers to person's way of life. Theorists, Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan State: The way people behave while eating, talking with each-other, interacting at work, engaging in ritualized social behaviour such as social gatherings and the like constitute a culture. (Rivkin and Ryan 233).

Every individual dreams that his/her culture is the best and most appropriate way of living. Hence, it can be offered that people view culture as 'hierarchical'. This cultural bias provides a basis for inequality, as it promotes the domination of one class/group over other. Moreover, it acts as a means of acquiring oppositional point of view to those in dominance.

With this mind, cultural studies as a form of analysis are concerned with the generation and circulation of meaning in industrial societies. It focuses on the relationship between social practices commonly separated, so that a mixture of culture is seen as a 'way of life'. Social totality, exploring and aiming to understand the maintenance and formation of inequalities within and between social groups. The selected texts of Doris Lessing reflect and emphasize the unjust and divide societies of post-war era. Doris Lessing was an author deeply concerned with the cultural inequalities of her society.

*She articulated that: "it is not merely a question of prevailing evil, but of strengthening, a vision of a good which may defeat the evil"*  
(Doris Lessing, *Elements of Literature* 1146).

### Anger and Frustration of the age

Her writings are fuelled by her feeling of anger and frustration at the social and political oppression of cultural and psychological perspectives. As the representatives her characters' have a special significance because every character represents the changing pattern of society. Her female characters are the representatives of 'free-women'; her young heroes are the representatives of 'angry young man' of post-war era. Her greatest creation *Shikasta*



represents the desolated and degenerated pattern of society and culture. Lessing herself is the representative of her age. Her narratives are considered as her mouthpiece.

*“What interests me more than anything is how our minds are changing” she says (“SPV”, 65-66). She incarnates “a new imaginative comprehension” (GNB, 61) “a new kind of knowledge” (LL-157) “a new sort of understanding” (FGC, 357).*

In the post-war era, Lessing moved about the cultural perspectives of the age. Her intense commitment in the narratives reflects with active persuasion to reform society. Lessing’s narratives define the cultural perspectives very similar to that of Shaw’s *Life Force*. Considering, ‘Vitality with a purpose’ as it acts on the principles of *trial and error*. As Lessing’s characters suffered from this very force, they were distorted and did not know, for “what purpose, the perfection sought”? Her characters’ journey through life is with this similar aspect of perfection.

Furthermore, post-war cultural aspects depend upon imperialism, totalitarian, socialism and other radical theories. The core principle of post-war studies is the notion of the social construction of cultural and philosophic perspectives. The true novelist’s function has always been to know everything about his/her age. To convey their philosophic and cultural perspectives in fictional terms they need the vast knowledge of the era. If the novelist has the proper eye of his age, then his value must be fundamentally demonstrative. Lessing performs her duty to help human race by lifting its heart by encouraging it and by making it aware of hope, honor and pride, which have been the glory of human beings. In post-war era, the violent changes in class structure, the breakdown of traditional beliefs. The threats of war have brought many writers into complete abandonment of cultural and philosophic belief. Doris Lessing portrays the situation in her text *Alfred and Emily*.

*I think my father’s rage at the trenches took me over, when I was very young, and how never left me. Do children feel their parents’ emotions? Yes, we do, and it is a legacy I could have done without. What is the use of it? It is as if that old war is in my own memory, my own consciousness. (Preface)*

However, some of the major post-war novelists namely, John Wain, Iris Murdoch, William Golding, Angus Wilson and Doris Lessing, who deal with the transfiguration of the class-structure in the twentieth-century, are essentially concerned with the human values in their novels; the essential focus is always upon the consciousness of their characters who find themselves lonely in a hostile world. It is an evident fact in the attitude of, Kate in *Summer before the Dark*, the novel begins with the very thought of loneliness, she felt:

*A woman stood on her back step ... waiting, Thinking? She would not have said so. She was trying to catch hold of something, or to lay it bare so that she could look and define; for some time now, she had been "trying on" ideas like so many dresses off a rack. She was letting words and phrases as worn as nursery rhymes slide around her tongue: for towards the crucial experience custom allots certain attitudes, and they are pretty stereotyped. Ah yes, first love! (SBD 5)*

The statement expresses the sarcastic tone of Kate in search of Self. Lessing conveys the same idea in her *The Golden Notebook* which begin with reactionary attitude of 'New Woman' emphasizes through Anna's friend Molly, that, "we are completely new type of woman. We must be, surely?" (TGB, 26).

Though, the phrase denies by Anna as thus: 'new woman' and says, "There is nothing new under the sun." (TGB, 26). Anna and Molly are 'insecure' and 'uprooted' suites to this changing pattern of society. Somewhere, Anna, accepts this failure from the very beginning. The problem is having an attitude, towards social patterns, myths, customs and traditions.

"As soon as one has lived through something, it falls into a pattern. And the pattern of an affair ... is seen in terms of what ends it" (Lessing quotes).

Similarly, every individual is seeking for new-birth, in *Shikasta* "Souls waiting at the Shikastans entrances for a chance of rebirth." (Shikasta, 21). Lessing presents the terrific picture of post-war land in *Shikasta* by Johar the emissary,

A twilight of grief, mists of hungry longing, a sucking drag of all my emotions — and I had to force each step, and it was as if my ankles were being held by hands I could not see, as if I walked weighted by being I could not see. Out of the mists I came at last and there, where last time I was here I had seen grasslands, streams, grazing beats, now were only a vast dry plain. (Shikasta, 19)

Every character of Lessing, suffers from loneliness. Al\*Ith has travel on hard-road alone, "I do not know myself. I do not trust myself. I must go alone" (Marriage between Zone Three Four and Five, 57) Further, "A descent into possibilities of herself she had not believed open to her." (58)

In almost of her works Lessing demonstrates that freedom of individual does not come easily, it can be earned by the hard-way of living and attitude. The author successively proves that the common people did not want the war, neither physical nor spiritual. In her autobiography,



she exclaims: "I never knew a Tommy who was bloodthirsty. No, it was the armament manufacturers. The war suited them all night". (UMS 110)

Post-war anxieties cracked everything. The land lying before everyone was dejected, desolated and degenerated. Lessing begins "*The Golden Notebook*" from this thought of Anna that "the point is, that as far as I can see, everything is cracking up." (TGB, 25).

Fredrick R-Karl refers an interview given by Doris Lessing makes the point sharply clear: In May 1969 in an interview at Stony Brook, New York, she states further:

I feel as if the Bomb has gone off inside me and in people around me. That is what I mean by cracking up. It is as if the structure of the mind is being battered from inside. Some terrible thing is happening. (Breaking the Boundries of Madness, 292)

The main argument is that, the era is marked by its wilderness, strength and cultural and philosophical identities. Culture not only remains a larger category as far as it refers to the totality of human experiences. Somehow it is a group a part of which goes into the making of a work of literature. Culture is a wider literary manifestation with totality of human experiences.

*Culture is something that each man  
not only may interpret as he pleases  
but must indeed interpret as he can.*

*(T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays, 436)*

## Concept of Culture

Culture is a growth of the human mind which is possessed by a society and which is the outcome of history spread over a long period. It reflects when history, sociology and politics invoke in assessing literary works. When rituals, concepts and tradition determines the criteria being used by the writer in the assessing activity, only then does the critical discourse become a piece of culture and philosophical perspectives.

In recent years, cultural studies of post-war era, is indeed a part of every writer's work. In the first volume of her autobiography, Lessing emphasizes the brutal bigotry of her age. Suffering of her parents, cry and screams of the generation. The generation of post-war lived with shut-door-identity, locked out, helpless, dependent, and then vanished into that door. The terror-stricken confusion of post-war era described in following words.

My parents talked about them, and their voices were low and anxious and there were words I did not know, so I kept saying what does that mean, what does that mean? The Great War: The Revolution, the Civil War, Famine, the Bolshevik. (UMS, 42)



Considerably, Lessing projects the era in two parts through her autobiography in two parts. In the first volume of her autobiography, (UMS) she emphasizes the post-war cultural and philosophic study. Second volume of her autobiography (WIS) highlights the issues related to the post-modern structure of twentieth century. The nature, culture and structure of the post-war era, is desolated and degenerated. In *Under My Skin*, she observes that she began to understand the human nature of her era through Shaw's phrase about human race that "human race is over-sexed". This thought of Shaw, becomes the source of inspiration for Lessing's phenomena about human nature. She sees that men are behaving as 'hyper-masculine' and women are behaving as 'hyper-feminine.'

The unconventional generation based upon human nature, instead of God. The inter-war generation becomes rootless pessimistic and frustrated. The years of her past are interpreted as the study of perplexed and devastated era of post-war. It was the time of endeavor with the rapidly increasing ugliness, which put everything into consideration. Wartime destruction, confusion and melancholy have destroyed the physical and intellectual of people's conscience. Lessing's attack on the superficiality of the British colonial set in Africa is far more morally committed.

*Leaves falling  
Each one I have known with my fingers,  
I walk over them  
Feeling the dark veins burst as I tread.  
Each one I have known through  
the days and the nights.  
My blood theirs. (UMS, 191)*

Through these lines, Lessing highlights the perplexed atmosphere of war. Her mother who at the time of war was working as nurse exclaimed similar lines. "Every sun rose with the physical-destruction of the common people" (UMS, 190). Witnessed the spiritual destruction of authority. Lessing considers Russia and Germany as the "representatives of Evil fight", and the Britain and America seems to be "armies of God". (UMS, 190)

### **Epicenity, Explosion and Extimism**

The antagonism of war is the backbone of Lessing's narratives. Like every post-war writer, who comes from such brutal bigotry and as a true communist, she spills the milk upon all the post-war issues like episenity, explosion and extremism. In the post-war era, one gets the feeling of having arrived at a whimsical crossroad with paths leading to different directions, and some pointing to no direction at all. As a post-war writer *tension* and *immediacy*, become



the tools of her writing. The accents and attitude of post-war fiction describe the criteria of the writers belonging to this age. Post-war studies and writing suffer from existential attitude. The narratives of this era have provided more forceful, more far-reaching, and more relevant. Differently from the early 20th century, Lessing has focuses every phase of her age. Disaster to development in 1950s 'Neo-realism' becomes the trend of these writers. The basic issues of this age tradition, authority and ruling class. Lessing, retort her age, through her characters, when she allows Martha, her literary self, to state:

The working classes were undoubtedly just where they used to be, but everyone of my 'class' seemed concerned only to prove not only that they were entitled to a good life, but that they had already achieve it. Further, it was almost impossible to hold a conversation ... because ... speech was full of gaps, pauses, and circumlocutions where words used to be. (Martha Quest, 56)

In above statement Martha discusses that how she be caught up by the two phases of post-war era. These rapid changes of the age quickly observed by Martha in her life; before marriage and after marriage. She scared by the phrase adopted by Mr. Maynard, that "the more things change, the more they remain the same." (56)

Factually, Martha's life is fluctuating between past and present. Lead characters of '*The Golden Notebook*' registers the loss — social, moral, philosophical, political — that once gave life meaning:

"My God, what we've lost, what we have lost, what we have lost, how can we ever get back to it, how can we get back to it again?" (629).

Saul Greene exclaims such degenerated pattern of post-war era. Feeling of 'lost' and 'hard to achieve' is becomes their major part. World is still goes with 'old pattern' while the new generation has been looking for the 'new patterns' of living, 'new-man', 'new-woman' and completely 'new-ideology' of the perceptions.

In the post-war era, the world was divided into false analogy and divisions. Lessing draws the frustration and anger of the generation through her narratives. The theme of 'crack-up' clearly defines the impatience and dissatisfaction conventional morality and behavior. Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* begins with the phrase "the point is that as far as I can see, everything is cracking up." (25)

Through, this phrase Anna finds everything at its 'break down' physically, spiritually and morally. Lessing uses this 'cracking up' theme, as the intellectual breakdown of the post-war generation.



In the beginning of '*The Golden Notebook*', she explains that everything hyphenated and labeled, she considers such point of view in the following manner:

Mr. Dogma and Mr. I am Free – Because – I – Belong – Nowhere, Miss I – Must – Have – Love – and – Happiness and Mrs. I – Have – to – be – Good. At – Everything – I – Do, Mr. Where – is – a – Real – Woman? and Miss Where – is – a Real – Man?, Mr. I'm – Mad – Because – They – Say – I Am, and Miss Life – Through – Experiencing – Everything, Mr. I – Make – Revolution – and –therefore – I – Am, and Mr. and Mrs. If – We – Deal – Very – Well – With – This – Small – Problem – Then – Perhaps – We – Can – Forget – We – Daren't – Look – at – The – Big – Ones. (TGB, 7)

Through, these hyphenated phrases, Lessing brings to consideration that in the 20th century, everyone involved in quest of identity and significant existence. There is resentment, and powerlessness and sometimes violence in their accent and attitude. The frequent expression of freedom, equality and personal morality, becomes the central theme of Lessing's writings.

## Post wWar Narratives

Eventually, *The Golden Notebook* has total post-war structure and it configured in the similar state of affairs. Margret Drabble has called it "Lessing's inner space fiction" (the Oxford companion to English Literature). As the novel contains a powerful anti-war and anti-Stalinist message an extended analysis of communism. It is the document on the hope of structure a peaceful and stable society after the end of World War II.

The failures of political system and socio-economic problems, of 20th century are clearly highlighted in the structure of Lessing's narratives.

In a May 1969, interview with Stony Brook, New York, Doris Lessing referred the period in which the events of *The Golden Notebook* occurred as:

A time when everything is cracking up ... It had been falling apart since the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima ... Throughout my life I've had to support parties, causes, notions and movements which stink ... I feel as if the Bomb has gone off inside myself and in people around me. That is what I mean by 'cracking up'. It is as if the structure of the mind is being battered from inside. Some terrible thing is happening. (Preface)

Lessing's narratives depict an individual's mental breakdown. The representatives of her novels experience of the generation and examine the specific socio-political circumstances in





which it occurred. The mental-disorder of Lessing's characters points-out the sickness of the world outside.

Consequently, Lessing uses every kind of fragmentation of her age, throughout her narratives. 'Post-war- anatomy- of- melancholy' represented by Lessing in her debut *Grass is singing*. The novel concerns the dejectedness of frustrated conscience Mary the protagonist. Lessing structured Mary's character, as a symbol of post-war anxiety. Her heart becomes a battlefield, where two armies: race and gender oppose each other. The young girl Mary has the racial thoughts and ideologies. She is being influenced by her experiences with other characters in her social surroundings and the institutions prevalent around her at that time.

However, Lessing uses post-war theme in almost all her narratives, including the Canopus series of science-fiction novels. In the first volume of this series, *Shikasta*, she emphasizes the distorted land and people's journey from degeneration to regeneration. Man is a too limited creature, to ensure, to gain the certainty of the essential nature through his various experiences from life. Particularly, it focuses on an age, whose experiences are received from individual consciousness. As a post-war writer, Lessing begins the novel *Shikasta* with the feeling of lost. The lost of ruined planet an age and race. "Creature infinitely damaged, reduced and dwindled from their origins, degenerates almost lost." (203)

Hence, this feeling of dissipation is infinite in the works of Lessing. This devastated generation can compare with Miltonic myth *Paradise Lost* as Milton used the theme of *Bible* and the 'fall of man.' Similarly, Lessing works upon the theme of the fall of an era, fall of the generation. Like Milton, Lessing too blends the series with the twin theme of fall of an era and rising of the scientific Utopia or new era. In this way, *Shikasta* is not only, about the distorted earth, but a document about an entire human race. It deals with the history of an age in the universal concept. It represents the reach of men on every planet and sphere of universe is eternal and forever. The uncertainty of the world-war creates to a very chaotic and confused state of mind. Society of the post-war land was free from all the moral ethics. All morals were forgotten and there was degeneration all around. By this time Lessing and so many other writers, blow the horn of communism and reformation among all perspectives of the post-war era.

The society underwent many changes during this period. The post-war society is fascinated with troglodytes of male above female. Literally, it was the violent dissipation of 'male with female', 'male with male', and a 'female with female'.

Eventually, Lessing's narratives are blend of two periods, the World War-II and I. There was revolution as well as reformation in post-war age. *Canopus series* becomes the mouthpiece of such blend of rebel and reform. Lot of emphasis, which were laid on religion, and a moral



code of ethics influenced Lessing. Her childhood experiences are related to the life after World War- I, while her young age experiences the World-War-II. In the first book of the Canopian series, she creates an ideal world as an ideal philosophy. Lessing makes Johar her agent or alien to go through this universe and all the planets. *Shikasta* is called the most destructed planet. Johar justifies his views and his journey in these words of Dr. Hebert and inspire his 'Testament of faith.' "All these people can take, weight, responsibility, burdens, difficulties, delays, the loss of hope. As we know, this is essential equipment for these hard times ..." (Shikasta353)

Thus, readers not only enter into the world with an alien; but also confronted with a chronology that defies human comprehension. A document that introduced destruction of harmony and the desolation of 'earthly paradise': "This paradise ... is where now lie deserts and rocks, sands and shale ... Ruins are everywhere" (Shikasta, 30).

In this way, *Shikasta* is considering a spectacle of devastation. *Shikasta* does not talk of salvation or moral ethics. It is a genre about destruction occurred by Men and preservation will be possible through the regeneration only. All lost and degenerated fall occur by the man himself. The post-war era emerged as the age of individualism. This individualism makes man responsible for all his actions. In *Shikasta* Lessing's indictment of all human history and of human beings' propensity to hurt and mistreat one another and the world of living. *Shikasta* is considering as an alien name for Earth. The story indicates the *Old Testament*, *Gnostic*, and *Sufism*, while the name *Shikasta* comes from the 'Persian' word *Shekasteh* meaning 'broken'. The book recommends that Canopus is fighting a losing battle and the planet declined further. By the 20th century, *Shikasta* has degenerated into war and self-destruction.

Actually, this after-war-destruction related to the uncomfortable human race. Lessing highlights the issues related to tragic self-destruction. Every sphere of land captured through the devastated human life. Lessing points out this explosion in the following terms:

At this time millions upon millions of people in the subcontinent of India are treated any black — as badly as any white South Africans every treated any black — as badly as any white appraiser ever treated a black man or woman. This is not a question of a year's oppression, a decade's persecution, a century's ill-treatment; not the result of a short lived and unsuccessful regime like the British Empire, not a ten-year outburst of savagery like Hitler's regime in Europe, not fifty years of savagery, like Russian communism, but something built into a religion and a way of life, a culture, so deeply embedded that the frightfulness and ugliness of it apparently cannot even be observed by the people who practice it. (Shikasta, 414)



## CONCLUSION

“It seems we are in for a seminar on man’s inhumanity to man.” (Shikasta, 415) A line represents the barren, dry and dire state of *Shikasta*, on the eve of World War III. On the very day, Sherban and other emissaries relocate a small number of promising Shikastans to remote locations to escape the coming nuclear Cassandra. The post-war distorted civilization stated at the end of the book where the Shammat, who set the Shikastans on a course of self-destruct themselves with Canopus. With a strengthened lock and the SOWF flowing freely and harmony and prosperity returns to Shikasta. “The Twentieth Century War’ with its evil and deadly emanations, useful only to Shammat, had affected these planets.” (424, Shikasta) However, Lessing ends this documentary through these poetic lines:

*“The hunters hunted,  
The Weapons turned  
When the hunters hunted  
The World burned ...” (Shikasta, 439)*

Through these lines she diagnosis that the conditions would be applied at the ‘World War-III’. This is an infinite haunted hunting of the ‘crazed species’ at ‘intellectual and physical’ level. In the post-war era, everything is put into consideration. In true sense, it is an age of questions. Lessing also concludes *Shikasta* with so many interrogative phrases. As Johar George Sherban is mouth spoken of Lessing, exclaims that:

Fight and then kill. All that is over; it is finished; it is dead. How did we live then? How did we bear it? We were also stumbling about in a thick dark, a thick ugly hot darkness, full of enemies and dangers, we were blind in a heavy hot weight of suspicion and doubt and fear. (Shikasta, 447)

Post-war people try to sustain each other with the thought of future in their mind. So that, the reigning society of post-war era strives to appear as if it were based on some sanctified principle of right value to refuse the acknowledgement. It seems like any other social-structure of partial choice of men with partial knowledge. The folly of human race was becomes the existential attitude in existential society. Even this era has evolved its own cultural and philosophic perspectives. Lessing’s narratives are enlightening the cultural as well as philosophic enlightenments of the era. Doris Lessing herself, the victim of particular society. When she moved to England in 1949, her sense of social responsibility and duties mingled with distrusts and dilemma. As the picture of London she portrays in the second volume of her autobiography “Walking in the Shade”.



As matter stands, Lessing's philosophical perspectives becomes the sperm of Marxist ideology. Communism fluctuates in her philosophy. The lead characters of her novels are communist. Hence, Lessing maintains the consistency of interest in time and place. Communism is the only philosophy revolving at her time. She fills her work with frequent historical and parenthetical references. "Rationing was still on. The war still lingered, not only in the bombed places but in people's mind and behavior." (WIS, 5)

The word *philosophy* comes from the Greek *Philosophia*, which literally means 'love of wisdom'. Literally, philosophy is the study of general and fundamental problems, such as those connected with existence, knowledge, values, reason, mind and language. Philosophy is distinguished from other ways of addressing such problems by its critical, generally systematic approach and its reliance on rational argument. Thus, Lessing's genres are general study of these three problems. The post-war society emerged from the lack of wisdom.

The shift in the work of Doris Lessing, from a view of communistic way of life, becomes the most influential. The basic famous forms of philosophies at the 20th century were humanism, structuralism existentialism, psychoanalytic perspectives and critical theory. Communists sought the study of conscious regeneration from the society, while humanism is the study of human-behavior, and ideas collected at the post-war era. Post structuralism and psychological trauma is another aspect of Lessing and her philosophy.

Thus, the philosophical perspectives are based on conceptualism. Her philosophy of rationalism is based on 'thinking'. Lessing approves it through her narratives that, something beyond thinking really exist. However, Dr. N. Sharda Iyer, emphasizes her philosophical structure in these words: "Lessing's philosophical quest leads her to break novelistic forms as soon as she has created it. This has left even her most devoted reader breathless in pursuit." (Dr. N. Sharda Iyer)

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