

SPEECH RHYTHM AS POETIC DEVICE IN ROBERT FROST'S NARRATIVE POEMS

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ABSTRACT

This project is a study of Speech Rhythm As Poetic Device with special reference to Robert Frost's Narrative poems.

Chapter 1 : Deals with the characteristic features of twentieth century American poetry focusing Robert Frost as a

prominent poet of that age.

- Chapter 2 : Analyses the formative New England influences which shape Frost's poetry, making it appear picturesque.
- Chapter 3 : Discusses different techniques adopted by Frost to portray human experiences in his poem, bringing about a harmony between men and nature.
- Chapter 4 : Throws light on the descriptive and narrative style of Frost which model him as one of the leading poets of America.

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CHAPTER - 1

THE POET'S VOICE IN THE MODERN WORLD

Frost was the epitome of the benevolent farmer-sage, a type of ideal regional figure whose communions with Nature purified him and raised him to the status of a seer but whose total humility rendered him approachable to all. (Cerber 39).

Robert Frost is the most celebrated and widely read American Poets. Frost holds a unique and almost isolated place in American Letters. His career fully spans the modern period and it is impossible to speak of him as anything other than a modern poet. Frost has been praised as a classical poet. Like many of his contemporaries he is an Emersonian Romantic. He is a poet of the minor theme, the casual approach and the discreetly eccentric attitude.

American literature in the twentieth century is a research for the ideal, a research lighted and directed by hope and expectation.

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This research has been persistently a part of the entire history of the literature of America. Twentieth century literature indicates concern and compassion in its analysis and evolution. Intolerable injustices social blindness, or brutalizing conditions are brought before the public conscience by the writers of the twentieth century. A trust in man is

apparent in the social and political fabric of America and it is reflected in the literature of this period. The decade of nineteenth century American poetry reached its zenith and a number of able practitioners and poets of ability like Robert Frost, E.A.Robinson, Carl Sandburg, T.S.Eliot and Ezra Pound came into prominence.

Robert Frost was born on March 26, 1874 in San Francisco, California. At the age of ten when his father died he returned to New England. His great grandfather supported him financially. He attended Dartmouth College for a few weeks. However Frost's independent spirit rebelled against both the regime of College discipline and the feeling of dependence for support. He went to

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work. He was a bobbin boy in a mill worker in a shoe factory,

reporter in a newspaper, farmer and a country school teacher. He married in 1895, attended Harvard College for two years and then settled to farming and writing poems. Failing to support his family with four children, Frost began to teach at Pinkerton Academy, and then at new Hampshire State Normal School. He sold his farm in 1912 and went to England. At the age of forty he published North of Boston (1914). Earlier he had published A Boy's Will (1913), Mountain Interval (1916) and New Hampshire (1923). Frost's poems are mostly gathered in his Complete poems (1949).

Frost's best poems explore the fundamental question of existence depicting the facts of life. His settings and subjects are usually the landscapes and folk of New England. He is considered as a Farmer poet. His love for the soil, his intimate knowledge of country things, and his rejection of industrial civilizations are his special values which appeal to his readers.

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Frost enchanted American people and won a special place

in their hearts. His charm enlightened by his manner of seeming to be natural, direct and confiding in all forms of communications. He is more than an American poet, he is more than a New Englander, he is a poet who can be understood anywhere by readers. Frost's country is the country of human sense, of experience of imagination and of thought. Through his poems Frost presents a world, which is wild as it is wide, a dangerous world hard to live in yet the familiar world than all can love for its good and bad things, intelligible as well as unintelligible. Man's experience in the world is portrayed by Frost, realistically.

In his poetry Frost avoids poetic diction. He used only words of his own, always striving to be natural and sincere. His blank verse is nearly the normal blank verse with only a few changes of his own. He endeavours to be straight forward in his work, and he strips off all the unwanted things, except the theme.

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Frost is a nature poet in the tradition of Wordsworth. Nature is his subject but not an impulse. Frost thinks New Englandly to fill his eclogues with new England characters and tone of voice. His best poetry is concerned with the drama of man in nature. In all his poems, Frost is describing the animal and vegetable natures in man not reading man's nature into the animal and vegetable world's. when Frost talks directly to or with natural objects, he is really looking at man out of the corner of his eyes and speaking to them out of the corner of his mouth. He embraced the problem of the common man. He enjoys a wide appeal because of the diverse and effective use of symbolism in his poetry. Frost's work is almost photographic. The pictures, the characters and language are reproduced directly from life; they are burnt into his mind as though it is a sensitive plate. He gives out what has been put into his mind, unchanged by any personal mental process. His imagination is bound by what he has seen; he is always confined within the limits of his experience. Frost writes as a man under the spell of fixed ideas. His poetry is a constant search for absoluteness. The appeal finally of all his poems is neither to the brain nor to the ear but beneath the graceful image there speaks a greatness of

soul.

The poetry of Frost begins in delight and ends in wisdom. Integrity and sureness are brought into his poetry. By the

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arrangement of words and choice of words, Frost is able to attain the effects of humour, pathos, hysteria and in fact all the effects. His poetry mirrors basic psychological oppositions and his art is truly mimetic.

Pre-eminently Frost's poetry is a farmers poetry. His familiarity with nature and with objects is not that of an observer or a spectator but that of a man who has worked with them and used them. His acquaintance with them is more intimate and more instinctive than that of an onlooker. Frost's work is severely restricted by bonds of his own nature. His poetry is a poetry of exclusions, of limitations, not only in area and in localism but equally in temperament. His poetry has little music, little delight for the senses and little glow of warm feelings. He introduces his readers not into a world rich in colour, sound, taste and smell but a world mainly black and white, and grey, etched in with acid in deep shadow and fine lines with sharp edges, lighted up with a fitful radiance as of a

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starlight. Frost's poetry brings in a new element of thought and experience and a new trait of phraseology.

Robert Frost is the spokesman of his people. His poems are like those plants which flourish in the earth of the broad plains and valleys but will not strike roots in more rarefied atmosphere. There is cheerfulness in his poetry and it is the result of his looking so deep into the tragic meanings of life. He protects himself by cultivating a deliberately, superficial folliness, in order to bear the

unbearable. Frost wears the comic mask of a whittling rustic in order to gaze into the tragic abyss of desperation. Frost's characters are protagonists who again and again are made to face their fact of individualism. They undergo changes in the modern world but they still retain their identity as an individual. Frost's protagonists refuse to live in the modern world.

The verse of Frost is one of the finest. He creates his own, extraordinary, flat, unpoetic variant of the conversational idiom. He restricts himself to the homeliest diction, to words which have one or

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two syllables. Thus his themes generally appeal much to his readers. He deals with exhaustion of living, the sense of imminent danger, personal isolation and the need of communication in his poems. Frost examines nature very closely. He depicts Nature faithfully and often fuses his ideas with his feelings. His poetry reveals a diversion between the imagist and the commentators, between the man who is involved and the man who observes, between the naturalist and the rationalist. Frost's poetry is a "Fresh Vitality without recourse to the facts and limitations of modern experimental techniques" (Thompson 7). Frost pays attention to truth as well as to comprehension and clarity of expressions. "This man has the good sense to speak naturally and to paint the thing, the thing as he sees it" (Pound 170).

In a period of extreme experimentation with form, Frost continued to write in simple conversational style. His style is so simple and understandable that there is no difficulty in comprehending the meaning which he tries to bring out in his poems. Frost's writings

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often leads the reader to the poet's most striking effects. Though his style is flexible, musical and natural, he tries to depict reality which evokes irony and ambiguity.

The feeling of being drawn into the depths, the sensation of being lured by elusive perspectives arises in us when we read Robert Frost's poetry for the first time, a feeling which keeps growing in us as we keep reading and absorbing it. . . . Frost reproduces reality in such a manner that the very scene presented to our view entices us bit by bit and then involves us completely. (Sinyavsky 174)

Frost's poem depict New England life in traditional verse

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and a seemingly simple style. His lyric style is simple yet it evokes feelings of fear, isolation lostness, and discontinuity. The flavour of New England life is seen in all his narrative poems. Frost is a poet by gift, countryman by nature and a frequent explorer of wilderness by choice. In each and every poem, right from short lyrics to longer dramatic blank verse, the poet's gift is visible everywhere. Basically all his poems are narrative and dramatic in structure. The colour of New England life is truly depicted in all the narrative poems of Frost. His major themes are isolation and alienation. A conflict exists between man nature. The tragic view of life is projected in all the narratives. In some poems like "After Apple Picking" and "Birches", the voice of the poet is heard throughout. In certain narratives like "Home Burial", "The Death of the Hired Man", dialogue is used in which two speakers speak. Through the narrative poems, Frost has established himself as a man filled with the milk of human kindness. Man in society is pictured in all narrative poems.

Frost is a poet who tells a story or pictures a character

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and the use of his poetic line gives it a clarity that is made sharper by its brevity. He never holds back true feelings for fear of giving rein to false. Frost has been variously identified as classical poet, a symbolist, a poet in the pastoral tradition, a revisionist, a spiritual drifter, a diversionist, and an ordinary man. A poet with speculative interest in ideas, Frost is referred to as a metaphysical lyricist. Robert Frost enchanted American people and won a deservedly special place in their hearts.

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CHAPTER - 2

BLEAK NEW ENGLAND'S FIRST POET

Frost is recognised as one of the foremost American Poets of the twentieth century.

The setting of his poems is predominantly the rural landscapes of New England, his poetic language is the language of the common man. (Lowell 223).

Robert Frost is the voice of New England. The setting for most of his narratives is the rural landscapes of New England. He makes use of the speech of common man of in his poems. He makes his New England universal in meaning and implication. In his ability to portray the local truth in nature, he has no peer. Frost writes on rural subjects which is partly the product of the Romantic sentimentalization of Nature.

Robert Frost's is pre-eminently a farmer's

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poetry. His familiarity with nature and with objects is not for all his deservedly famous observation, that of an observer or spectator, but that of a man who has

worked with them and used them. His acquaintance with them is more intimate and more intuitive than that of an onlooker. (Whipple 110)

Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, though his ancestry was of New England. During his early years in America, while teaching or trying to work in a farm, he immersed himself in English and classical literature. In his middle years he went to the land of The Golden Treasury, New England. The turning point of Frost's life occurred when he went to England. Here he made the reputation that enabled him to continue his career as a poet. In England he met many poets; Lascalles Abercrombie, Rupert Brooke, Wilfred Wilson Gibson and

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Edward Thomas. Frost learnt from them to abandon the conversational language of the late Victorians and to use his own speech for poetry. It was in England that Frost launched himself as a poet, publishing his first two books A Boy's Will and North of Boston.

Frost's New England is an image of his own awareness of the social history of people and a landscape. His New England is not occupied by savages or puritans, but it is inhabited by men. The poet literally enters this abandoned landscape, human landscape, because it has been not only explored but also experienced. Robert Frost is primarily a poet of the rural world, chiefly concerned with his native place, New Hampshire. The beauty of New England had grandeur of its own and it enchanted Frost. His themes are about life and landscapes of New England. In A Boy's Will he gives a vivid description of the varied aspects of New England countryside. Frost identified himself with Nature. The woods play a curious part in Frost's Nature Poetry. The response of Frost to Nature is a

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sympathetic form of worship.

Not imitation or playing of these things
would content him, he loves the earnest
of the North wind, of rain, of stone,
of wood and iron. A beauty not explicable
is dearer than a beauty which we can
see to the end of. It is nature the
symbol, nature certifying the supernatural
body over flowered by life which he
worships with coarse but sincere rites.

(Emerson 138)

Frost is deeply rooted in the New England tradition. It is this fact which keeps him away from the influence of his predecessors and his contemporaries. But he has certainly inherited the healthy habit of the Romantics, that of going back to Nature. He approaches Nature, with a fresh mind and tries to see it in the right perspective.

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Nature's spell was irresistible. The craggy, rocky, woody places, particularly in New Hampshire drew him close to them as if they had a spell. Nature inspired him to write poetry.

The pastoralism of the New England poems represent Frost's development in his way of thinking. This is implicit in many of his poems. When *North of Boston* is compared with *A Boy's Will*, it is clear that the poet found his true medium, when he discovered New England. *A Boy's Will* gives glimpses of what is to come but his second book *North of Boston* portrays regional life in its earnest form and it shows his mastery over the pastoral form. The sudden maturing of his pastoralism is accompanied by a simultaneous maturing in his treatment of Nature.

The language used in Frost's poetry is the language drawn

primarily from the vernacular. He avoided artificial poetic diction by employing the accent of a soft spoken New Englander. Frost feels that a poet's ear must be sensitive to the voice in order to capture with

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the written word the significance of sound in the spoken word. The poem "The Death of the hired Man" for instance is a dialogue, which is written in the natural spoken language of New England folk. This narrative poem represents human situation. "The Death of the Hired Man" represents Frost at his best because he wrote it in the natural speech of New England.

Frost's work is photographic. The pictures he creates through his poems and the characters depicted are reproduced directly from the life which is seen around him. Readers can visualise an orchard after reading his poem "After Apple Picking" and imagine springs in a farmyard in "Two Tramps in Mud Time". The background of nature is seen in almost all his poems. In the narrative poem "Birches", the poet gives a realistic description of the Birch trees. A birch tree, an axe helve, a wood pile are objects of Nature, which inspire Frost to write. Ultimately all his poems are packed with rich meaning.

The setting for the narrative poem "Stopping by woods

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on a snowy Evening" is perfectly New England. Through this poem he depicts a man riding through dark woods. The snow falling on a house in the village is picturesque. The speech used by the speaker is the language spoken in the north of Boston. Frost's landscapes and contain something which is more than just an imitation of life and a copying of nature. At the same time the metaphysical essence of nature and existence which he abstracts from everyday life surrounding him are always seen in Frost.

Frost's poetry is deeply rooted in the soil of reality. Poetry and prose, abstract philosophy and sober everyday occurrences

are closely interwoven in his poetry. The poet philosopher Frost prefers to contemplate its origins. He looks at the depth of things not merely at their spectacular sparkling surfaces. His whole art sounds in fact like an invitation to a walk along an old familiar country road, where behind every apparent trifle a new miracle is waiting to be revealed. In the narrative poem "Mending Wall" the poet depicts reality in such a way that the very scene presented to the view of the reader

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entices them bit by bit and then involves them completely.

The actions of an ordinary man are depicted in Frost's poetry. He is totally aware of the farms and the folks of New England and still he has managed to get an individualistic, fairly optimistic, thoroughly American philosophy out of it. No other poet has written so well about the actions of ordinary man. His wonderful monologues and dramatic narratives have evolved out of the knowledge he had of people. Frost appears in the guise of a gentle nature poet who writes poems which the common man can understand, poems free from the dreadful complexities and allusions found in modern poetry. He chose a landscape which does not have anything storied in it, it is a landscape which is not poetic but Frost tried to depict facts and truths through it. His poetry is more often of the country than of the city. It stands as a reminder of rural life as a resource and a recourse. It is considered as a symbol of man taking his rise from individuality and seclusion. The poem "The Death of the Hired Man" portrays human experience with its sensation and its emotions and its knowledge of

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good and evil. This poem drives home the truth that as man grows he understands himself more and of others too. He begins to respect others more.

Mr. Frost writes as a man under a spell
of fixed idea. He is as racial as his
own puppets. One of the greatest interests

of the books is the uncompromising New
Englander it reveals. Mr. Frost is as New
England as Burns in scotch, Synge Irish
or Mistral Provençal. (Lowell 222)

Frost's New England is an image of his own awareness of
people and landscape. Men depicted in his poems compromise and
bargain with nature through a series of prudent gestures and
questions. The human situation as Frost presents, remain relatively,
solitary, simple and anti-social. The remoteness and calculated simplicity
of the rural world transform Frost's New England into a symbolic
vista. Frost's Style is familiar and it reflects the genuine new thoughts

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of the poet. The poems of Frost are mostly written in blank verse.
The language suggests the hardness and roughness of New England
granite. It is halting and maimed like the life it portrays. Frost's poems
reveal a disease which is eating into the vitals of New England life,
at least in its rural communities. There is no rare and vivid
imaginative force playing over his subjects or any exotic music pulsing
through his verse. His words are simple, straight forward and direct.
This elemental quality in all his poems will be lost if he chooses to
pursue niceties of phrase. Frost's poetry goes back to early American
Farm life partaking of a pastoral feeling which in turn forms his style.

Frost is a nature poet in the tradition of Wordsworth.
Nature is his subject. His poetry is concerned with the drama of man
in nature.

His poetry is rock like, not ebullient;
quiet, not wild; factual, not hallucinated;
solid, not evanescent, relevant to things

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not creating a dream world; rational,
not ariel; given to quatrains, couplets

other set forms, not inventing new
measures; recording men deep and
sure, not strange and high. (Eberhart 228)

Frost speaks directly to the object of Nature. He feels a kind of brotherhood for Natural objects. Frost began to make his style approximate to that of conversation. In the narrative poems like “The Death of the Hired Man”, “Home Burial”, “After Apple Picking” conversational style is used. His characters are usually discovered in isolated rather than in social situations. The solitary protagonist in “After Apple Picking”, the women portrayed in “Home Burial”, the hired man in “The Death of the Hired Man” all experience loneliness and isolation.

The poet thus deals with human experience in words. Conversational style adds on to his reputation. With the background of nature, Frost depicts a harmony between man and nature in all his

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narrative poems. His love for his countrymen is revealed in all his poems. He embraced the problems of the common man. Frost’s poetry goes back to the early American Farm life. He was integrated with life of his times and his nation. He pays a close attention to the most ordinary things and he clearly focuses on the actual and concrete situation in his narratives. His poems establish connections between man and nature, body and soul and they demonstrate reality. In all his narrative poems, New England is placed in the background and a prominent position is occupied by human beings. It is undoubtedly his narrative poems which made Frost a master in American poetry.

CHAPTER - 4
AMERICA'S GIFTED POET

Poetry is described as a workshop whose walls are lined with pegs holding tools of the craft. Few poets master every implement. A poet is expected to select the tools appropriate to the artifice he wishes to create and to excel in wielding these with some measure of dexterity. A close look at the poems of Frost reveals that he is a poet and a craftsman. Twentieth century is dominated by prose writers and a few poets but from coast to coast, Robert Frost's poetry is read by readers. Like the glaciers of Everest, Frost's snow crowned head was marking the horizons. Thus he soared above all other poets.

"Frost's poetry is defined as a game or play with the view to highlight the notion of delight implicit in the art of poetic creation, which is spontaneous but not straight and is almost unpredictable" (Tripathi 1). Concentration upon Nature, deep reverence for it and the use of natural objects in his poetry is obviously seen. Frost's position in American letters is firmly rooted. In the years before his death, he came to be considered as a poet laureate of the United States. On his seventy fifth birthday, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution in his honour which said "His poems have helped to guide American thought and honour and wisdom, setting forth to our views a reliable representation of ourselves and of all men" (Shepley 188). Robert Frost has been awarded more official and

academic honours than any other living poet. He was twice made the Master of Arts, three times Doctor of Humanities and twelve times Doctor of letters. He has been awarded four Pulitzer prizes.

Frost carves his poetry out of experience. Frost is a poet-Philosopher who preferred to walk through the world and observe life closely. He looks into the depth of things. His whole art looks like an invitation to walk along an old familiar country road where behind every apparent trifle, a new meaning and miracle is waiting to be revealed. Frost's major topics are the personal experiences. His treatment of them is usually whimsical, sentimental and evasive. Individual man is small, lost and unimportant in the midst of a vast and changing universe. His style combines descriptive precision, great concentration of meaning, free from decoration and irrelevancy.

Narrative poems are his memorable works. The troubled human society is pictured in his

poems. The readers are made to listen and watch human society closely through his poems. Man is the central theme in all his poems. Frost's New England landscape, spare, hard and unyielding is an extended metaphor which expresses desolation of man. In Frost's poems the central person or dramatic voice speaking in the poem finds ways to live in that desolation. Frost fashions the state of New Hampshire in front of his readers. It is a quarry of inexhaustible resources from which Frost draws his themes from. The problem which he deals with in his poetry is relatively new and is still the concern of modern thought.

In the narratives of Frost nature is an image of the whole world of

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circumstances within which man finds himself. Narrative poems deal with the human situation. Each individual must discover his individuality by restoring order through his art, whatever that art may be - whether it be splitting of birch logs or making of axe helms. Each man must reveal a form which is indwelling in the material with which he works. Man's tendency is to bring in an order to the chaos found in this world. Frost's view of man's nature is consistent throughout his poetry. Temperamentally Frost's poetry is rooted very much in New England soil. There is always a cooling touch of humour and irony too present in his poems.

Frost is not only an observer of rural New England, but he is the spokesman of the entire region. Frost's regional reputation has always been his practical experience on a farm in New Hampshire. North of Boston portrays rural life and evokes a specific observer located in his regional setting who plays various roles, and conveys various feelings, like isolation and alienation. Frost achieved artistic depth and complexity because his poetry deals with experience of man. The social world pictured in his narrative poems is composed of men and women who struggle unsuccessfully to live and work, together. As a skillful poet, Frost treats his regional material with verve and originality. He is an expert in producing better verses of homogenous variety than any other poet. He played endless varieties of the same tune. His poems are rural in a highly moralized way.

Frost produced finely crafted work that is technically impressive and pleasant. Each of Frost's great poems explores human condition, the experience of an individual located in New England who struggles to find a meaning to his life. All his narratives reveal the fact that Frost made the best use of his literary

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gifts and his extraordinary imagination, his special sensibility to life in New England and his insight into human nature. His style combines descriptive precision with great concentration of meaning. Frost

excelled in narratives because he used blank verse which reads quickly, easily and naturally. With blank verse he produced verses which had the hardness of New England granite. Life is his dictionary and it provided him with new themes. He creates poems from the store house of observations. His ideas and details entwine together to produce poetry. Frost imagines and visualizes man always cradled within nature, totally immersed in environment.

Robert Frost's success in England, his return to America upon the outbreak of the First world war combined to establish him prominently in the literary scene. When Frost left for England, America was deaf to his work and when he returned after two and half years, America hailed him as one of the highest promises in a renaissance. Robert Frost has been the most widely known and perhaps the most fully appreciated American poet of the twentieth century. He set out to lodge a few poems and he ended up by lodging himself in the hearts of his countrymen as an American Symbol.

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