



A critical appraisal on distinctive therapeutic utility of *Haritaki* (*Terminalia Chebula* Retz.) mentioned in Bhavaprakash Nighantu

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Abstract

Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.) is one of the most widely used medicinal herbs in Indian, Thai, Tibetan and Iranian traditional systems of medicine. *Haritaki* with its clinical efficacy in numerous medical conditions forms the main crux of Ayurvedic Materia Medica. It is such a wonder drug that Ayurveda have in its quiver which can be used in preventive, curative and also rejuvenative purposes of the treatment. Description of *Haritaki* along with its properties and therapeutic attributes can be seen in almost all the ancient texts of Ayurveda but Acharya Bhavamishra in his book 'Bhavaprakash Nighantu' has proclaimed for the first time the complete profile of *Haritaki* with regards to its origin, varieties, tastes-secondary tastes, different names, characteristics, external features, properties and medicinal uses. Distinctive therapeutic profile of *Haritaki* which includes use of *Samskarit* (processed) *Haritaki*, use of *Haritaki* with different adjuvants, use of *Haritaki* with regards to food intake and use of *Haritaki* as a *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) therapy has been explained meticulously in Bhavaprakash Nighantu. In view of the unparalleled utility of *Haritaki* in Ayurvedic Pharmacopeia, a literature review has been carried out in the present article which focuses mainly on different distinctive therapeutic usages of *Haritaki* in different contexts as mentioned in Bhavaprakash Nighantu.

Keywords: bhavaprakash nighantu, *haritaki*, *ritu haritaki*, *terminalia chebula* retz, therapeutic utility

Introduction

Numerous medicinal herbs are mentioned in ancient Ayurveda classics which constitute the main content of Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia. *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.), also known as 'King of Medicines' is one of the wonder drugs Ayurveda have in its quiver. The dried fruit of *Haritaki* known as Chebulic myrobalan is most widely used drug in traditional medicines. *Haritaki* is commonly known as *Harad* in Hindi, Myrobalan in English, *Hirda* in Marathi, *Hirido* in Gujrati, *Kadukkai* in Tamil and *Katukka* in Malayalam [1]. Although description about *Haritaki* is found scattered in various ancient texts of Ayurveda, a detailed profile of *Haritaki* has been elaborated in Bhavaprakash Nighantu- an ancient glossary of medicinal herbs written by Acharya Bhavamishra in 16th century AD. The three ancient texts viz. Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya are known as the greater trio of Ayurveda treatises while the lesser trio is comprised of Bhavaprakash Samhita, Madhava Nidana and Sharangadhara Samhita. Out of these Bhavaprakash is an important and pivotal text of Ayurvedic pharmacology. Bhavaprakash Samhita is composed of three volumes namely, *Purva Khanda*, *Madhyama Khanda* and *Uttara Khanda*. *Purva Khanda* again is divided in two sections, *Pratham Bhaga* and *Dwitiya Bhaga*. In *Pratham Bhaga*, 24 *Vargas* have been described which constitute the *Nighantu* part of Bhavaprakash Samhita. Description of *Haritaki* is elaborated in *Haritakyadi Varga* which is the second *Varga* of this *Nighantu*. Total 85 herbs and 6 groups of herbs are described; amongst them *Haritaki* have been given first and foremost place in *Haritakyadi Varga*. The nomenclature of

this *Varga* itself is based on the drug '*Haritaki*'. Acharya Bhavamishra has mentioned different therapeutic forms of *Haritaki* those can be used in different clinical conditions. Considering the unparalleled utility of *Haritaki* in Ayurvedic Materia Medica, it was felt essential to elaborate the different distinctive therapeutic usages of *Haritaki* in different contexts as mentioned in Bhavaprakash Nighantu and the present article is an attempt in this direction.

Materials and Methods

The present review is primarily based on the description of therapeutic utilities of *Haritaki* given in Bhavaprakash Nighantu. Relevant materials and information have also been collected from Ayurveda classics like Charaka Samhita, Sushruta Samhita and Ashtanga Hridaya. Various research articles related to *Haritaki* and its medicinal uses have also been reviewed. The obtained data was compiled; screened, reorganized and critically analysed which was later presented in this article with reasoning and interpretation.

Observations and Discussion

Haritaki - a wonder drug of Ayurveda

Haritaki has been regarded as a wonder drug of Ayurveda for its properties to prevent and cure diseases. It has enjoyed the prime place among medicinal herbs used in India since ancient times. *Haritaki* is one of the most widely used medicinal herbs in Indian, Thai, Tibetan and Iranian traditional systems of medicine [2, 3]. *Haritaki* fruit is used traditionally as a folklore medicine in the treatment of fever,

cough, diarrhoea, skin disorders, candidiasis, urinary tract infections and wound infections by tribals in various parts of India [4]. All the classical texts of Ayurveda have expounded the medicinal properties of *Haritaki*. Acharya Charaka has described *Haritaki* as a superior drug producing wholesome effects in human body (*Haritaki Pathyanam*) [5]. Owing to the *Ayushya* (life promoting), *Paushtiki* (tonic), *Vayahsthapana* (sustenance of youthfulness) properties of *Haritaki*, Charaka has regarded *Haritaki* as *Amritakalpa* (having properties of nectar) [6]. Sushruta has adorned *Haritaki* as the best of elixirs which improves intellectual faculties, rejuvenates the exhausted body frame and invigorates the sense organs soothingly [7]. According to Vagbhata, *Haritaki* along with its disease alleviating actions also improves intelligence, maintains youthfulness, bestows long life and strengthens the mind and sense organs [8].

Table 1: Seven varieties of *Haritaki* along with their attributes [10]

Sr No	Variety	Habitat	Characteristics	Therapeutic uses
1	<i>Vijaya</i>	Vindhya mountains	Fruit resembles round gourd, oval in shape	Useful in all kinds of diseases
2	<i>Chetaki</i>	Himalayas	Fruit has three ridges on it	Preferable for converting into powder and used as indicated
3	<i>Putana</i>	Sindh region	Fruit is less bulky having small seed inside	Useful for external application
4	<i>Rohini</i>	Paithana region (Maharashtra)	Fruit is round in shape	Useful in wounds
5	<i>Amrita</i>	Champaranya region (Bihar)	Fruit is bulky with thick hard pulp	Useful in purificatory measures as a purgative
6	<i>Abhaya</i>	Champaranya region (Bihar)	Fruit has five ridges on it	Useful in eye diseases
7	<i>Jivanti</i>	Saurashtra region (Gujarat)	Golden yellow coloured fruit	Useful in all kinds of diseases

General properties and therapeutic uses of *Haritaki*

According to Acharya Bhavamishra, *Haritaki* possesses five tastes viz. *Madhura* (sweet), *Amla* (sour), *Katu* (pungent), *Tikta* (bitter) and *Kashaya* (astringent). It is devoid of *Lavana* (salty) taste. *Haritaki* is *Tuvara Param* (very astringent), *Ruksha* (dry, causes dryness) in nature and *Ushna* (hot) in potency. It produces *Madhura Vipaka* (sweet taste) at the end of digestion [11].

Haritaki stimulates digestive fire, rejuvenates and stoutens the body. Its consumption is good for intelligence and also for eyesight. It is easily digestible and initiates downward movement of faeces, flatus, urine etc. *Haritaki* is effective in dyspnoea, cough, diabetes, haemorrhoids, leprosy and other skin diseases, ascites, worms, hoarseness of voice, diseases of the duodenum, constipation, intermittent fever, abdominal tumour, flatulence, thirst, vomiting, hiccup, itching, heart diseases, jaundice, colic, diseases of the spleen and liver, renal calculus, dysuria and retention of urine [12]. *Haritaki* mitigates *Pitta* and *Kapha* by virtue of its *Madhura*, *Tikta* and *Kashaya* tastes. It mitigates *Vata* by *Katu*, *Kashaya* and *Amla* tastes. A suspicion may arise here as how it will not cause aggravation of *Pitta* and *Vata* by its *Katu* and *Amla* tastes? Acharya Bhavamishra has given the answer for this as *Prabhava* (special action) is the factor responsible for mitigation of all the three *Doshas* by *Haritaki* [13].

Explaining the *Prabhava* of *Haritaki*, Bhavamishra has cited various examples. E.g. *Danti* (*Baliospermum montanum* Muell.) and *Chitraka* (*Plumbago zeylanica* Linn.), though both are having similar *Rasa*, *Virya* and *Vipaka*, *Danti* is a purgative whereas *Chitraka* is not so. Likewise despite having similar properties, *Dhatri* (*Emblica officinalis* Gaertn.) kindles the digestion process whereas *Lakucha* (*Artocarpus lakoocha* Roxb.) not. These examples indicate that there is a special or peculiar action of a drug though its *Rasa* etc. properties are similar to another drug. Bhavamishra opines that this peculiar action is to be considered as born from *Prabhava* of that drug. *Haritaki*

In Bhavaprakash Nighantu, Acharya Bhavamishra has proclaimed the complete profile of *Haritaki* with regards to its *Utpatti* (origin), *Jati* (varieties), *Rasa-Uparasa* (tastes-secondary tastes), *Nama* (different names), *Lakshana* (characteristics), *Varna* (external features), *Guna* (properties) and *Prayoga* (medicinal uses).

Haritaki in Bhavaprakash Nighantu

In Bhavaprakash Nighantu, total seven varieties of *Haritaki* have been mentioned along with their origins, characteristics and medicinal uses which are depicted in Table 1. The variety *Vijaya* has been considered as best amongst these as it is having its effectiveness in almost all kinds of diseases (*Sarvarogeshu Shasyate*) and it functions smoothly i.e. without any harm (*Sulabha-Sukhaprayoga*) [9].

also has this peculiar action called *Prabhava* thus mitigating all the three *Doshas* [14].

Distinctive therapeutic profile of *Haritaki*: A unique contribution of Bhavaprakash to Ayurvedic Pharmacopoeia

Variation in medicinal uses of *Haritaki* by virtue of different *Samskaras* applied

Haritaki when consumed by chewing it in the mouth, enhances the digestive fire i.e. *Agni*. *Haritaki* consumed in paste form helps in smooth evacuation of *Mala* (faeces) whereas when used in steamed form it acts as *Samgrahi* (withholds movements, absorbs all moisture thus causes constipation). *Haritaki* mitigates all the three *Doshas* when used in fried form [15]. Here *Haritaki* is common and only the *Samskara* (process through which some transformation is brought to the original properties of any substance) is variable. This variation with *Samskara* as the root cause can be rationally deduced with the help of *Pancamahabhuta Siddhanta*. Usually *Guna-Karma* of any *Dravya* depends on conjugation and configuration of *Mahabhutas* present in it. This Pharmacology can be modified with *Samskaras* due to alteration in *Panchabhautika* composition. A clear cut understanding of the *Samskaras* with the exposition of *Pancamahabhuta* will give the physician, an advantage of confidently using same *Dravya Haritaki* for different therapeutic indications. Here the difference in therapeutic action of *Haritaki* by virtue of various *Samskaras* applied on it is because of alteration in its *Panchabhautika* conjugation and configuration leading to alteration in its *Gunas*.

Variation in medicinal uses of *Haritaki* administered at different timings with regards to food.

Haritaki when consumed along with food stimulates intelligence and strength of sense organs. Also it mitigates *Kapha* and *Vata* and causes smooth elimination of urine, faeces and other wastes from the body. *Haritaki* when administered after meals quickly pacifies the unwanted/bad

effects of food and drinks consumed. It also alleviates the disorders caused by vitiation of *Vata* and *Kapha* when taken after meals [16]. Thus effect of food on therapeutic properties of *Haritaki* is clearly mentioned by Acharya Bhavamishra.

Variation in medicinal uses of *Haritaki* administered along with different adjuvants

Haritaki when consumed along with *Lavana* (rock salt) cures diseases manifested due to vitiation of *Kapha*, when consumed with *Sharkara* (sugar) it cures diseases manifested due to vitiation of *Pitta*. *Haritaki* administered along with *Ghrta* alleviates diseases of *Vata* and when given with *Guda* (jaggery) it can cure all kinds of diseases [17]. This variation in medicinal uses of *Haritaki* can be attributed to the combined effect of *Haritaki* and the drug given along with it. The individual properties of *Lavana*, *Sharkara*, *Ghrta* and *Guda* are depicted in Table 2.

Ritu *Haritaki*: *Haritaki* as a *Rasayana* (rejuvenation) drug

Rasayana (literal meaning- rejuvenation that which nourishes the channels) is the specialized treatment modality of Ayurveda which is enlisted among the eight Ayurvedic specialties. It deals with the study of medicines and measures which can act as *Vayahsthapana* (slowing the ageing process), *Ayuhkaram* (increasing life span), *Medhakaram* (improving intellectual functioning), *Balahkaram* (improving strength) and can treat the diseases as well [18]. Acharya Charaka explicitly stated that *Rasayana* imparts longevity, memory, intelligence, freedom from illness, youthfulness, excellence of lustre, complexion and voice, optimum strength of physique and sense organs, perfection in deliberation, respectability and brilliance. *Rasayana* is the means of attaining excellent qualities of *Rasa* etc. *Dhatus* i.e. body cells and tissues [19].

There are three types of *Rasayana* in practice- *Medhya Rasayana* - *Shankhapushpi* (*Convolvulus pluricaulis* Chois.), *Mandukaparni* (*Centella asiatica* Linn.),

Guduchi (*Tinospora cordifolia* Willd.) etc. *Doshaghna Rasayana* - *Bhallataka* (*Semecarpus anacardium* Linn.), *Haritaki* (*Terminalia chebula* Retz.) etc. *Dhatu Rasayana* - *Ashwagandha* (*Withania somnifera* Dunal.), *Amalaki* (*Embllica officinalis* Gaertn.) etc. [20] *Haritaki* acts as a rejuvenator by detoxifying *Strotasas* (structural or functional channels in the body) and by cleaning various *Malas* (waste products) in the body. *Haritaki* shows its *Rasayana* effect when administered along with different adjuvants in different *Ritus* (seasons). Bhavamishra has advised six adjuvants to be given in six *Ritus* along with *Haritaki* which are depicted in Figure 1.

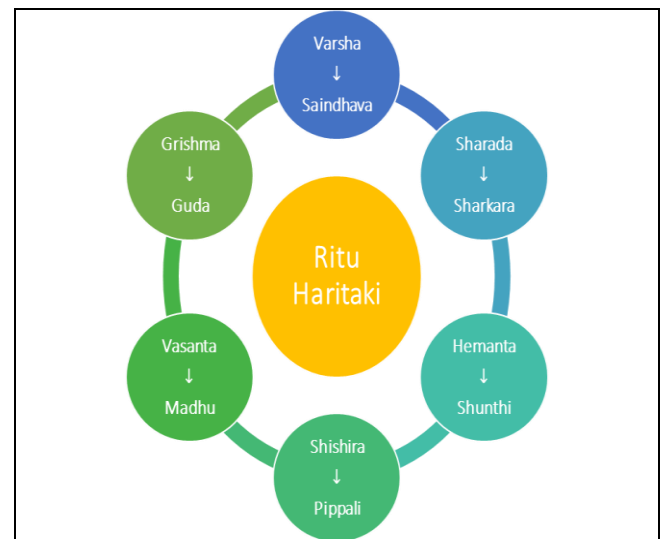


Fig 1: Ritu *Haritaki* protocol [21]

For understanding the rationality for choosing these adjuvants one has to analyse the properties of these adjuvants and also the predominance of *Doshas* and other factors like *Bala*, *Rasa* in those specific *Ritus* in which these adjuvants are recommended (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2: General properties and actions of six adjuvants recommended in Ritu *Haritaki* protocol

<i>Dravya</i>	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Guna</i>	<i>Virya</i>	<i>Vipaka</i>	<i>Karma</i>
<i>Saindhava</i> [22]	<i>Lavana</i>	<i>Laghu, Tikshna, Snigdha</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Tridoshahara, Rochaka, Deepana</i>
<i>Sharkara</i> [23]	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Guru, Snigdha</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Vata-Pittashamaka, Brimhana</i>
<i>Shunthi</i> [24]	<i>Katu</i>	<i>Laghu, Snigdha</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Vata-Kaphashamaka, Deepana, Vrishya</i>
<i>Pippali</i> [25]	<i>Katu</i>	<i>Laghu, Snigdha, Tikshna</i>	<i>Ushna</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Kapha-Pittashamaka, Deepana, Vrishya</i>
<i>Madhu</i> [26]	<i>Madhura, Kashaya</i>	<i>Laghu, Ruksha</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Tridoshashamaka, Deepana, Balya</i>
<i>Guda</i> [27]	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Guru, Snigdha</i>	<i>Sheeta</i>	<i>Madhura</i>	<i>Tridoshashamaka, Balya</i>

Table 3: Predominance of *Rasa*, *Bala* and *Dosha* in six *Ritus*

<i>Ritu</i>	<i>Rasa</i>	<i>Bala</i>	<i>Dosha</i>
<i>Varsha</i> [28]	<i>Amla</i> (sour)	<i>Alpa Bala</i> (reduced strength)	Aggravation of <i>Vata</i> , accumulation of <i>Pitta</i>
<i>Sharada</i> [29]	<i>Lavana</i> (salty)	<i>Madhyama Bala</i> (medium strength)	Aggravation of <i>Pitta</i> mitigation of <i>Vata</i>
<i>Hemanta</i> [30]	<i>Madhura</i> (sweet)	<i>Pravara Bala</i> (increased strength)	Accumulation of <i>Kapha</i> mitigation of <i>Pitta</i>
<i>Shishira</i> [31]	<i>Tikta</i>	<i>Pravara Bala</i> (increased strength)	Accumulation of <i>Kapha</i>
<i>Vasanta</i> [32]	<i>Kashaya</i>	<i>Madhyama Bala</i> (medium strength)	Aggravation of <i>Kapha</i>
<i>Grishma</i> [33]	<i>Katu</i>	<i>Alpa Bala</i> (reduced strength)	Accumulation of <i>Vata</i> and mitigation of <i>Kapha</i>

***Haritaki Rasayana* in *Varsha Ritu* (rainy season)**

Varsha Ritu is first season of *Visarga Kala* (debilitating period), during which *Amla Rasa* is predominant. *Agni* (digestive power) becomes *Vishama* (irregular) in this *Ritu* and *Bala* (strength) of the person is also less. Due to *Vishamagni* and *Amlata*, *Samchaya* (accumulation) of *Pitta* and *Prakopa* (aggravation) of *Vata* takes place. *Haritaki*

with *Saindhava Lavana* (rock salt) brings the *Sanchita Pitta* to equilibrium state due to *Laghu Guna* and *Madhura Vipaka* of both *Haritaki* and *Saindhava Lavana*. Due to its *Lavana Rasa*, *Snigdha Guna* (unctuousness), and *Madhura Vipaka*, *Saindhava Lavana* acts as *Vatashamaka*. On the other hand *Haritaki* acts as *Vata Shamaka* due to *Madhura-Amla Rasa*, *Ushna Virya* and *Madhura Vipaka*. When the

Vata and *Pitta* are brought to their equilibrium state, they ultimately enhance the *Agni* leading to improved metabolism, which is impaired due to *Vata Prakopa* and *Pitta Samchaya*. *Haritaki* and *Saindhava* act as appetizer, digestive and restore the strength of the person by their *Madhura Vipaka*.

Haritaki Rasayana in Sharada Ritu (autumn)

Sharada is second season of *Visarga Kala* during which *Lavana Rasa* is predominant. *Agni* becomes slightly *Tikshna* (increased) and *Bala* of the person is *Madhyam* (moderate) due to predominance of *Snigdha Guna* and *Lavana Rasa*. *Haritaki* with *Sharkara* (sugar candy) pacifies the aggravated *Pitta*, owing to its *Snigdha Guna*, *Madhura Rasa* and *Madhura Vipaka*. *Madhura Rasa*, *Madhura Vipaka* and *Sheeta Virya* of *Sharkara* prevent the further vitiation of *Pitta*. With enhancement in metabolism capacity of the body, *Bala* of person also gets enhanced.

Haritaki Rasayana in Hemanta Ritu (early winter)

Hemanta is the last season of *Visarga Kala*, during which the *Snigdha Guna* and *Madhura Rasa* are predominant. In this season the strength of the person is *Pravara* (good), the *Pitta* is in mitigating state and *Kapha* at its accumulating stage. *Haritaki* administered with *Shunti* (*Zingiber officinale* Roscoe.) mitigates the *Kapha* at its accumulating stage and prevents its aggravation. In combination with *Shunthi*, *Haritaki* also helps to bring back the *Pitta* to equilibrium state by its *Madhura Vipaka*. Also due to *Ushna Virya*, both stimulate the *Agni* (which gets impaired during vitiation of *Pitta*) leading to increased metabolism and *Bala*.

Haritaki Rasayana in Shishira Ritu (late winter)

Shishira Ritu is first season of *Adana Kala* (strengthening season) during which *Tikta Rasa* is predominant. Accumulation of *Kapha* takes place in this season. *Pippali* (*Piper longum* Linn.) which is considered as a good *Shleshmahara Dravya* (*Kapha* mitigating) when administered along with *Haritaki* in this season will prevent *Kapha* from its accumulation and aggravation owing to its *Katu Rasa*, *Laghu*, *Tikshna Guna* and *Ushna Virya*. The combination of *Haritaki* and *Pippali* maintains the equilibrium status of the *Doshas* leading to *Agni Samyata*, *Dhatu Samyata* (equilibrium state of *Agni* and body tissues) and ultimately leads to *Rasayana Karma*.

Haritaki Rasayana in Vasanta Ritu (spring)

Vasanta Ritu is second season of *Adana Kala* during which there is predominance of *Kashaya Rasa* and strength of person is reduced. The aggravation of *Kapha* takes place in this *Ritu*. To mitigate the aggravated *Kapha*, *Haritaki* should be taken with *Madhu* (honey) in this *Ritu*. The *Laghu*, *Ruksha Guna* and *Kashaya Rasa* of *Haritaki* and *Madhu* help to mitigate the aggravated *Kapha*. *Ushna Virya* of *Haritaki* also helps in alleviation of *Kapha*. Both *Haritaki* and *Madhu* are having *Madhura Vipaka* which will enhance the body strength i.e. *Bala*.

Haritaki Rasayana in Grishma Ritu (summer)

Grishma Ritu is the last season of *Adana Kala* during which there is predominance of *Katu Rasa* which considerably reduces the strength of a person. Accumulation of *Vata* takes place in this season. *Haritaki* when administered along with *Guda* (jaggery) will prevent the accumulation of *Vata*

by *Guru*, *Snigdha Gunas* and *Madhura Vipaka* of *Guda* and *Ushna Virya*, *Madhura Vipaka* of *Haritaki*. By this, it checks *Vata* from moving into further *Kriyakalas* (pathological stages). Combination of *Guda-Haritaki* also enhances *Agni* leading to enhanced metabolism and improvement in *Bala*.

The seasonal use of *Haritaki* as a rejuvenation therapy can be one of the cheapest and effective tools to elevate the health, detoxification of the body and keep oneself free from diseases. Considering the wide scope therapeutic utilities of *Haritaki*, Acharya Bhavamishra has rightly considered it as a divine herb which was incarnated on Earth from the drop of *Amrita* (nectar) [34].

Conclusion

Haritaki is one of the most widely used drugs in traditional medicines across the globe. With its wide scope utility in numerous medical conditions, it forms the main crux of Ayurvedic *Materia Medica*. Acharya Bhavamishra in his book 'Bhavaprakash Nighantu' has proclaimed the complete profile of *Haritaki* with special regards to its distinctive therapeutic utility in different forms. *Haritaki* is such a phenomenon herb that it has unique rejuvenative properties along with its disease alleviating actions. *Ritu Haritaki* protocol is a unique contribution of Bhavamishra to the Ayurvedic Pharmacopeia by which a physician can prescribe *Haritaki* as preventive, curative, and rejuvenative remedy in all the six seasons of a year.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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