

Archaeological Exploration of the Santok Drainage Basin in Jaithari Tehsil, Anuppur District, (M.P.)

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Abstract: The Santok Nala is a small tributary of the Son River, flowing through the Jaithari Tehsil of Anuppur District in Madhya Pradesh. The objective of this research is to conduct a survey, documentation, and cultural analysis of the archaeological sites situated within the Santok drainage basin. During regional explorations, various sites yielded stone tools, manufacturing waste (debitage), brick fragments, pottery shards, and terracotta toys. The recovered antiquities indicate that this region has been a significant centre of human activity since prehistoric times. Among the stone tools and remains, implements anddebitage fashioned from chert, jasper, chalcedony, and other local rocks were found, pointing toward a local tradition of tool manufacturing. Furthermore, the presence of pottery fragments provides evidence of subsequent historical or early agrarian communities residing in the area. The distribution of archaeological evidence was primarily observed along the banks of the stream, river terraces, alluvial deposits, and near water sources, highlighting a close relationship between human settlement and resource utilization. Cultural continuity persisted within the Santok drainage basin, making this area vital for studying the prehistoric and early historical cultures of the Son Valley. This exploration provides a foundational framework for the archaeological mapping of the region, the reconstruction of its cultural sequence, and future detailed research.

Keywords: Archaeological, Exploration, Lithics, Mesolithic, Pottery, Prehistoric, Santoknala, Terracotta, Tools,

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INTRODUCTION

River valleys have long been the cradles of human civilization and the foundational grounds for cultural development. Archaeological studies enable the reconstruction of different phases of human history. The Son River Valley is one of the most prominent archaeological landscapes in Central India, preserving evidence of cultural continuity from prehistoric human activities to the historical period. The Son River Valley within Anuppur district stands as a crucial archaeological unit, where evidence ranges from prehistoric stone cultures to historical settlements. Around the banks of the Son River and its confluences with various streams—at locations such as Kotmi, Padaur, Dhurvasin, and along

the banks of the Kevai River at Sonmohda, Shivilahra, and Gambhirwa Tola numerous stone tools, human settlements, pottery, and the ruins of temples and sculptures have been discovered. These provide significant proof of cultural continuity. Consequently, the systematic archaeological survey and excavation of the Son River Valley have been, and will continue to be, immensely helpful in reconstructing the cultural history of Central India.

Anuppur district is a vital geographical and cultural zone in Central India, where numerous traces of prehistoric and historical human activities are found along the margins of the Son River and its tributaries. The Santok Nala, located in Jaithari Tehsil, is an important component of the Son River system; however, systematic archaeological surveys in this specific area have been relatively sparse. As a result, information regarding its cultural traditions, human settlements, and ancient lifestyles remains limited. The recovery of stone tools, pottery shards, brick fragments, toys, historical structures, and other antiquities from the Santok Nala area indicates that this region served as a hub of human activity from prehistoric times through the historical era. Thus, an archaeological study of the Santok Nala drainage system is essential not only for reconstructing local history but also holds immense significance for understanding the prehistoric and historical cultural traditions of Central India.

Jaithari Tehsil is situated in the southeastern part of the Anuppur district in Madhya Pradesh. Rich in natural resources, this region lies within the Maikal mountain range and the catchment area of the Son River, making it highly significant from an archaeological perspective. Stone tools from various periods, pottery remains, and other cultural evidences have been recovered from here, which aid in studying human settlement and cultural evolution. The Santok Nala is a minor tributary of the Son River. It originates and flows through the forested and sloping terrains of the Jaithari region. It is formed between the villages of Kanai Tola and Padariya, where small water springs and field run-offs converge. It joins other small seasonal streams between Choi and Kukurgoda, flowing from the southeast to the northwest in accordance with the local topographical slope. It finally merges into the Son River system at a place called Bhavarda, located between Pataura and Belhatola. From its source to its confluence, several small water sources like Kariya Pani, Gohondra, Chintahi, and Chuhira ensure a perennial flow of water at various points along the Santok Nala. Alluvial deposits, gravel-rich sediments, and various geomorphological surfaces are found on both banks of the stream. The presence of archaeological remains has been recorded on these very surfaces, making this area important for the study of prehistoric human activities. During the survey conducted in the Santok drainage basin, various types of stone tools—such as blades, cores, flakes, scrapers, points, lunates, and borers—along with pottery items including pitchers, bowls, shallow plates, bricks, lamps, pitchers (surahi), and toys were discovered. This indicates that the area was a centre of human activity since prehistoric times. The availability of resources near the streams and favourable environmental conditions encouraged human settlement.

The primary objectives are to conduct a systematic survey and exploration of the archaeological sites in the Santok drainage basin, discovering prehistoric cultural remains along the banks of the stream and its tributaries. Identifying new sites will highlight archaeological potentials and assist in preserving local cultural heritage. The antiquities collected during the survey, such as lithic tools and pottery, will be analysed based on their morphology, manufacturing techniques, utility, and chronological determination. This will help identify different cultural phases and understand the nature of human activities. Based on the archaeological evidence recovered from the Santok drainage basin, a comparative study of the antiquities from different periods will be carried out to determine when human habitation began in the area and how cultural transformations occurred over time. This will

facilitate an understanding of the gradual evolution of prehistoric culture. Through these objectives, the ultimate goal of this research is to comprehensively study the archaeological and cultural heritage of the Santok drainage basin to understand ancient human history, cultural development, and the process of environmental adaptation. This study will contribute significantly to understanding the archaeological landscape of the Son River Valley and Central India.

The present study is based on an archaeological survey conducted along the coastal/bank zones of the Santok Nala, a tributary of the Son River located in Jaithari Tehsil, Anuppur District, Madhya Pradesh. To begin the study, a preliminary reconnaissance of the area was conducted to identify potential archaeological sites. Following this, a systematic pedestrian survey (foot survey) was carried out on both banks of the Santok Nala and the adjacent elevated terrains. During the survey, surface antiquities such as stone tools, flakes, cores, pottery shards, and other cultural remains were documented. The geographical coordinates of each site were recorded, and photographs of the locations were taken. The recovered antiquities were classified based on their raw material, manufacturing technique, size, and functional characteristics.

A pedestrian survey method was adopted for discovering the archaeological sites. A direct inspection of the entire drainage basin of the Santok Nala and its tributaries was carried out. Riverbanks, elevated terrains, natural mounds, agricultural fields, and eroded areas were closely examined by walking along designated transects to inspect the ground surface minutely. During this process, a systematic photographic record of each site and recovered antiquity was maintained. The geographical location, surface structure, positioning of antiquities, and the surrounding natural environment of the sites were thoroughly documented. The photographs obtained serve as authentic evidence for the research. A selective surface collection of antiquities scattered on the ground was performed. During collection, the site, context, and position of each object were recorded. This primarily included stone tools, pottery fragments, and other cultural materials. The collected items were numbered and secured to facilitate a comparative study.

CLASSIFICATION OF STONE TOOLS

A. Core: Core, Core-residue, Multidirectional core, Discoidal core

B. Flake: Simple flake, Retouched flake, Scraper

C. Microlithic: Blade, Bladelet, Backed blade, Point, Borer, Lunate, Geometric microlith

The techno-typological analysis of the stone tool assemblage represents a developed microlithic industry. The manufacturing of cores, flakes, blades, bladelets, backed blades, scrapers, points, borers, and geometric microliths in the collection was predominantly carried out on fine-grained siliceous rocks such as chert, chalcedony, jasper, and quartz. These materials were widely utilized by prehistoric communities due to their excellent conchoidal fracture properties.

The cores exhibit multidirectional and occasionally unidirectional striking platforms. The direct percussion technique was utilized to detach flakes and blades from the cores. Some cores display distinct negative flake scars, demonstrating the process of chronological flake reduction. This feature points toward a developed core-flake tradition.

The flake tools show evidence of both primary and secondary modifications. Marginal retouch is observable on the working edges of several flakes, adapting them for specific purposes. Some flake tools can be classified as side scrapers and end scrapers. These were likely used for processing animal hides, woodworking, and other daily tasks.

The substantial quantity of blades and bladelet tools indicates a developed blade-based technology. The length of the blades is greater than their width, and their lateral edges are roughly parallel. Several blades show evidence of backing on the dorsal margin, transforming them into backed blades or backed bladelets. This technique is considered a primary hallmark of the Mesolithic tool tradition. Such tools were generally used as composite tools, hafted into wooden or bone shafts. Some tools have a sharp and symmetrical apex, classifying them as points or projectile points. These were likely utilized for hunting activities. Similarly, some narrow and pointed tools fall under the category of borers or drills, which were used for perforating leather, wood, or bone.

The geometric microliths include tools like lunates, triangles, and possibly trapeze variants. This category of tools is recognized as a distinctive diagnostic marker of the Indian Mesolithic cultural tradition and was used in making composite hunting gear. The quality of the raw materials used and the developed retouched technique on the tools demonstrate that the toolmakers possessed substantial knowledge of lithic properties. Chert and chalcedony were chosen specifically for their controlled fracturing qualities. The fine and regular retouch observed on the tools reflects high technical proficiency.

Based on typology, technology, and raw material analysis, this tool collection appears to be associated with the Mesolithic cultural tradition of Central India. The presence of blade-based technology, backed microliths, geometric microliths, and advanced retaking sets it apart from the Upper Paleolithic tradition, establishing it as a well-developed Mesolithic industry. In the Indian subcontinent, such technological features are generally dated between 12000 BCE and 4000 BCE.

Thus, the presented stone tool collection represents a highly developed microlithic tool tradition, containing all the major elements of core-flake technology, blade-based production systems, and geometric microlithic traditions. This collection offers vital archaeological evidence of the technical efficiency, hunting-based economy, and advanced resource exploitation strategies of the region's prehistoric human communities.

CLASSIFICATION OF POTTERY

1. Rim shards
2. Body shards
3. Base shards
4. Decorated shards
5. Black-slipped shards
6. Pottery discs
7. Terracotta balls
8. Shallow plates (Dish)

The study of the pottery remains clarifies that they belong primarily to the Red Ware Tradition. The clay used in fabrication is well-kneaded and mixed with sand, mica, and fine mineral particles. Most of the vessels are handmade, while some are wheel-made, and they appear to have been fired at medium to high temperatures. Their color ranges from red, ochre, and reddish-brown to dull grey at certain places. The recovered remains can be divided into the following categories based on morphology, utility, and manufacturing style:

Rim Shards: Most recovered rims are everted with rounded, thick edges. These appear to be remnants of shallow dishes, bowls, and open-mouthed domestic vessels. The thickness and structure of the rims suggest they were used for serving food and daily household chores.

Body Shards: The largest portion of the collection consists of body shards. These are broken wall fragments of vessels. Their surface is generally coarse, and some fragments clearly show wheel-turning marks. This indicates that the vessels were manufactured using early pottery techniques.

Base Shards: The base shards are flat and relatively thick. Such bases were designed to keep the vessels stable. Based on these bases, it can be inferred that the assemblage included dishes, bowls, and small storage vessels.

Decorated Ware: Parallel lines, grooved decorations, and oblique incised patterns are visible on the decorated pottery. Such decorated wares held social and cultural significance alongside regular utility, reflecting the artistic skill and aesthetic sense of the contemporary potters.

Black Slipped Ware: A black surface slip is visible on these shards. It can be categorized under Black Slipped Ware. This group represents a relatively refined pottery tradition and indicates vessels intended for specific uses.

Pottery Discs: These appear to have been made by cutting and grinding broken fragments of vessels. At Indian archaeological sites, such discs were used as gaming objects, ornaments, or for other auxiliary functions. Similar pottery discs have been discovered in large quantities during excavations at Gambhirwa Tola.

Terracotta Balls: These might have been used for games, ritualistic activities, domestic purposes, or as pellets for hunting. Their exact utility can be determined based on contextual evidence.

Shallow Dish: Based on the recovered rim, body, and base shards, a shallow plate/dish can be reconstructed. Its estimated diameter is approximately 24 cm, height 4 cm, and thickness ranges from 0.6 to 0.8 cm. Its rim is slightly everted, and the base is flat. It was likely used for serving food, storing items, or for religious rituals.

The comprehensive study of the pottery indicates that these are primarily remnants of vessels related to domestic utility. Among these, dishes, bowls, and other open-mouthed vessels are prominent. Most vessels fall under the ordinary Red Ware category, though some decorated and black-slipped examples were also retrieved. The manufacturing techniques—coexisting handmade and wheel-made types—the reddish-brown colour, limited decoration, and the form of the vessels represent an early pottery manufacturing tradition. From a cultural perspective, this collection presents significant evidence regarding daily life, dietary arrangements, storage systems, and local craftsmanship. Based on the available characteristics, this material shares similarities with the pottery traditions ranging from the Early Historical to the Medieval period.

The pottery antiquities obtained from the Santok drainage area were compared with those recovered from the Gambhirwa Tola archaeological site on the banks of the Kevai River. The comparative study reveals cultural similarities along with some variations; the excessive coarseness of the pottery here points toward an early, predominantly handmade pottery tradition. This has aided in understanding the cultural status of the study area within a regional context.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological explorations conducted in the Santok drainage basin clearly indicate that this region has been a continuous and significant center of human activity from the prehistoric period through the

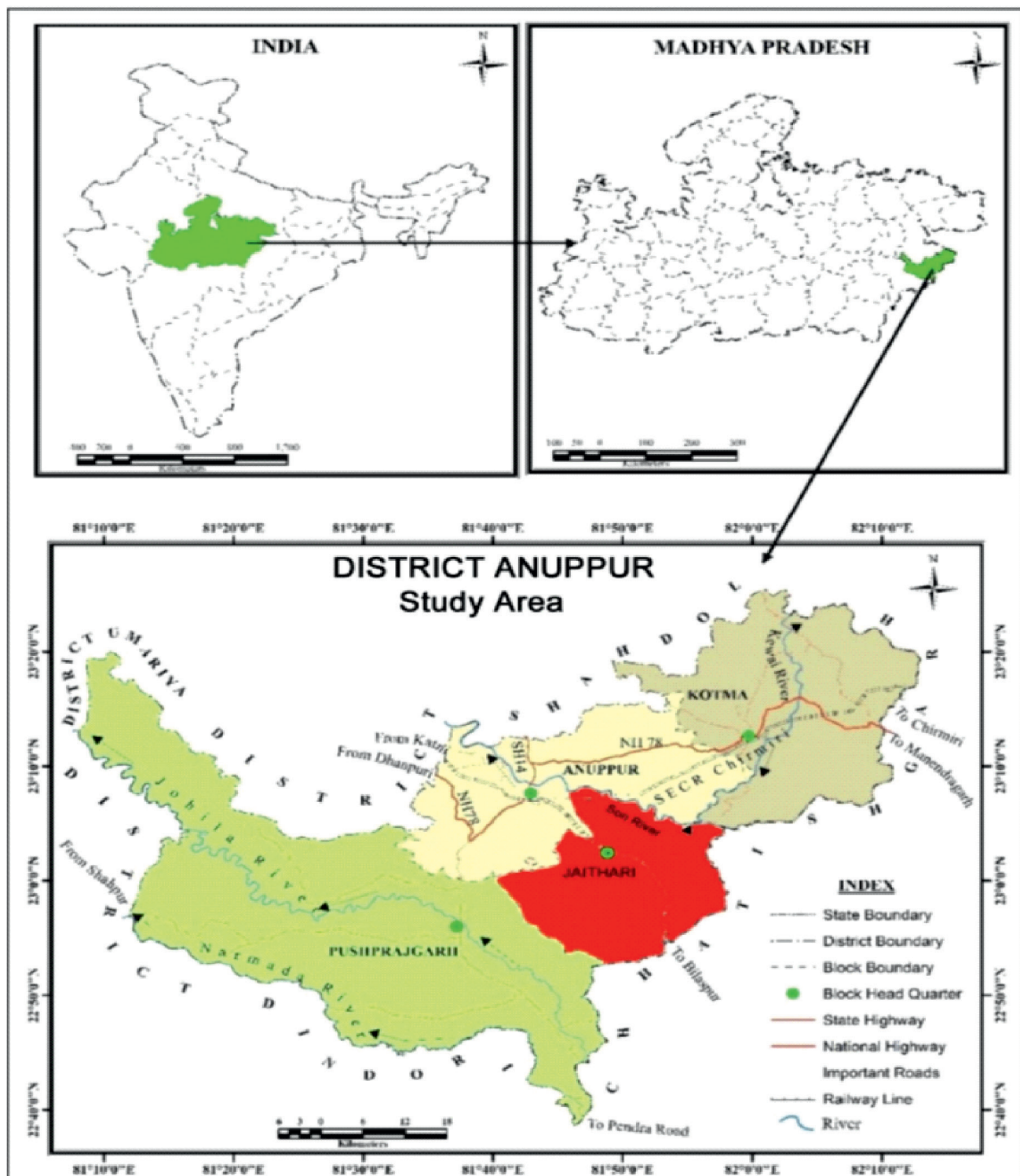


Fig. I: Location map of Anuppur District

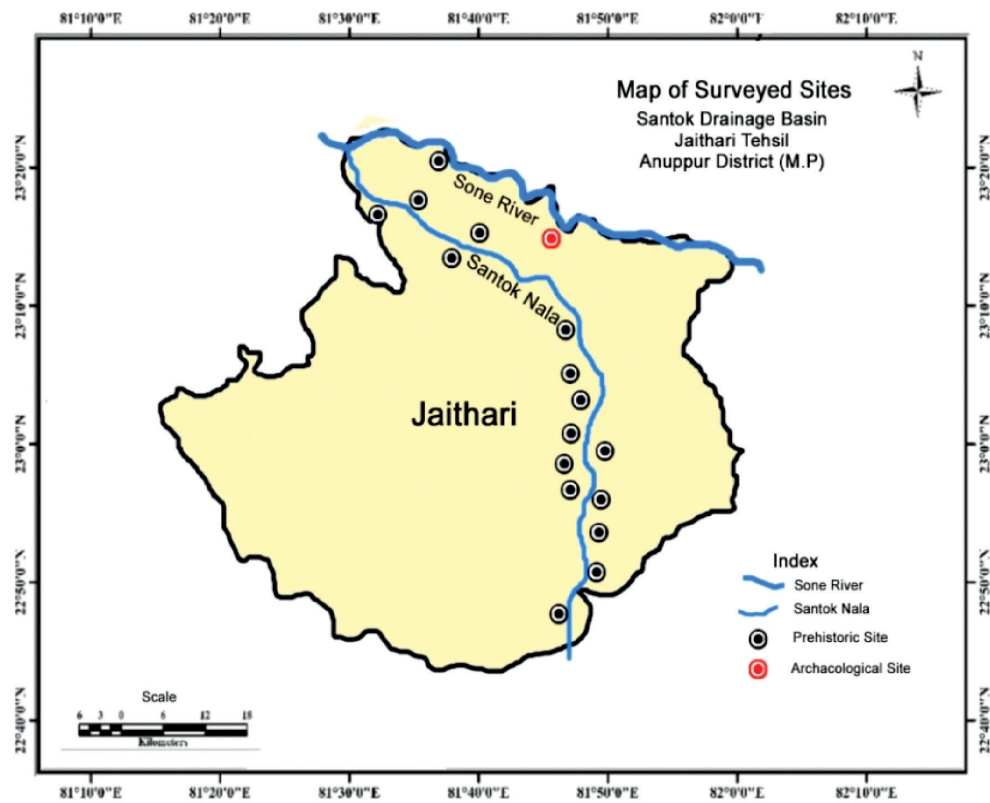


Fig. II: Study Area Map



Fig. III: Microlithic tools



Fig. IV: Microlithic tools



Fig. V: Microlithic tools



Fig. VI: Pottery



Fig. VII: Pottery



Fig. VIII: Terracotta Plate

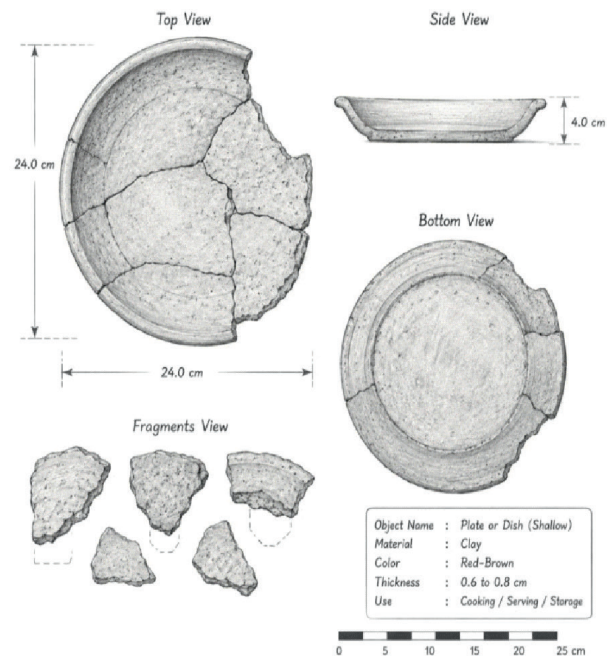


Fig. IX: Terracotta Plate Drawing

historical and medieval eras. The stone tools, debitage, pottery shards, bricks, terracotta objects, and other cultural remains recovered during the survey validate the long-term cultural sequence of the region. Among the lithic tools, the presence of cores, flakes, blades, backed blades, points, scrapers, borers, and geometric microliths indicates a developed Mesolithic tradition. Concurrently, the utilization of local raw materials like chert, jasper, chalcedony, and quartz points to a robust local tradition of tool fabrication. The study of pottery remains reveals the presence of the Red Ware tradition, black-slipped vessels, and decorated pottery, pointing toward cultural activities spanning from the Early Historical to the medieval period. The distribution of antiquities was primarily clustered near stream banks, alluvial deposits, and water sources, highlighting the close nexus between human settlements and natural resources. The comparative study with Gambhirwa Tola and other archaeological sites of the Son Valley further elucidates the cultural continuity and regional importance of the Santok drainage basin. Therefore, this study is not only instrumental in reconstructing the ancient history of the Anuppur district but also makes a vital contribution to understanding the prehistoric and early historical cultural frameworks of Central India. Future detailed excavations and scientific analyses will further clarify the precise cultural stratigraphy and sequence of this region.

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