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## **ANEKĀNTAVĀDA AND ITS RELEVANCE: A PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS IN JAINA VIEWPOINT**

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### **Abstract**

Jainism is a religio-philosophical school of India which reacted against the Brahmanic/Vedic tradition and established as a school of thought. As a way of life it started as a Sramanic movement (the non-Brahmanic ascetic tradition) to attain the truth. Jains metaphysics and epistemology are purely logical and conducive for all. Jainism always is against the physical and psychological violence, and believes that it is the Ekanta (one sided view of reality) philosophy, which leads to violence. According to the Jains, Ekantavada is a very rigid view, thus partial in nature. Any school asserting this claim for the absolute truth logically thus rejecting all the other views that basically leads towards dogmatism and in toleration; which further aggravated and leads

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toward violence. Mahavira as a champion of Ahimsa (non-violence) carried out this concept from the domain of practical behaviour to the domain of intellectual and philosophical discussion. The Jaina principle of respect for the other life gave rise to the principle of respect for the views of others; thus they advocates Anekāntavāda. According to them, non-violence is the goal and Anekāntavāda becomes the tool. Its Syadvada is basically a logical inclusivity which accepts diversified aspects of truth. Consequently, it tells that a complete understanding of any truth requires the consideration and acceptance of a variety of viewpoints. This pluralistic view of the Jains is to be effective well to combat social violence and evils too. The world is in the pyramid of violence that can only entail massive destruction of this phenomenal world in any moment. I think, this pluralistic approach of Anekāntavāda is to be considered as the panacea to overcome all types of rigidities and bigotries of the present society as well.

**Keywords:** Ekantavada, Anekāntavāda, Syadvada, Non-violent appeal of Jainism, Jaina epistemology and substance, Inclusivity and social order.

Jainism is a religio-philosophical school of India which reacted against the Brahmanic/Vedic tradition and established own school of thought. Although Jainism was a contemporary of Buddhism, however, they did not feel at home with them in various religio-philosophical aspects. It is a *Sramanic* movement propounded against the non-Vedic ascetic tradition and considered as a way of life. Even their movement was a rejection of Vedas, however, there are many similarities related to the conception of world and to its view on the path to *Moksha/Kaivalya (liberation)* etc. Lord Mahavira, the 24<sup>th</sup> *tirthankar* of Jainism opined, *'the world is not eternal, it is transitory and mutable, hence, world has no eternality in absolute sense.* Jainism strongly advocates for the non-violent behaviour to maintain a peaceful and cohesive life and also to construct a good and just society. It is highly conscious

of all biotic and non-biotic species considering their necessity in life and society as well. Its pragmatic attitude is very logical and conducive to maintain ecological balance.

We have already stated that Jainism is not a religion in general sense, thus most of us are confused about it. It is basically a philosophical way to lead a good and pious life and to construct a just society. In this respect it will be more appropriate to say that it is a way to lead good life. It is believed that etymologically 'Jainism' comes from the word '*Jina*' meaning conqueror; they believe that to attain *Moksha/Kaivalya* each and every devotee will have to conquer all passions (*Raga and Dvesa*) as their gurus (*Tirthankaras*) did in their life.<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult to ascertain the exact date of the origin of Jainism, however, like most of our other Indian philosophical schools we are not able to ascertain the exact date of the origination of Jainism. Beside these, most of the Jaina scholars believe that Jainism has originated around 9 thousand BCE. and the first of whom is believed to be *Rsabhadeva* and *Vardhamana* the last. *Vardhamana* is also familiar as *Mahavira*. Historically it is evident that Lord *Mahavir* was a contemporary of Lord Buddha; hence, there are some similarities in their thoughts, practices and ideologies also. According to the Jains it is believed that the *Tirthankara* can only be defined Jainism in the best way. Related to too many issues and ideologies there are endless controversies among the people of Jainism and as a result Jainism has been divided into two broad schools, the *Svetambaras* and the *Digambaras*. These two schools differ mostly in practice and in minor principles of faith only and not in the main principles.<sup>2</sup>

To understand the proper philosophy of Jaina Anekāntavāda it needs to be discussed something on its epistemology and metaphysics, hence we are going to discuss these two major aspects at the outset:

### 1. *Jaina Epistemology*

From epistemological standpoint Jainism believes that consciousness is an inseparable essence of each and every *Jiva* (soul). The *Jiva* is to be conceived and comparable to sun light which is capable to enlighten every particle of the globe without any prejudice. Generally *Jiva* needs to be free from any kind of obstacle. If obstacles are free then the *Jiva* would lead himself in the state of *Nirvana*. But we will have to understand that these obstacles are basically the fruits of the past *Karmas* (*actions*) of the *Jiva*. The *Manas* (mind or intellect), the *Indriya* (senses), the *Kaya* (body) of the *Jiva* are all deeply entangled with the fruits of *Karma* and related to different obstacles *Jiva*'s consciousness took different shapes.<sup>3</sup>

To understand the real philosophy of Jainism we need to discuss the main tenets of it. Jainism is very much conscious of the attainment of knowledge because they believe that life is the process of the attainment of consciousness, hence, they believe in the threefold classification of knowledge like some other Indian philosophical schools:

#### 1. *Jaina classifications of knowledge:*

- a) **Mediate Knowledge:** This kind of Knowledge can be acquired by the *Jiva* through inference (*anumana*).
- b) **Relative Immediate Knowledge:** This kind of knowledge can be captured by the *Jiva* through their *Manas* (minds) and *Indriyas* (senses) only.
- c) **Absolutely Immediate Knowledge:** It is the most highest category of knowledge according to Jainism. This kind of Knowledge can only be acquired by the *Jiva* after overcoming all the obstacles of *karma* (action).

Jaina *Anekāntavāda* is a philosophical theory which stressed to attain knowledge in a diversified form but in their outlook knowledge always entangled with reality/ the truth of object. Legitimately a question may emerge here –what kind of reality or object it is? Is it phenomenal reality or noumenal/metaphysical reality? Hence the discussion of substance is also pertinent here.

## 2. Jaina Theory of Substance (*dravya*)

Epistemology is deeply entangled with metaphysics because epistemology mainly deals with the origin, scope and development of knowledge but knowledge, of whom is very important, hence the discussion of substance is highly needful here. In Jainism *Dharma* has a pivotal role and then *dravya*. They consider a *Dravya* possessing two different kinds of *Dharma*: *Guna* (essential) and *Paryaya* (accidental). The *Guna* are part of the substance and they have no real existence, their existence is depended as long the substance exists, as consciousness in a Jiva. Since the *Paryaya* are accidental they are not manifested as *Guna* rather they fade away with time in a substance. But in a substance's life *Paryayas* can be manifested more than once. Desire, pleasure, pain are all the essential properties of *Paryayas* which are always mutable as modes of the substance.

Metaphysical issues of Jainism can be traced back to Buddhist metaphysics also and both are familiar as the *sramanic*, traditions as well as the opponents of Vedic tradition. In the philosophy of *anekantavada* of Jainism, influence of Buddhist *Vibhajya vada* is discerned. Lord Buddha was also the propagator of non absolutistic view, he disparaged all extreme views and fascinated for middle path (*madhyam pantha*), therefore, he has never given answer of any metaphysical question directly. In this regard he was very much fascinated to keep silent and advocated conditioning system, which has developed latter as the theory of *pratityasamutpada* (causal theory). Therefore He was always eager to first analyze the question (*Vibhaga*) and its various presuppositions and thereafter

distinguished (*Vibhaga*) between the various interpretations (*Vyakhya*) as a system of causality.<sup>4</sup> In following this system of analysis he has tried to get answer of all metaphysical questions.

Goutam Buddha has tried to give the answer of all metaphysical questions under the four categories, as:

1. *Ekamsavyakaraniya*: This is mainly related to the questions which are directly answerable.
2. *Vibhajya-Vadana Vyakaranya*: The answers of this type of questions are related to analysis and separation both.
3. *Prati-Prasnena Vyakaranya*: This is basically questions and a counter question system to attain the truth.
4. *Sthapaniya* : It is a process by which questions are answerable by silence only .

Vasubandhu, a notable scholar of Buddhism also discussed these four-fold classifications in one of his writings which are highly compatible to analyze non-exclusivist views:

*'Will all beings be born again?'* Vasubandhu has given answer of this question logically in drawing the process of separation and analysis and stated that 'Those with defilements will be born again, and those without defilements will not be born again'.

The question here is also very pertinent that *'Is man superior or inferior?'*

According to Vasubandhu the answer of this question is not so easy because it entails different question: such as- to whom are you asking?' where you are asking? Hence, it is contextual and also related to the agent to whom you are asking this question. If a person says 'Is a man superior or inferior to the God?' Then the answer is- 'Man is inferior to God.' But if he says, 'Is man superior or inferior to the lower beings?' Then the answer is: 'Man

is superior incomparision to the lower beings of the universe.’<sup>5</sup> Therefore, context and locus both are very important to ascertain the truth/ reality.

Vasubhandu as a notable champion of Buddhist philosophy stated that the second question can be rephrased in a new style- ‘Will those who die be born again?’ according to him, this question is answerable only by dividing (*vibhaja*) the classes denoted by the subject term into two groups, like- *those with defilements and those without defilements*. Similarly the third question also belongs to the *Vibhajya* method and one can answer the question by dividing (*vibhajya*) the predicate-property, or rather by specifying (*visisya*) further the predicate-property. Speaking from the viewpoint of gods, man is inferior; but speaking from the viewpoint of lower beings, man is superior. Hence, it is related to context, condition and locus also.

In order to give proper answer Vasubhandu has logically assumed the third category to be a sub-variety of the second. In following the above the answer is quietly related to *Vibhajya-Vada*. From this above discussion it is pertinent to mention that we can say there exist two sub-varieties of *Vibhajya-Vada* like-

1. *category by dividing the subject class into sub-classes*
2. *category by specifying or relativising the predicate.*

I do believe that Lord Mahavira has adopted the second sub-variety of the *Vibhajya-Vada* method of Buddhism and developed that method into the Anekānta method (Relativistic View) in his own ways.

Let us discuss Jainism’s *anekantavada*:

Jainism stated that some philosophical and religious schools believe in the *Ekantavada* (one sided view of reality) philosophy and as a result their absolutistic view of truth leads towards violence. According to the Jains this is very rigid and illogical,

because, if any school is asserting this claims for the absolute truth logically it is rejecting all the other views that basically leads towards dogmatism and intolerance; which further aggravated towards the severe violence.

In order to avoid intolerance and violence Jains advocated *Anekāntavāda*. In their eyes it is one of the most important and basic doctrines of Jainism. It is basically a non-absolutistic view and considered *anekantavada* as the principles of pluralism and the view of multiplicity. In this principle the truth and reality are to be perceived differently from diverse points of view, and it asserts that no single point of view properly depicts the complete truth. Things or object can be viewed differently from different angles and all are partially true, no one is complete as well as false. This relativistic view of *anekantavada* became a clue of relativity theory of pure science.

Samantabhadra, a great proponent of Jainism defines *Anekāntavāda* as Reality which is *aneka* (many) i.e. Reality can be viewed in infinite number. There is no absolutistic view of Reality in Jainism. It does not mean all reverse qualities can exist simultaneously, but it accepts only those consistent qualities which establish the objectivity of truth. It is basically an attitude of our mind to looks the Reality from various angles. According to this theory, truth and reality are perceived differently from different points of view, and no single point of view find out the complete truth. This has been explained by the Jaina scholars by propounding *adhgajanyayah* example, which can be illustrated through the story of the *Blind men and an elephant viewing*. In this story, each blind man has touched the different parts of an elephant (trunk, leg, ear, etc.) and all have explained their personal views of the elephant. Those who touched the trunk says elephant just like a big snake, those who touched the ear says elephant like a fan, those who touched the leg says elephant is like a pillar etc. and their views are basically partially experiential base due to their limited perspectives and none is to be neglected. Through



this above example of experience it is quite evident that objects are infinite in their qualities and modes of existence related to their position, so they cannot be completely grasped in all aspects and manifestations by finite human experience or perception.

We have already stated that the Jaina metaphysics is basically a relativistic pluralism thus, familiar as *Anekāntavāda* (the theory of many-sidedness). In its philosophical standpoint the matter and spirit are to be conceived as separate and independent realities. Hence, *Anekāntavāda* (many-sidedness) is one of the most important and basic doctrines of Jainism deeply entangled with the dialectical concepts of *syadvada* (conditioned viewpoints) and *nayavada* (partial viewpoints), providing it with more detailed logical structure and expression. The Sanskrit term *anekantavada* literally means “*doctrine of non-exclusivity*”; thus western people compared it with the philosophy of “*skepticism*” or “*non-absolutism*”. *Anekanta* or “*uncertainty/ non-exclusivity*” is the opposite of *ekanta* (*eka+anta*) “*exclusiveness, absoluteness, necessity etc*”.<sup>6</sup> In the viewpoint of Jains Ttruth is infinite in nature and that can be analyzed from various aspects/angles, i.e. reality as endowed with permanence, origination and destruction that basically is the persistence with mutability and change. In Jaina’s standpoint all existents are real and all opposite qualities exist concurrently which is logical too. Our own knowledge is relative to our capabilities and position of perception. *Anekānta*, therefore is not a blameworthy principle rather it is a principle by which honour others experience. In following this principle someone can answer all queries related to his position from at least substance, place, time and mode. This doctrine helped enormously to bring various monistic thinkers together and eliminate or minimize the violence indulged in by followers of different faiths. The origins of *Anekāntavāda* is a matter of endless controversy, however, we can be traced back its origin through the teachings of Lord Mahavira (599-527 BCE), the 24th *Jain Tirthankara* of Jaina religion.

From the above example it becomes clear that our knowledge is almost depended upon the people who experienced the elephant and their knowledge of elephant is partially true. They only understand and explained their individual experience due to their limited perspectives. This principle is more being effective by observing the objects and their infinite qualities which are always changeable in nature as modes. Since human being is finite hence, they cannot be completely grasped all aspects of object through their single perception. In Jaina's viewpoint only the *Kevalins* can comprehend and apprehend objects in all aspects and manifestations due to their capability of metaphysical awareness and knowledge; the normal people are only capable of partial knowledge and reality as well.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of this Jains opined that no single and specific human view can claim to represent absolute truth. On the basis of it some scholars say that Jaina *anekantavada* i.e. their concept of knowledge and truth indulges subjectivity of truth and thus variable and no possibility of universal knowledge through it.

According to Jaina philosophers, *sat* is the proper existence of object/being which is neither eternal nor ephemeral. It cannot be also regarded as both eternal and ephemeral in different forms. They only say that though *sat* is always mutable it does not mean that it loses its own self in any way. In their outlook every object has more than one attribute and all attributes are not to be understood by the common people. The *kevali* jnani (liberated person) can only encompass the universal aspect of knowledge and its different attributes which are related to object. But the common people can see object only from one standpoint at a time, therefore, whenever they say concerning an object we must keep in view its different attributes also. The locus of the object and the standpoint of viewing the object are also here very important. Here theory concerning reality represents all sided, eternal and ephemeral aspects mainly. Jaina *Anekāntavāda* is also acquainted as *Parinama Nityatyavada* and *Syadvada*, which are the basic foundation of this theory. In this regard M.P. Marathe, a well known scholar of Jainism says

that *Syadvada* is an explanatory foundation of *Anekāntavāda*. According to him, an object can be viewed roughly in three ways such as possibility of potentiality, epistemological possibility and nomological as well as existential possibility. When knowledge will be viewed as the part and as the whole it will be called *dumiti*. Whenever knowledge is to be regarded as it is, without judging it to be either partial or absolute, then it will be termed as *naya* and when the knowledge is accompanied by consciousness and apprehend the reality in a relative and limited aspects it called *sopadhi*, whenever that can be interpreted in different ways and in different standpoints it is termed as *Pramana* (*Syadsat*). In Jainism *Pramana* basically epithet *Syad* that must precede *Naya* and it supposed to be the sign of Truth. It is relative and also the process of gradual development of knowledge. Here it is pertinent to mention that *Syadvada* generally eliminated the contradiction between divergent standpoints. Thus rejection of *Syadvada* mounts to the adoption *anta-vada* which goes to all experiences in rigidity.<sup>8</sup> Scholars of Jainism advocate that *Pramana* cannot be *nirupadhi* (unconditional) and *aikantika* (deeper), thus, affirmation and negation both are to be found in every *paramarsa* (the knowledge of *pakshadharmata* as qualified by *Vypti* is called *paramarsha*; it is the knowledge of the presence of the major in the minor through the middle). Jaina scholars say that whenever we will judge the existence (*sat*) of an object we will have to accept the notion of *Dravya*, here the object is *sat*, eternal, universal and one, while the standpoint of *pariyaya*, it is *sat* but particular, ephemeral and many.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Jains claim, all philosophical schools embody one sided truth and logically all philosophers have right to criticize the theories of others. But if it pretends to be the sole embodiment of absolute truth and dubs other philosophies as false and fallacious then it will be thoroughly mistaken, thus unacceptable. In this regard the modern objective realists have pointed it out to be the fallacy of exclusive particularity.<sup>10</sup> There are some basic difference between the *anekantavada* and the *syadvada*. In the *anekantavada* knowledge of all differing but

opposite attributes whereas *syadvada* is a process of the relative description of a particular attribute of an object or an event.

The challenge for Jaina thinkers is to show how a single subject can be predicated by two distinct and contradictory predicates. Let the statement be “X (the subject) is and is not Y”. Some Jaina scholars propounded an example which is very simple in nature, like – *it is raining*. Can the state of affairs predicated by ‘*is raining*’ be simultaneously predicated ‘*is not raining?*’ Here the Jaina people have answered in introducing the idea of different perspective: according to them by some perspectives it would be raining while by others it would not. The sentence ‘*it is raining*’ would be true, for instance *if and only if it is raining, and false if it is sunny. The statement can thus be true and false depending on the indexical pertaining to the subject. The statement could also be true if it is raining in the place where the statement is made and false at some other place; and of course the statement would be true at some times and false at other times. Indeed it is always the case that when the conditions pertaining to the subject of a statement are made clear, one can see that only by virtue of those conditions can the statement be properly indicated as true.* In Jaina viewpoint these are not to be treated as antagonistic, because when the contrary statement is also clarified as to its subject’s conditions then its truth can also be seen to be justified. So if one simply collects together the conditions by virtue of which the statement and its contradiction are both true in a certain position of perception, thus, we arrive at the state wherein a single statement is both true and false in logic. The contextual and varied perspectives of truth are the normal and natural matter in Jainism. The point is that the particular conditions or perspectives which are in normal discourse hidden, assumed or neglected must be included in the proposition for the determination of its correct truth. Some scholars have opined that Jaina statement’s of truth value will have to be ascertained in looking the contextual position of the statement, because there are the sharp difference between the

formal and the factual truth. On the basis of *anekantavada* theory of Jainism it is almost vivid to us that non- omniscient being is mainly ascertained the truth through factual and state of affairs situations. Human being is finite, thus, they will have to refrain from imaginable impinge of truth. The diversified perspective as claimed by *anekantavada* is basically an ethical command through which oughtness and honesty of the fact can be ascertained in non-exclusivistic view, hence, mere perception of the reality cannot be find out through one sided view. *Anekantavada* of Jainism in one hand the logical quest of truth as well the process of disparaging of bigotries and rigidities. <sup>11</sup>

Now the question may emerge does Jainism affirm absolute truth? The answer is yes but it is not possible to attain by the common people and that cannot be attained through mere physical perception, *siddha purusha or kevala jnani* (liberated person) can apprehend it through their metaphysical consciousness. Ordinary people can make the difference between the belief, practices and the perceptual facts and those are sometimes appears to us as contradictory in the varied situations. The experience of the ordinary man is the external perceptual and it represent the inner aspect of the object and in the eyes of the *kevala jnani* the external perceptual knowledge which appears to the common people are incompatible to encompass the absolute truth.

From the traditional logical form some statements can be true and false at the same time and in the same way. As we have perceived it through *Anekāntavāda*, in this view there are many aspects of knowledge remain *avaktyyam* (non-articulated) due to the transcendental prespectivism of the truth. Since *Anekantavada* is an initiative to understand the pluralistic position of the truth and through it the diversified aspects of thought and cognition can be ascertained in a logical manner. Its ethical urge can grow a sense of responsibility to accept the variability and relativity of thought/truth. Thus, this principle must be taken into account as a comprehensive theory of religious cognition and evolution.

Jains, in support of their views have taken the help of logic and divided their logical theory of *Naya* into two separate categories, like- *Dravyarthika* and *Paryavarthika Naya*. The former considers an object in the light of the *Dravya* (substance), but the later keeps in view of *paryaya* and *upadhi* of the object concerned and both have their specific logic. S.L. Pandey in his “*Nayavada and Many-valued Logic*” opined that there are resemblances between the Logic of *Naya* with Lukasiewiczian three valued logic by exploiting the distinction between *Pramana Naya* and *Dur-Naya*. Thus *Pramana* and *Naya* are two very important conceptions of Jaina Logic and Epistemology. Ishwarachandra Sharma gives a detailed account of the controversy amongst Jaina Acaryas and scholars and discussed conceptual foundation of *Pramana* and *Naya*. He concludes that *Naya* arises from *Pramana* and is the nature of *Pramana* rather than *Savdapramana*. In jaina logic it is called *Naya* for distinguishing it from *kevaljnana* and *srutajnana*.<sup>12</sup> To understand *syadvada* we will have to accept the knowledge of *saptabhengi naya* (the doctrine of seven fold paralogsims). *Nayavāda* (Skt., *naya*, ‘viewpoints’) has a very distinctive position in Jain philosophy, it is basically the doctrine of relative pluralism and it has specific benefit to ascertain the pluralistic views of truth. This doctrine is unique in the sense that it is a process of analysis which asserts that all viewpoints are only partial expressions of the truth and all have specific value to ascertain the truth.

The logical system of *saptabhinginaya* has seven distinct semantic predicates which bears seven different truth values. In Jaina logic it has distinctive position to ascertain relativistic truth. The sevenfold sentence which constitutes the *syadvada* is well known in the Jaina literature as follows:

1. *syad asti eva* (a thing is existent).
2. *syad nasty eva* (a thing is nonexistent in different perspectives)
3. *syad asti eva syad nasty eva* (a thing is both existent and nonexistent due to the position of perceptible agent).

4. *syad avaktavyam eva* (a thing is indescribable in seeing the contradictory aspects of things).
5. *syad nasty eva* ( a thing is nonexistent by arguments)
6. *syad asty eva syad nasty eva* ( a thing is existent and nonexistent both by arguments)
7. *syad asty eva syad nasty eva syad avaktavyam eva* (a thing is existent ,nonexistent and indescribable by arguments).

This *saptabhanginaya* is an assertion of existence of a thing to eliminate *ekantikata* (one-sidedness) and was fully against non-violence. On the basis of our above discussion it is very relevant to ascertain truth thorough the logic of *saptabhanginaya*. Thus, on the basis of this logic any proposition can be viewed and analyzed in various sub-sets. The positivity and negativity of the proposition might occur in contextual basis which is ascertained by the Jaina logician from the time immemorial.

Mahavira as a champion of *Ahimsa* (non-violence) has carried out this concept of *Ahimsa* from the domain of practical behavior as well as to the domain of intellectual and philosophical discussion. Jaina *anekantavada* is logical initiative to honor the contradictory views of the opponents concerning the reality/ truth. It also gives respects to other views and which is the sign of intellectual toleration too. One who follows *Anekāntavāda* can never dislike others views and understanding others in following this nonexclusivistic view. Thus, according to Lord Mahavira non-violence was the goal and *Anekāntavāda* is to be treated as the tool to lead peaceful life without hampering others views. *Jains, therefore,* encourages its adherents to consider this *anekantavadi* views and beliefs of their rivals and opposing parties to avoid dogmatism and bigotries as well. This principle of *Anekāntavāda* may apply in religion and philosophy to eliminate rivalry in our lives.<sup>13</sup> it is evident that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was also an ardent follower of *anekantavada* and in following it he applied this principle in his entire life of *ahimsa and satyagraha*.<sup>14</sup> Jainism through its *Anekānta* theory teaches us that all affirmations can

be true under certain circumstances and limitations, therefore relativistic view is much more logical than the absolutistic view to ascertain Reality/truth and also to combat violence in the society. Therefore, it is still highly relevant to save this present degenerated world.

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