

## CHAPTER -1 LOCATION AND HISTORY OF DARJEELING

### 1.1 Introduction:

*Darjyu Lyang*, or 'the land of God' or 'heaven earth' is believed to have given Darjeeling (Darjiling, after the 1981 census), the northern most district of the Indian state of West Bengal, its name. It is also believed that the name is a corrupted form of *Dorjee ling* of the Lamaist religion, 'Dorjee' the Celestial sceptre of double-headed thunderbolt and 'ling' or the land, and thus, literally means 'the land of the thunderbolt' after the famous Buddhist monastery, which stands atop the observatory hill and was known by the same name.

### 1.2. Location:

Darjeeling district is located between 26°31'05 "and 27°27'10 " north latitude and 88°53'00 " and 87°59'30" east longitude. The plains area of the district lies between 26°30' and 26°45' north and between 88° and 88°30' east. The hilly region of Darjeeling which is the subject of study lies between latitude 26°30'30 " to 27°8'45" north 88° and 88°56'15" east longitude. Darjeeling town is situated in the lower Himalayas in 27°3' north latitude and 88°16' east longitude. The total area of the district is 3254.7 sq km, while the hilly region covers an area of 2320 sq km. The district occupies 3.68% of the total area of West Bengal state. Out of the 943.6 sq km area falling in the terai and plains, 837.4 sq km area falls under the Siliguri sub-division. Among the four sub-divisions of the Darjeeling district, the hilly regions have the following area – Darjeeling 935.5 sq km, Kurseong 425.3 sq km and Kalimpong 1056.5 sq km.<sup>1</sup>

Darjeeling shares its boundaries with the international boundaries of Nepal in the west and Bhutan in the east. The state of Sikkim separated by the river Teesta forms its northern boundary while the districts of Jalpaiguri and Purnea of Bihar lies towards the south. The boundaries of Nepal, Sikkim and Darjeeling meet at the peak of Phalut (3600m) forming a tri junction. Another tri junction is formed at Rachela (at Tinsinmana 3100m) by the boundaries of Bhutan, Sikkim and Kalimpong. Excluding a part of the Siliguri subdivision the District of Darjeeling is exclusively mountainous with the

the altitudinal range varying from 132 m (at Sukna) to 3670m (Phalut). The altitude of the various hill ranges varies markedly and usually there is a distinct correlation between the altitude and vegetation. Thus altitude is one major factor that determines the range of distribution of different plant species and the associations that they form at different elevation ranges.<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1.1. shows the Location Map of the Study Area)

### 1.3. Vegetation:

Various scholars have put forth the classification of the vegetation of this region and it includes workers like Gamble(1875)<sup>3</sup>, Hooker(1906)<sup>4</sup>, and Bhujel (1996).<sup>5</sup> These authors have essentially classified the flora and vegetation according to altitudinal ranges, although they differ considerably in detail. Six major types of vegetation which are further subdivided to sub types can be recognized as shown by Table 1.1

**TABLE 1.1. VEGETATION TYPES IN THE DARJEELING DISTRICT**

Nos.	Vegetation types	Altitudinal ranges
1.	Tropical and plains	Plains to 800m
2.	Subtropical	800-1600m
3.	Temperate	1600m-2400m
4.	Cold temperate	2400-3200m
5.	Sub alpine	3200-4000m
6.	Alpine	4000 m and above

Source Bhujel, R.B. *Studies on the Dicotyledonous Flora of Darjeeling District*, Ph. D. Thesis, North Bengal University. 1996

A major portion of the Temperate and the Cold temperate forests have been cleared for cultivation and for plantations of tea, cinchona and cardamom.

### 1.4. Drainage and rivers:

The Teesta, a broad mountainous river with numerous shallows and rapids traverses a large part of the state of Sikkim and enters the district of Darjeeling at the point it meets with the Great Rangeet. Reyang, originating from Mahaldiram Reserve Forest (2438m), Peshok and Gail khola constitutes its main tributaries on the right bank after its entry

into the District of Darjeeling. The main tributary of Teesta is the Great Rangeet, which arises from the Pathong glacier and confluences with Teesta at the Teesta Bazar. It enters the district of Darjeeling at the point on the northern boundary where it receives the river Ramam arising from Singalila and Rangu arising from Senchal in Darjeeling on its right bank. Below the confluence the Teesta flows eastwards where it receives the Little Rangit from Darjeeling from where it enters the plains of North Bengal and finally joins the river Brahmaputra in Bangladesh.

The other important rivers of Darjeeling include, the Balason arising from the Ghoom saddle running south till it reaches the plains at an altitude of 304.8m and then turns south east and divides into two channels the New Balason and the Old Balason and subsequently joins the Mahanadi further south. It receives tributaries like Pulungdung khola, Rangbang Khola, the Marma khola, Dudhia khola on the right bank and Rinchingtong khola, Rakti khola, Rohini khola, Jor khola etc on the left. The Mahanadi has its source near the Mahaldiram Dime east of Kurseong and flows southeast receiving a few sizable right side tributaries the Siva khola being the most important one. Its left bank tributaries include the Jholi khola, the Jogi khola, Gulma khola Babu khola and Ghoramara khola. The Teesta and Jaldhakha form the western and eastern boundaries of the sub Division of Kalimpong. A number of rivers and tributaries originate in this sub-division the principal ones include the Lish which originates at the ridge of Pabringtar village and flows downwards receiving the Aml khola on the western side and Turungkhola on the east further southwards it is joined by the Phangkhola and Chunkhola near the Bagrakote Colliery and eventually joins the Teesta at the Kalagaiti Tea estate. The Gish is formed by the joining of two small rivelets, one originating below Lava and the other below the Chumang reserve forest. Ramthi and Lethi form the major tributaries of the river. The Neora originates from the Rechila Chawk just below the Rechila danda and joins the Thosum at the boundary of Thosum and Rechila. It then flows southwards and eventually joins the Teesta. The Relli originates in Khempong reserve forest below Lava-Algarah and runs along the southern boundary of Saihur reserve forest after which it is joined by the Pala and Lolley khola and moving southwards it joins the Rani khola. Murti originates in the Mo block south of Thosum hills flowing through the reserve forest and emerging in the Samsing area and eventually

joining the Jaldhaka river. Along with these, numerous small springs occur which meet to form small rivulets at the bottom of valleys.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.5. History:**

Darjeeling does not have a pre-colonial history for it was a creation or the projection of British colonial imperialism. Darjeeling like Simla or Ooty, was a peculiar feature of British India; no parallel to be found elsewhere. The colonial masters unable to cope with the heat and dust of the Indian plains came to the hills for seasonal relief. Darjeeling served as a summer capital for governmental business. It was a military headquarter as well as a place to relax, far away from the maddening crowd of the vast Indian plains. Moreover it also served as a base for launching commercial links with Central Asia.

The territories of the district of Darjeeling were acquired by the British government of India from two neighbouring states of Sikkim and Bhutan. Prior to the formation of the hill station of Darjeeling in 1835 it was actually a part of Sikkim. From the eighties of the eighteenth century to the early nineteenth century, Sikkim was invaded several times by the Gurkhas who seized power in Nepal. Disturbances in the northern frontier brought the British into the scene. From 1804 to 1812 relationship between Nepal and the British continued to deteriorate along the frontier till war was declared in November 1814. After an arduous campaign the British took possession of the whole country between the river Kali and the Sutluj, which had been annexed by Nepal. The treaty of Segauli in 1816 finally settled British relation with Nepal. It gave the British direct control of the Himalayan district of Kumaon and Garwal. The East India Company's relation with Sikkim may be traced to the Anglo-Nepalese war. Due to the strategic location of Sikkim the British had sought its help during the war. It included the hill regions east of the Mechi and part of the Terai between the Mechi and Teesta rivers.<sup>7</sup> In the eighteenth century Sikkim was engaged in warfare with Bhutan and Nepal. The Raja of Sikkim, Chador Namgyal (1700-1716) lost the territory to Bhutan in 1706, but re-conquered it by the closing decades of the eighteenth century. It was Nepal which overran Sikkim as far east as river Teesta.<sup>8</sup>

Nepal had to face another enemy the British whose expansion in the east led to border skirmishes between them and this eventually led to the Anglo-Nepal war of 1814 which was concluded by the Treaty of Segauli on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 1815 whereby Nepal ceded to the East India Company all its Sikkimese territories. By the treaty of Titalya of 10<sup>th</sup> February 1817, the whole country between the river Meechi and the Teesta (a vast tract of 4000 sq miles) was restored to Sikkim, and the sovereignty of the Raja of Sikkim was guaranteed by the Company. By this treaty the Company assumed the position of 'paramount power' in Sikkim the Raja being bound to refer to the arbitration of the British Government any disputes of his subjects and those of Nepal or any neighbouring state.<sup>9</sup> In 1828, disputes between Nepal and Sikkim led to arbitration of the British Government who ordered Captain Lloyd and Mr. J. W. Grant the Commercial Resident at Malda, an enthusiastic explorer of the Himalayan foothills to bring about a settlement. In February 1829 Lloyd was impressed by Darjeeling for the purpose of a sanatorium.<sup>10</sup> He urged the British Government to secure possession of such a strategically located place, commanding the doorway to the neighbouring countries of Nepal and Bhutan. For the nearest road to Lasha from the British territory lay through Darjeeling.<sup>11</sup> His views were supported by Captain Herbert, the Deputy Surveyor-General deputed by the Government. On the basis of their reports the Court of Directors approved of the project of having a sanitarium for invalids. Governor-General William Bentick ordered Major Lloyd to open negotiations on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 1835, offering land or money<sup>12</sup> and making the Raja understand that the British only wanted Darjeeling for a sanitarium.<sup>13</sup>

The Raja of Sikkim had a list of demands. He asked for an extension of the western boundary of Sikkim. The tax collector who owed him money was to be handed over to Sikkim and thirdly he asked for Dargong. The Government of India did not like the nature of the demands made by the Raja of Sikkim and asked Lloyd to stop negotiations but the Government was surprised that Major Lloyd did not follow the order and instead informed them that he was in possession of the deed of grant of Darjeeling. The British took over Darjeeling in August 1835. In December 1836 Lloyd and Chapman were sent for a year to make a report on Darjeeling and General Lloyd was made the Local Agent dealing with application for land plots. The settlements in Darjeeling grew from a few huts in 1836 to 60/70 locations by 1840. Relationship between the Company and

Sikkim deteriorated as Sikkim lost its right over the Lepchas settling as British subjects in Darjeeling.

In November 1849, Sir Joseph Dalton Hooker and Dr. Campbell the Superintendent were suddenly seized while travelling in Sikkim with the permission both of the Raja and the British Government. The Dewan of Sikkim wanted to pressurize Dr. Campbell to give up all escaped criminals and slaves of Sikkim. The Sikkimese Government was forced to release the British prisoners unconditionally on 24<sup>th</sup> December <sup>1849</sup> 1849. The British withdrew the grant of Rs. 6000 per annum to Sikkim, which was part of the settlement made earlier, and the Sikkimese terai was occupied. Thus Darjeeling covering an area of 640 sq miles was connected to British India .<sup>14</sup> Sikkim put a claim on the portion of territory lying to the north of the Ramman river and to the west of the Great Rangeet river. Sikkim was defeated and according to the treaty of 28<sup>th</sup> March 1861, Sikkim was forced to pay compensation for the losses incurred by the natives who had been disturbed by the Raja's men and the British troops. Sikkim was thus, flung open to free trade and travel. Travellers were guaranteed protection by the government.

Relationship with Sikkim was drawn out but the British still had to deal with the neighbouring kingdom of Bhutan. The Bhutanese were engaged in aggressive attacks on the frontier causing disturbances. In fact in 1862, British troops had to be mobilized at Dinapore in preparation of the Bhutanese attack. In 1863 Sir Ashley Eden the British envoy was sent to the Bhutan durbar, to demand restoration of the plundered territories but he was forced to sign a document by which the Bhutan Duars, on the Assam frontier was surrendered by the British. In order to re-annex the Bengal Duars the British sent an army in 1865 which conquered the territory and the humiliating treaty signed by Sir Ashley Eden was cancelled. Instead a new treaty was signed by which Bhutan Duars was ceded to the British in return for an annual subsidy. In 1886 Kalimpong was made a part of the Darjeeling district. Thus the formation of the district of Darjeeling was complete.

In shape the district resembled an irregular triangle of which the apex projected into the British territory, while the base rested in Sikkim. The district has retained its geographical

dimensions since 1886 but administrative placements kept on changing. Darjeeling was annexed to Rajshahi (now in Bangladesh) after 1850. In 1905 the region was placed in the Bhagalpur district of Bihar (Bengal, Bihar and Orissa then undivided) but was taken back to Rajshahi in 1912. The final annexure to West Bengal was an automatic incident in 1947 when India became independent. The present structure since then remains unaltered.

### **1.6. Migration to the Hills:**

Contrasting sharply to the vast Indian plains, Darjeeling a colonial creation served as a favoured retreat for the colonial authorities. It was a nook in the Himalayan colossus that drew immigrants from neighbouring countries like a magnet. They came in search of jobs some bringing their families, both men and women enticed by the stories heard from others about 'Muglan' or Darjeeling hills. The wave of immigrants included the soldiers, artisans, petty traders, shopkeepers, slaves, fugitives, labourers and domestic hands. It was a multiplicity of factors that brought them to the hills.

It must be pointed out that when the British first acquired the hills in 1835 it was almost entirely a forest comprising of a population of 100 Lepchas and Limbus. A picture of Darjeeling drawn in 1841 shows a scattered village on the slope of Birch Hill and Jalapahar ridge.<sup>15</sup> The Government made General Lloyd the local agent in charge of application for land mainly from the residents of Calcutta. The building of the Pankhabari road by the Executive Engineer and Superintendent of roads Lt. Robert Napier and the establishment of a staging bungalow at Mahaldiram and Pankhabari and a hotel each at Kurseong and Darjeeling led to gradual mushrooming of houses in Darjeeling. It served as an excellent sanatorium. By 1848, there were 70 locations or houses.<sup>16</sup>

The growth became rapid. Leading newspapers commented, 'the discovery of Darjeelling and the well accepted fact that it is justly entitled to be considered even in the light of a Providential blessing as to its climate, scenery and locality – the excitement that has been raised by it through the minds of the community – the positive public assurance that the government are now devoting their services intention to it as a station and sanatorium....for the establishment of an institution founded on the

principles, moral, religious, educational, of our proper proprietary grammar schools in England.....confined to the reception of children of the civil and military.....<sup>17</sup> Thus, Darjeeling served the colonial needs.

Rapid development of the new settlement was possible from 1840 due to the efforts of Dr. Campbell the first Superintendent who worked tirelessly for twenty-two years to attract the immigrants to work in the new colony. At this stage it was the Lepchas, Bhutias and the early Nepalese settlers, who gave up the 'jhum' cultivation' (shifting cultivation) with the introduction of settled cultivation and reservation of the forest. Land was leased out to the cultivators.<sup>18</sup> Encouragement was given to the settlers who received grants of the forest land. Campbell introduced a simple system of administration of justice well adapted to the character of the tribes; forced labour formerly in use was abolished and the various tribes of inhabitants were conciliated and settled in the hills. The British introduced new cash crops to the region like tea<sup>19</sup> and cinchona<sup>20</sup> along with new small scale industries like woodcutting, sawing etc. All this gave the natives a chance to settle down as plantation workers, road construction workers and cultivators. The clearance of forest lands and the opening of railways provided employment to many. This labour movement into the station became the precursor of a permanent settlement in the hills.<sup>21</sup>

Military and civil buildings made steady progress. Dr. Campbell was helped by the Government in establishing the water supply, post office, bazaar, jail and the sanatorium. Dr. Campbell watched over the territory with parental anxiety. His object was to inspire the aborigines with confidence in the British rule, to induce the neighbouring tribes to settle in the territory. The British needed the labour of the Indian men and women to lead a comfortable life. As Darjeeling grew more important, it attracted more immigrants from the plains and the neighbouring states.

Moreover Dr. Campbell's supervision led to the growth of trade and commerce which added a new dimension to the importance of Darjeeling as a centre of 'trans-frontier trade and an entrepot for Central Asian trade'<sup>22</sup> A sum of Rs. 30,000 was spent for building the market square.<sup>23</sup>The market grew steadily after the Darjeeling Municipality

was founded in 1850 which took upon the task of erecting stalls, slaughter houses, and creating avenues for trade. The Darjeeling Municipality recorded a population of 22407 in 1869.<sup>24</sup> To the Superintendent Campbell credit must be given for the development of Darjeeling by his 'personal character', 'administrative temper, deliberation and forethought', 'caution and foreberance.'<sup>25</sup>

Dr Campbell was also the pioneer to experiment with tea cultivation along with others like Dr. Withecombe, Major Crommelin and Mr. Jackson. The subsequent planting of tea resulted in the rapid progress of Darjeeling and the growth of population. Tea production was foreign to both Indians and Europeans but from 1833, seeds, plants and labourers from China were brought to India to work in experimental gardens and land was cheaply given on lease by the government for cultivation. The elevation, land and climate of Darjeeling were found suitable for tea cultivation. Tea production was vastly improved by Mr. Fooks, who experimented in growing tea bushes in rows keeping 3 feet distance between each bush.

By 1856 tea industry developed on an extensive scale thereby placing the industry on a solid footing of commercial enterprise. Between 1866 and 1874 the numbers of tea estates in Darjeeling hill was trebled, the area under cultivation increased by 82%. Tea labourers who were migrants from Nepal increased from 6859 in 1868 to 14019 in 1873, 19424 in 1874.<sup>26</sup> Darjeeling tea found markets abroad and the British encouraged tea planting in the hills. A part of the colonial discourse was to encourage immigration in the gardens along with the families so that the wives and children offered extra hands to help with the plantation and factory work in cheap rates. This kept them tied to 'an *invisible chain*' from which it was difficult for them to come out.

Moreover, the Nepalese from the hill area did not face any hazards of physical adaptation to this region. Table 1.2. gives an idea of the number of workers in the tea gardens in the District of Darjeeling.

**TABLE 1.2. NUMBER OF GARDENS, AREA UNDER CULTIVATION, OUTPUT AND EMPLOYMENT 1866- 1895.**

YEAR	NO. OF GARDENS	AREA UNDER CULTIVATION IN ACRES	OUT TURN OF TEA IN lbs.	NUMBER OF LABOURERS EMPLOYED
1866	39	10,392	433,715	N.A.*
1867	40	9,214	582,640	N.A.*
1868	44	10,067	851,549	6,859
1869	55	10,769	1278,869	7,445
1870	56	11,046	1689,186	8,347
1872	74	11,503	2938,626	12,361
1873	87	14,503	2956,710	14,019
1874	113	15,695	3927,911	19,424
1885	175	18,888	9090,298	N.A.*
1895	186	38,499	11714,551	N.A.*

SOURCE: FOR 1866-1874- HUNTER W.W.; 1877; - A STATISTICAL ACCOUNT OF BENGAL, p. 165 for 1885-1895 O'MALLEY L.S.S. ;1906; - BENGAL DISTRICT GAZETTERS; DARJEELING, p 74.

\*[ N.A. Data not available]

Like tea the colonial authorities regarded the entire hill area of Darjeeling west of the river Teesta a favourable zone for introduction of cinchona plantation due to suitable climate and cheap labour. In 1862 the Ranju valley at Lebong was chosen for cinchona plantation followed by Rambhi in 1876 and Rongchung in 1887. In 1893 the Namring valley came under cinchona plantation. The introduction of cinchona plantation at Mungpo attracted migrants from eastern Nepal and Sikkim who came in search of jobs. In Darjeeling District the local agricultural labourers and those from Nepal furnished a sturdy labouring force for these plantations. It was the Tagadharis followed by the Matwalis, a few Chettris, Rai and Limbus who migrated to work in these plantations.<sup>27</sup> The staple industry of tea and the great traffic moving up and down made it necessary to have a railroad. The opening of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in 1881 helped transport of goods and machinery for the tea factories. Railroad and road eased communication and many elite Indians came to enjoy their holidays in the hill stations. Darjeeling like Simla became an influential hill station for the British and their families, as well for the rich Indians.

The importance of Darjeeling as a military cantonment grew. British political interest in recruiting the Gorkhas preferably from their most martial tribes, to the British Indian army enhanced migration.<sup>28</sup> Kirantis had been recruited since 1828 in the

42<sup>nd</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup> and 44<sup>th</sup> Assam Regiment at Assam, Sikkim and Burma. From 1890s Rais and Limbus were also recruited. But the Nepal government was reluctant to allow British recruitment of soldiers from Nepal. The British had to adopt certain clandestine measures for getting them into their army. They sent agents for bringing them from Nepal and encouraged them to settle in the hill areas of Darjeeling, Sikkim, Shillong and Dehradun.<sup>29</sup> Some brought their families others married local girls and settled down in the hills. In another instance during the time of Jung Bahadur Rana a force of 6000 Limbus were conscripted and stationed at Kathmandu but the outbreak of cholera killed many of them. Families who dreaded conscription flocked to Darjeeling.<sup>30</sup>

Working along with the 'pull factors' mentioned above there were certain push factors that led to the large scale migration to Darjeeling hills. The increasing population in Nepal put pressure on land<sup>31</sup> although land was plentiful and the terai had yet to be reclaimed. Nevertheless there were several factors that made the cultivators unhappy. The landowners were intermediaries between the state and cultivators. He was a revenue farmer with a considerable socio-political and economic power with a right to evict tenants in the terai and western Nepal. In central Nepal the 'small plots of cultivable land were directly under the peasants but the tenurial right was confined to the actual use of the land. However the permanence of the peasants' tenure was undermined by reallocation of land under the *raibandi* system that constricted each lot to nothing more than a subsistence holding. They forfeited their rights only when they did not cultivate the land themselves and no family was allowed to keep excess land.<sup>32</sup> Destined to always remain an agricultural labour even if land was reclaimed the bitter cultivator preferred to migrate to neighbouring countries with his wife and children. Sometimes if the individual efforts made by peasants to reclaim cultivable land did not pay, the cultivator would take loans from private individuals with high rate of interest as high as 30%. The peasants fled from their lands and migrated to places outside Nepal.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the fragmented landholding, indebtedness, food deficiency acted as indigenous factors that led to an exodus from Nepal to the hill stations in India.<sup>34</sup>

The discriminatory system of justice in Nepal made many men and women fugitives who found an opportunity to start a new life in the hills of Darjeeling under British laws. Documents of 1834 proved that a Magar Mongoloid woman's nose was cut off and she was declared an outcast if she had killed her infant by a slave. If an Upadhyaya Brahman lady, committed the same crime, her face would be blackened and she would be expelled. Sexual contact between an Upadhyaya widow and a slave would result in death for the slave. If Magar criminals died, their property and land was confiscated hence their families were not spared. For a crime of polluting other Magars by distributing wine to them, posing as a Magar, an outcaste woman was ordered to be killed.<sup>35</sup>

The laws of Nepal differed for different caste. For sexual contact with the elder sister-in-law the Kirats, Limbu, Jumila were exempted but the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Sannyasis were to be declared an outcaste and exiled, the sexual organs of the Khasa, Rajput, Kshatriyas, Vaisya and Gurung-Ghale were to be mutilated, everything belonging to the Newar Sudras were to be confiscated while others like Damai, Sunwar, Kami, Sarki, Balami, Majhi, Tamangs and Chipangs were to be killed. The result of these strict rules was that many Nepalese ran away rather than face trial. Among the migrants the Kirats were in majority as they could not reconcile themselves to the Gorkhali conquest of their lands and many of them at the incitement of the Chinese rose up in arms in 1792. As fugitives they sought shelter in Darjeeling hills. One more factor that caused the exodus from Nepal to Darjeeling and Assam was the terrible practice of slavery. People were reduced to slaves on the charges of adultery. In many cases the woman's nose was slit and she was enslaved. This form of punishment was only for the women of low caste and the *matwali* tribes or Mongoloids.<sup>36</sup> Raper, an Englishman who visited Garwal in 1808, saw the sale of slaves at a Nepalese post leading to *Har-ka-Pir*. Many hundreds of these poor wretched of both sexes from 3 to 30 years of age were sold. Their price varied from Rs 10 to 100. A document of 1850 proves that a slave was gifted by a priest to his friend.<sup>37</sup> Slavery and bondage were common among the Magars and even little boys and girls were made bonded labourers by moneylenders till the debts were cleared by their parents. The socio-economic condition of the poor made this

system inevitable in Nepal. As a result these people fled to join the other migrants flocking to the hills of Darjeeling to lead a new life.

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