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HOUSING STANDARDS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON ISLAMIC AND TRADITIONAL STANDARDS IN BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Housing plays a critical role in the well-being of individuals and communities. It is not merely a physical shelter but a space where people live, grow, and connect with others. In various cultures, housing is shaped by unique social, religious, and ethical values that guide construction standards and design principles. In particular, Islamic and traditional housing standards offer distinct yet complementary perspectives on how the built environment should be structured, considering both value and ethical considerations. This article explores these two approaches to housing standards, with a focus on their underlying values and ethics, and their implications for the built environment.

Keywords: Islamic House, Privacy, Modesty, Ethical Values in Housing, Hospitality.

1. Introduction

Housing is one of the most basic needs of human life. It is not just a building made of bricks and cement but a place where people feel safe, comfortable, and connected. A home is where families live, grow, and create memories together. In Islam, the idea of housing

goes beyond just providing shelter. A house is seen as a gift from Allah and should be a place where people can rest, worship, and live in peace. It is a space where Islamic values like kindness, modesty, and fairness are practiced every day.

Islam teaches that a home should meet both physical and spiritual needs. It should be a place where people can relax after a long day, spend time with their family, and pray to Allah without interruptions. The Quran describes the home as a place of comfort and peace, saying:

"And Allah has made for you from your homes a place of rest..." (Quran 16:80).

Privacy is one of the most important principles in Islamic housing. A home must protect the privacy of the people living in it. For example, windows and doors should be placed in a way that prevents outsiders or neighbors from looking inside. This ensures that family life remains private and safe. Respecting the privacy of others is also an important value in Islam, and housing designs should reflect this.

Another important idea is simplicity. Islam encourages people to avoid showing off or wasting money on things they do not need. Homes should be designed to meet the family's basic needs without unnecessary luxury. A simple home does not mean a home without comfort. It means focusing on what is useful and avoiding things that are only meant to impress others. This is because Islam teaches that true happiness comes from faith and good relationships, not from material things.

Fairness is also a key value in Islamic housing. Islam teaches that everyone has a right to a safe and decent home. Housing should be available to all people, including those who are poor or in need. Acts of charity, like helping to build homes for the needy, are highly encouraged in Islam. At the same time, honesty and fairness should be practiced in buying, selling, or renting homes, ensuring that no one is cheated or taken advantage of.

Islam also teaches about caring for the environment, and this is an important part of housing too. Muslims are told to act as protectors of the Earth and to avoid harming it. When building homes, people should use materials and methods that are good for the environment, such as saving water, using energy wisely, and planting trees or gardens. These actions not only protect the planet but also reflect the Islamic value of balance and responsibility.

Finally, a home should be a place that encourages worship and good relationships. A Muslim home should have a space where family members can pray together and reflect on their faith. It should also be a welcoming place for guests, as hospitality is highly valued in Islam. Additionally, homes should be part of neighborhoods where people treat each other with kindness and respect. Living close to mosques, schools, and parks helps families grow spiritually and socially.

This paper will look at how Islamic teachings guide the design and purpose of housing. It will explain how these principles, like privacy, simplicity, fairness, and care for the environment, help create homes that meet the needs of both the body and the soul. By following these ideas, Islamic housing provides a way to build communities that are peaceful, fair, and full of good values. In today's fast-changing world, these teachings can help create better homes and neighborhoods for everyone.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamic housing standards are deeply rooted in the spiritual, ethical, and social teachings of Islam. They are guided by principles that emphasize justice, respect for human dignity, environmental stewardship, and community well-being. The Quran and Hadith

(sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, PBUH) provide the foundation for Islamic architecture and housing, creating a set of guidelines that shape not only the physical aspects of homes but also the values they embody.

2.1 Key Values in Islamic Housing

1. **Social Justice and Equity:** Islam strongly emphasizes the importance of equity and fairness. Islamic housing standards advocate for the creation of homes that are accessible to people of all social classes, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of wealth, have access to basic human dignity and comfort. The Islamic concept of **adl** (justice) underscores the need for housing that does not exploit or marginalize any segment of society.
2. **Environmental Responsibility:** Islam teaches that humans are stewards of the Earth, entrusted with its care. Islamic housing practices emphasize environmental sustainability, encouraging the use of natural, locally sourced materials, as well as energy-efficient designs. The ethical principle of avoiding wastefulness also influences housing designs, encouraging a balance between comfort and the responsible use of resources.
3. **Modesty and Simplicity:** Modesty is a central value in Islamic teachings, and it extends to the design of homes. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advocated for simplicity in all aspects of life, including housing. While homes should be functional, comfortable, and well-constructed, they should not be ostentatious or extravagant. This modest approach ensures that the focus remains on the well-being of the residents rather than the display of wealth.
4. **Privacy and Family Well-being:** Privacy is highly valued in Islamic society. Homes are designed to provide private spaces for each family member, allowing them to live in peace and dignity. Islamic housing standards prioritize the creation of spaces that offer both individual privacy and the opportunity for family unity. The house should be a sanctuary for spiritual reflection, relaxation, and family interaction.

2.2 Ethical Considerations in Islamic Housing

Islamic ethics in housing revolve around principles of fairness, dignity, and community. The following ethical considerations are essential:

- **Rights to Adequate Housing:** Every individual has the right to a safe and dignified home. Islamic teachings advocate for affordable housing, especially for the poor, and promote charity (*zakat*) to help meet these needs. The idea of social justice is reflected in policies and actions that make housing accessible to all, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable.
- **Environmental Ethics:** Islam encourages the responsible use of natural resources, discouraging waste and promoting sustainable practices. Energy-efficient homes, water conservation methods, and the use of renewable resources are all in line with Islamic teachings on environmental stewardship.
- **Community Responsibility:** Islamic housing is not just an individual concern but a communal one. Neighborhoods are designed to promote social cohesion and mutual support. Shared spaces for prayer, charity, and

community gatherings help foster a sense of unity and collective responsibility among residents.

2.3 Traditional Housing Standards: Values Rooted in Culture and Heritage

Traditional housing standards are influenced by centuries of cultural practices and regional customs. These standards reflect the values, beliefs, and societal norms of specific communities, often shaped by the natural environment, climate, and available resources. Traditional housing, whether in rural villages or urban centers, represents a harmonious relationship between human needs and the environment.

2.4 Key Values in Traditional Housing

- **Cultural Identity and Heritage:** Traditional housing reflects the cultural identity of a community, incorporating local building techniques, materials, and design elements passed down through generations. These homes often embody the values and beliefs of the society that built them. For example, the use of local materials such as clay, timber, or stone is not just practical but also a way of preserving cultural traditions.
- **Adaptation to the Environment:** Traditional homes are often designed to work in harmony with the natural environment. The use of passive cooling techniques, such as thick walls, high ceilings, and open courtyards, allows traditional homes to stay cool in hot climates. In colder regions, homes are built with insulation to retain heat. These homes are designed with an intimate understanding of local climate conditions, making them highly functional and energy-efficient.
- **Community and Social Interaction:** Many traditional housing designs prioritize communal living. Shared spaces, such as courtyards, gardens, and common areas, are common in traditional designs, fostering social interaction and a sense of belonging. In some cultures, homes are built in clusters or around communal spaces, which strengthens the social fabric of the neighborhood.
- **Sustainability and Resourcefulness:** Traditional housing often prioritizes sustainability, making use of local and renewable materials. The knowledge of how to build homes using natural resources has been passed down over generations, with an emphasis on minimizing waste and ensuring that construction practices respect the land. This sustainable approach is deeply embedded in traditional building practices.

2.5 Ethical Considerations in Traditional Housing

The ethics of traditional housing are closely aligned with community well-being, environmental sustainability, and respect for cultural heritage.

- **Sustainable Resource Use:** Traditional housing emphasizes the careful use of local resources, avoiding the depletion of natural materials and reducing environmental harm. Many traditional societies practice sustainable farming and building techniques that have minimal impact on the land.
- **Community Welfare:** Traditional housing values the collective welfare of the community over individual wealth. Many traditional designs feature communal living spaces, where neighbors share resources,

knowledge, and labor, reinforcing the importance of mutual support.

- **Respect for Nature:** Ethical considerations in traditional housing often involve an intrinsic respect for nature. Homes are designed with an awareness of the environment, integrating structures into the natural landscape rather than imposing upon it.

2.6 Comparative Analysis: Islamic and Traditional Housing Standards

While Islamic and traditional housing standards emerge from distinct cultural and religious backgrounds, they share several common values and ethical principles:

- **Modesty and Simplicity:** Both Islamic and traditional housing emphasize modesty in design. They prioritize functionality over extravagance, with an understanding that homes should serve as places of rest, family, and community rather than symbols of wealth and status.
- **Community Focus:** Both traditions highlight the importance of community and social cohesion. Shared spaces and communal living are valued, whether it is the Islamic emphasis on neighborhood welfare or the traditional practice of building homes that encourage interaction among neighbors.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Responsibility:** Both approaches to housing emphasize sustainability, using local materials and energy-efficient designs that work in harmony with the environment. These traditions encourage resourcefulness and a strong connection between humans and the land.
- **Human Dignity:** Both Islamic and traditional housing standards uphold the dignity of individuals, ensuring that everyone has access to a safe, private, and comfortable home. This principle is seen in the equitable distribution of housing and the protection of vulnerable groups in both traditions.

Islamic and traditional housing standards offer rich, ethically grounded approaches to the built environment. Rooted in deep cultural, religious, and social values, these housing standards reflect a commitment to human dignity, sustainability, and community well-being. They remind us that the value of a home extends beyond its material worth and that ethical considerations in housing—such as social justice, environmental stewardship, and cultural respect—are integral to creating spaces where people can live with dignity, harmony, and connection to the world around them. As modern societies continue to confront challenges related to housing, the values embedded in Islamic and traditional housing standards can offer valuable lessons on how to create a more just and sustainable built environment.

3. PRINCIPLES OF ISLAMIC HOUSING DESIGN

Islamic housing design is guided by key principles that reflect the values and teachings of Islam. These principles ensure that homes are not only functional but also align with religious, cultural, and environmental beliefs. Here are the main principles of Islamic housing design:

3.1 Modesty and Privacy

Modesty is a core value in Islam, and this extends to the design of homes. In Islamic housing, privacy is highly valued, especially

between different genders and public and private spaces. Homes are designed to ensure that family members have their own private areas, with clear separation between spaces for men and women in traditional settings.

“Do not enter houses other than your own until you have asked permission and greeted their occupants.”

Quran 24:27

emphasized by the Prophet, this principle teaches the importance of privacy. Houses should be designed to ensure that family members and visitors feel safe and private, respecting their personal space.

Windows and entrances: are carefully positioned to avoid direct visibility from the outside, ensuring that the privacy of inhabitants is maintained. **The Prophet (PBUH) also said,** *“A man should not look into another person's house without permission.”* Sahih Bukhari, This Hadith stresses that homes should have barriers, such as walls, fences, or curtains, to protect against unwanted intrusion.

3.2 Separation of Spaces

Islamic homes often have distinct areas for different family functions. For example, private quarters are separated from communal spaces like the living room. This separation helps maintain privacy and ensures that the home remains a peaceful, organized environment.

Special areas for prayer, (known as musallah) are often included in the design, typically in the form of a prayer room or a designated space oriented toward Mecca. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Modesty is part of faith.”* Sahih Muslim, Homes should reflect modesty in their design, avoiding extravagance or ostentation. This means focusing on functionality and simplicity rather than luxury.

3.3 Focus on Cleanliness

Cleanliness is a key aspect of Islamic practice, and it is reflected in the design of homes. Spaces are designed for easy cleaning, and materials are chosen with hygiene in mind. Ablution area, (wudu) are also integrated into the design, typically near entrances or bathrooms, making it convenient for residents to perform ritual washing before prayer. The Prophet (PBUH) said, *“Cleanliness is half of faith.”* Sahih Muslim. This Hadith highlights the importance of maintaining clean and tidy homes. Clean environments reflect Islamic values and create a healthy living space for the family. Another Hadith, **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Removing harmful things from the road is a form of charity.”* Sunan Abu Dawood, this also applies to keeping the areas around the house, like streets or gardens, clean and free from waste.

3.4 Use of Natural Light and Ventilation

Islamic housing often incorporates natural light and ventilation to create a comfortable living environment. The design may include courtyards or open spaces that allow sunlight to enter the home, reducing the need for artificial lighting and ensuring good airflow. Mashrabiya (decorative wooden screens) are used in traditional designs to provide privacy while allow in, **The Prophet (PBUH) also said,** *“The world is green and delightful, and Allah has made you His stewards in it.”* Sahih Muslim, this reminds Muslims to design homes responsibly, using resources wisely and considering the environment g air to flow freely through the home.

3.5 Symmetry and Proportions

Islamic architecture values symmetry and balance, both in the overall layout and the decoration. Geometric patterns, arches, and

domes are often used in the design to reflect the unity and order of the natural world, as well as the divine.

The design of Islamic homes often follows, proportions that create harmony between the various elements of the house, providing a sense of peace and balance. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Allah likes moderation in all things.”* Musnad Ahmad, This Hadith emphasizes that homes should avoid excessive luxury or wasteful designs. Simplicity is a core principle of Islamic housing.

3.6 Sustainability

Traditional Islamic housing designs are sustained able and environmentally conscious, making use of local materials like stone, clay, and wood. These materials are not only readily available but also provide natural cooling and insulation.

Energy efficiency is an important consideration, and modern Islamic homes often incorporate solar panels, efficient water systems, and other sustainable technologies, aligning with Islamic teachings on environmental stewardship. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“When a man provides safety for his family, he fulfills a great obligation”* Sunan Abu Dawood, Homes should be built to provide safety and security for the family, including solid construction, secure doors, and protected spaces.

3.7 Cultural and Spiritual Significance

The design of Islamic homes reflects the spiritual and cultural significance of the family unit and community. The home is seen not just as a physical shelter but as a place for spiritual growth, family bonding, and hospitality. Spaces are often designed to encourage worship, reflection, and community engagement, fostering a sense of peace and connection with God and family.

3.8 Privacy and the Design of Muslim Homes

Privacy is a core value in Islam, and it plays a central role in the design of Muslim homes. In Islamic culture, the home is considered a private space for family and personal life, where modesty and respect for personal boundaries are highly valued. The design of Muslim homes reflects these principles, ensuring that privacy is maintained in both public and private areas of the house. Here's how privacy is compacted into the design of Muslim homes:

3.9 Separation of Private and Public Spaces

Muslim homes are typically designed to clearly separate private and public areas. Private spaces, such as bedrooms, bathrooms, and family areas are placed away from the more public spaces like the living room, dining area, and entrance. Guest areas or spaces for receiving visitors are usually separated from family quarters. In many traditional designs, there are separate entrances for guests and the family, allowing the family to maintain privacy and dignity. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“If someone asks your permission to enter, then grant him permission. If you are inside, do not open the door unless you are certain that it is someone you want to welcome.”* Sahih Muslim, This Hadith emphasizes the importance of privacy when it comes to the entrance of the home. The layout of a home should allow for a clear boundary between private family areas and public spaces for guests.

3.10 Placement of Windows and Doors

The placement of windows and doors is carefully considered to avoid direct visibility from the outside, maintaining the inhabitants' privacy. High walls or fence around the house provide protection from prying eyes, and windows often have screens or

grills, particularly in traditional Islamic architecture, to balance light, privacy, and ventilation.

Mashrabiya (decorative wooden screens) are also used in traditional homes. These screens allow air and light to flow through the house while preventing outsiders from seeing inside. They help maintain privacy without compromising the openness and ventilation of the home. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Do not enter houses other than your own until you ask permission and greet those inside with peace.”* Sahih Bukhari, This Hadith stresses the importance of asking for permission before entering someone's private space. It reflects the principle that a home is a private domain, and entry should be respectful, which could be reflected in the design by having separate entrances or clear boundaries for guest areas.

3.11 Based on Privacy

Islamic homes often provide distinct areas for men and women, especially in traditional or multi-generational households. This could mean having separate living areas, entrances, or even stairways for different family members to preserve privacy and modesty. The layout of the house might include private rooms for women and men, where women can freely engage in their daily activities without being disturbed or observed by men, and vice versa. These arrangements respect the cultural and religious practices surrounding gender segregation in certain contexts. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“When you go to someone's house, do not look around unless you are invited to.”* Sahih Bukhari, This Hadith teaches respect for privacy by not intruding or invading private spaces without permission. In the home design, this can be respected by providing clear boundaries for spaces where family members can enjoy privacy without the feeling of being watched or disturbed.

3.12 Courtyards and Internal Spaces

Courtyards are a common feature in many traditional Muslim homes. These open-air spaces offer a sense of privacy, as they are typically surrounded by walls, ensuring that the activities within the courtyard are not visible to outsiders. Courtyards also provide a private area for relaxation, prayer, and family gatherings. The courtyard layout encourages natural ventilation and light, while also allowing the interior of the house to be shielded from public view. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“The most wicked of people in the sight of Allah on the Day of Judgment is the man who has relations with his wife and she with him, and then he spreads her secrets.”* Sahih Muslim, This Hadith highlights the importance of privacy between spouses. It reflects the need for private spaces in a home, such as bedrooms, where intimate moments are protected from others' eyes or unnecessary exposure.

3.13 Design for Family and Social Privacy

The design of Muslim homes often prioritizes the privacy of family members, allowing individuals to have their own personal space. This is important for maintaining peace within the household and fostering a sense of security and dignity. While Islamic homes are designed for privacy, they also facilitate hospitality and community engagement*. However, the act of receiving guests is carefully managed, with designated areas for visitors to avoid disturbing the private life of the family. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“A man should not look at the private parts of another man, and a woman should not look at the private parts of another woman.”* Sahih Muslim. This Hadith emphasizes the need for modesty and privacy regarding personal matters. In the design of Muslim homes, this principle can be reflected by ensuring that bathrooms, changing

areas, and intimate spaces are private and hidden from others. Another Hadith, **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Beware! When one of you has relations with his wife, let him not expose her private parts to others.”* Sunan Abu Dawood, This Hadith underscores the importance of privacy in intimate matters. In the design of Muslim homes, this principle is reflected by creating private and secluded areas for family life, particularly for personal or intimate moments.

3.14 Role of the Prayer Space

In many Muslim homes, there is a designated prayer spaces or musallah, where the family can pray together in privacy. This area is often situated in a quiet corner or a separate room, sometimes oriented toward Mecca (the qibla). This space is not just for religious purposes but also ensures a quiet, personal, and private environment for worship. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“The best place in the eyes of Allah is the mosque, and the worst place is the market”.* Sahih Muslim. While this Hadith speaks about public spaces, it highlights the importance of having dedicated areas for worship in homes, such as a quiet prayer room.

4. MODESTY SPACES IN MUSLIM HOMES

Modesty is very important in Islam, and this affects how Muslim homes are designed. The goal is to keep family members' privacy and dignity while making sure the home is comfortable and respectful. Here's how modesty is included in the design of Muslim homes:

4.1 Private Areas

In Muslim homes, private spaces like bedrooms and bathrooms are separated from public spaces such as the living room or dining area. This helps family members feel comfortable and keeps their personal life private from guests or outsiders. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“Modesty is part of faith.”* Sahih Muslim, This Hadith highlights how modesty is deeply connected to a Muslim's faith and character, and therefore should be reflected in all areas of life, including the home environment. These Hadiths underscore the importance of privacy in various aspects of life, especially within the home. They emphasize the need for boundaries, respectful behavior, and the protection of personal space. The design of Muslim homes should reflect these values, ensuring that privacy is respected, both for family members and guests, through thoughtful planning of private spaces, separate entrances, and clear boundaries.

4.2 Separate Areas for Men and Women

In some homes, men and women have separate areas for socializing or resting, especially in larger families. For example, women might have a space to gather or relax without being seen by men, keeping their privacy and modesty intact. **The Prophet (PBUH) said,** *“If a man and a woman are alone in a house, the third is the devil.”* Sunan Ibn Majah, This Hadith emphasizes the importance of maintaining privacy between men and women, particularly when they are not married to each other, to prevent inappropriate situations. This is a reminder for the design of homes to consider privacy between non-related members.

4.3 Prayer Space (Musallah)

A special prayer space is often included in the home. This is a quiet area where family members can pray without distractions. It is usually away from the busy parts of the house to ensure focus and peace during prayer.

4.4 Ablution Area

Before praying, Muslims perform a cleaning ritual called wudu. A private space or area for ablution is designed for this purpose. It is a place where family members can clean themselves before they pray, ensuring both cleanliness and privacy.

4.5 Separate Entrances

In some homes, there are separate entrances for guests and family members. This keeps the family's private life separate from visitors and helps maintain privacy when coming and going. **The Prophet (PBUH) said**, *"Do not enter upon people at night without their permission. If they are asleep, they will be disturbed."* Sunan Ibn Majah, This Hadith shows that privacy at night is essential, as it is a time for rest. The design of homes can reflect this by ensuring that bedrooms and family spaces are secluded and protected from disturbance.

4.6 Screens and Curtains

Curtains or screens are often used to separate rooms or areas of the home. These help hide private spaces from view, so people inside can relax or work without others seeing them. It's also useful in shared spaces to make sure no one feels watched.

4.7 Courtyard

Many Muslim homes have courtyards private outdoor areas surrounded by walls. These courtyards allow family members to spend time outside without being seen by neighbors or passersby. They provide a peaceful and private space for gatherings, relaxation, or even prayer. **The Prophet (PBUH) said**, *"He who believes in Allah and the Last Day should not harm his neighbor."* Sahih Bukhari, This Hadith emphasizes the importance of respecting the privacy and rights of others, including neighbors. It teaches the importance of not interfering with others' private spaces, even when living in close proximity.

4.8 Family Rooms

Family rooms are spaces that are meant only for family members. These rooms are private and give the family a place to gather, eat, or talk without feeling like outsiders are watching. **The Prophet (PBUH) said**, *"Beware! When one of you has relations with his wife, let him not expose her private parts to others."* Sunan Abu Dawood, This Hadith teaches the importance of privacy in intimate matters and how we should protect the dignity of each other, which reflects the need for modest spaces in the home, such as private bedrooms and bath area.

5. CONCLUSION

The idea that privacy, modesty, and hospitality continue to hold significance today is backed by the delightful insights from the Al-Quran and Hadith explored in this paper. These cherished principles have blossomed through a thoughtful examination of the literature. The shared traits, nuances, and variations in the ways Muslims embrace these principles offer architects, building designers, and interior designers a wonderful array of design choices to consider when working with Muslim clients. The architectural styles and materials found in homes across the Middle East clearly differ from those in other mainly Muslim countries, like Malaysia, due to unique climatic conditions and the materials that are locally sourced. Even with these differences, homes in predominantly Muslim countries often reflect a lovely "humility in design" philosophy, where dwellings are crafted with cost-effective and sustainable materials that also ensure a cozy living environment.

Information on how privacy, modesty, and hospitality shape the design of Muslim homes in non-Muslim countries is quite scarce, which is a bit surprising! The authors happily found two publications that zoomed in on the influence of just one principle (either privacy or hospitality), yet these studies were limited to only two countries (the USA and Canada). It would be wonderful to see more research exploring how the three core Islamic principles impact the homes of Muslims in non-Muslim regions, like Australia and Europe, as well as in various places throughout the United States and Canada. This kind of research is so important to better understand how Western culture influences the ways Muslim immigrants use their interior and exterior spaces and their domestic habits, and to identify the unique changes they make to their homes in their new countries to stay true to traditional Islamic values. Still, the insights gathered from this literature review on design strategies used by Muslims in different countries could really help professionals in the building industry by broadening the range of design choices they can present to their Muslim clients living in non-Muslim countries. Plus, the various design features highlighted in this literature review could also be beneficial for non-Muslim homeowners who are interested in achieving design goals that overlap with those of Muslims, such as ensuring visual privacy from neighbors, enhancing thermal comfort, and utilizing sustainable and cost-effective materials.

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