“Farmer Problems and Land Reforms in India”

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Abstract: Agriculture is the backbone of Indian economy. Though, with the growth of other sectors, the overall share of agriculture on GDP of the country has decreased. Still, Agriculture continues to play a dominant part in the overall economic scenario of India. Food is essential for life. We depend on agricultural outputs for our food requirements. India produces large quantity of food grains such as millets, cereals, pulses, etc. A major portion of the food-stuffs produced is consumed within the country. Our farmers work day and night to feed our population that counts over 1.21 billion. India is mainly an agricultural country. Agriculture is the most important occupation for most of the Indian families. In India, agriculture contributes about sixteen percent 16% of total GDP and ten percent 10% of total exports. Over 60 % of India’s land area is arable making it the second largest country in terms of total arable land. Agricultural products of significant economic value include rice, wheat, potato, tomato, onion, mangoes, sugar-cane, beans, cottonBesides agriculture with a commercial bias, subsistence agriculture with its emphasis on the production of food for the cultivator’s family is widespread. Traditionally, Agriculture is followed as the simplest method of obtaining food for the family. Agriculture in India is more a ‘way of life’ then a ‘mode of business.

Introduction:

Subsistent in Character: Despite eleven five-year plans, in greater parts of the country, Indian agriculture is subsistent in character. The cultivators and farmers grow crops mainly for the family consumption. It is only in the controlled irrigated parts of the country like Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, and Kaveri delta where agriculture has become an agri-business or is market oriented. Heavy Pressure of Population: The Indian agriculture is characterised by heavy pressure of population. About 70 per cent of the total population of the country is directly or indirectly dependent on agriculture. At present, the per capita agricultural land is only about 0.10 hectare as against 0.30 hectare in 1951. The world average of per head availability of agricultural land is about 4.5 hectares. The fast growth of population industrialization and urbanization are putting enormous pressure on arable land. The Zamindari system was a notable feature during the Mughal era. In this system, Zamindars were considered vassal chiefs with the primary responsibility of collecting revenues from farmers and delivering them to the kings.

Predominance of Food Grains: In both the Kharif summer and the rabi winter seasons, grain crops occupy the greater proportion of the cropped area. In fact, rice, maize, millets, bajra, ragi, and pulses are the dominant crops in the kharif season, and wheat, gram and barley occupy over three-fourth of the total cropped area in the rabi season.Mixed Cropping: In the rain-fed areas of the country, mixed cropping is a common practice. The necessity for land policies has been evident since ancient India, where rulers established regulations to manage land use and revenue collection. During this period, kings implemented policies that required landowners to pay a fixed revenue based on various factors such as the productivity of the land, the fertility of the soil, and the type of soil. The Arthashastra stipulates that high ground and lowlands should be documented separately. Initially, Kautilya set the revenue rates at $1/10^{th}$ of the total. However, later texts mention two types of taxes: Bali and Shudbhaga, which were fixed at a rate of $1/6^{th}$ of the total revenue .

Key words : Right to Livelihood, The Zamindari system, 16% of total GDP, Pre Independence land Policies, Abolition of intermediaries, Model Agriculture Land Leasing Act 2016, Special Economic Zones SEZs, Agricultural production, Farmer Problems and Land Reforms

➢ Constitutional Frame:

Indian farmers face systemic issues like land degradation, water depletion, volatile market pricing, and climate vulnerability. The **Indian Constitution** addresses these challenges through the division of legislative powers, fundamental rights for fair living, and specific Directive Principles aimed at agrarian welfare.

Division of Powers: Under Article 246 of the Constitution, "agriculture" Entry 14 and "markets and fairs" Entry 28 fall under the State List, giving state governments primary authority. However, inter-state trade and commerce fall to the Union, creating complex jurisdictional debates.

Right to Protest: Article 19(1)(a) and 19(1)(b) guarantee the right to peaceful assembly and free speech, enabling farmers to voice grievances and protest against state or union policies.

- **Right to Livelihood:** Article 21, interpreted to include the right to livelihood, ensures that agricultural policies cannot arbitrary deprive small farmers of their means of survival.
- **Right to Property:** Article 300A protects farmers from being deprived of their land except by the authority of law, offering legal defense against uncompensated land acquisition
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:** Article 48 directs the State to organize agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific

➢ **Pre Independence land Policies:** Over the years, leaders fighting for India's independence witnessed the cruelty of land policies and their detrimental effects on the country's peasants. As a result, the primary focus of independent India was on agrarian reforms to strengthen the nation's backbone. To address this, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of J. C. Kumarappa to eliminate the harsh policies of the British government and alleviate the burden on the peasant community. In post-independence India, land governance has evolved as a state responsibility. The land-revenue department serves as the primary custodian, but the actual responsibility is distributed among various

❖ **Tenancy reforms** - The tenancy reforms following Zamindari abolition aimed to regulate rents and provide tenure security, yet implementation varied widely across states. While some achieved radical restructuring and tenant ownership West Bengal, Kerala, most states struggled to enforce these laws effectively, limiting the number of tenants gaining ownership rights despite reducing overall tenancy. Tenancy was completely banned in states like Kerala, J&K and Manipur while some states have bans with some exception.

❖ **system of Mahalwari:** . Revenue was determined based on the land's productive capacity and the socio-economic conditions of the village. It was Introduced by Lord William Bentinck in 1833 in the Punjab province. This system considered the village community, or 'Mahal,' as the unit of revenue assessment. The responsibility of paying revenue rested collectively with the entire village communityBecause the whole community was responsible for the payment, the burden fell on everyone, leading to exploitation and inequality within the community.

❖ **Abolition of intermediaries** : Almost 2 crore tenants were made owners of the land, and more land was brought to government possession for distribution to landless farmers. the primary focus of the land reforms was to remove the intermediaries who were burdening the revenue on peasants. The reform was made to strengthen the actual landholders, the cultivators. This reform was not implemented in many states and this uneven implementation of Zamindari abolition left many issues unresolved, perpetuating landlordism, tenancy, and sharecropping, while causing widespread evictions and various social, economic, administrative, and legal problems.

➢ **Under British rule in India**: The British intrduced three types of land revenue policy in India, they are:There was a significant transformation in the land ownership pattern. The British altered the system of land revenue collection, resulting in changes to land ownership itself. They introduced policies that allowed for eviction and sale of land if revenue payments were not made in full. This shift made land a movable asset, contributed to the impoverishment of many peasants, and increased the wealth of zamindars. As stated at the outset, Indian economy hinges on agriculture. The socioeconomic status of the people, the national polity and the gamut of life of the people is directly controlled by agriculture. The Indian agriculture, however, has its own characteristics.Some of the important characteristics and problems of Indian agriculture have been described briefly in the following section:aimed at curbing land concentration, effectiveness was limited due to loopholes and strategies used by landowners. While some large estates were divided, many landholders evaded ceilings through benami transfers or legal maneuvers like divorcing wives to circumvent provisions. This undermined redistribution efforts meant for landless and marginalized groups, highlighting challenges in achieving equitable land distribution.

✓ **Consolidation of landholdings** – While agrarian reforms were being implemented, the government's focus shifted to economic reforms, attracting foreign investments into the Indian economy. This created a demand for large landholdings to establish multinational corporations and undertake significant projects. Concurrently, the need to introduce the Green Revolution to support the growing population arose. Consequently, land consolidation became necessary, undermining the land ceiling reforms, as substantial land tracts were now required.

✓ **Land Acquisition Act, 2013** : The act facilitates land acquisition for purposes such as industrialization, infrastructure development, and urbanization, ensuring that the process respects the rights and livelihoods of those impactedThis act is also known as the right to fair compensation and transparency in land acquisition, rehabilitation and resettlement, RFCTLAR and R. It is a significant modification of the colonial-era Land Acquisition Act of 1894. This modern legislation aims to establish a more humane, participative, informed, and transparent process for land acquisition, with minimal disturbance to landowners and other affected individuals..

✓ **The act mandates comprehensive:** measures to ensure that affected families are adequately compensated, rehabilitated, and resettled. By addressing the shortcomings of the 1894 Act, core objective of the LARR Act is to provide fair and remunerative compensation to families whose land is acquired for various public, private, or public-private partnership projects. The LARR Act seeks to balance developmental needs with the rights and welfare of landowners and communities, fostering a more equitable and just approach to land acquisition in India.

✓ **Model Agriculture Land Leasing Act 2016** : The Model Agriculture Land Leasing Act, 2016, was developed and approved by NITI Aayog under the leadership of Dr. T. Haque. This act provides a well-structured framework that serves as an ideal template for states and Union Territories to create their own legislation. The act is designed to be adaptable, allowing states and UTs to draft laws that align with their specific local requirements while adhering to the overarching principles outlined in the model act.

✓ **A key objective of the Model Agriculture Land Leasing Act** :is to facilitate and legalize the leasing of agricultural land. This provision aims to enhance land access for landless and marginal farmers, enabling them to participate more actively in agricultural activities. By simplifying and promoting the leasing process, the act seeks to provide these disadvantaged farmers with greater opportunities to cultivate land, improve their livelihoods, and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable agricultural sector. This model act thus addresses critical issues of land accessibility and aims to empower vulnerable farming communities through legal and institutional support.

✓ Reforms division was implementing two centrally sponsored schemes viz. Computerization of land records CL and Strengthening of Revenue Administration and Updating of Land Records SRA and ULR. Later, the cabinet approved merger of these schemes into a modified scheme named Digital India Land

Records Modernization Programmed. DILRMP. DILRMP is a tool to achieve a modern, comprehensive and transparent land record management system with the aim to develop an Integrated Land Information Management System which will inter alia provide error-free, transparent and tamper-proof land records by adopting modern technology such as AI, Machine Learning and Block chain technology thereby providing security of tenancy to citizen, reduce land disputes, simplify procedure of transfer of property title, assist in policy / planning etc.

➢ **Land Reforms Acts in India :** Land policies in India have undergone a significant transformation over the decades, adapting to the country's evolving socio-economic landscape. The prospects of these policies are crucial for a country's sustainable development, agricultural productivity, and socio-economic equity. Some key prospects of land policies include:

- **Digital land records and transparency** – Digital land records significantly enhance transparency in land administration. Utilizing advanced technologies such as blockchain makes the management of land records more efficient and less time-consuming, providing accurate and reliable results to end users. This technological advancement reduces the prevalence of disputes that were common in the past, ensuring a more transparent and streamlined land management process.

- **Improved land management and planning** - Land management using geospatial technologies like GIS, GPS, Remote Sensing, helps in accurate mapping and efficient land use planning, supporting infrastructure development, urbanization, and rural development.

- **Industrial Growth** – Clear, accurate, and transparent land records enable efficient execution of developmental projects by avoiding complicated legal procedures. Policies designating specific areas as Special Economic Zones SEZs can attract both domestic and foreign investments, thereby fostering industrial growth and technological advancements.

Bombay. Over the years, the British government realized that Zamindars were reaping most of the benefits from the Zamindari system, while the government was not receiving its full share. To address this, they began the direct collection of revenue from the 'ryots' peasants, eliminating the role of intermediaries. In this new arrangement, peasants were recognized as the owners of their lands and were directly responsible for paying revenue to the government. However, the revenue demands were set so high that many peasants found them unaffordable.

farmers mix millets, maize and pulses in the kharifseason and wheat, gram and barley in the rabi season. In the areas of Jhuming shifting cultivation, ten to sixteen crops are mixed and sown in the same field. The rationale behind mixing of crops is to get good agricultural return. In case the monsoon is good, the rice crop will give better production and in case of failure of monsoon, the less water requiring crops like maize, millets, bajra and pulses will give good harvest. Mixed cropping is a characteristic of subsistent agriculture.

❖ Less Area under Leguminous and Fodder Crops: The nitrogen fixing crops like pulses are getting less area under their cultivation. Consequently, the natural fertility of the soil is depleting and the soils are losing their resilience characteristics. Moreover, less than 4 per cent of the cropped area is under fodder crops. This, together with lack of good pastures, has detrimental effect over the development of dairy farming and milk production. India has the largest number of cattle in the world, but it occupies an insignificant place in respect of cattle products in the world.

❖ Tradition Bound: By and large, the Indian agriculture is tradition bound. Established several centuries ago, the structures of a self-contained rural economy were founded in caste-derived occupational land tenures, made complex by absentee and parasitic landlords. These institutional factors and tradition bound institutions are a major obstacle in the path of innovations and modernisation of agriculture.Low Productivity: One of the main problems of Indian agriculture is its low productivity. In comparison to the other agricultural countries, the Indian agricultural yields are among the lowest in the world The main cause of low yield per hectare is the low fertility of soil and less care to replenish it through green manure, fertilisers, fallowing, and scientific rotation of crops.

❖ Indian Agriculture is Labour Intensive: In India, agriculture is a labour based enterprise in which most of the agricultural operations, like ploughing, levelling, sowing, weeding, spraying, sprinkling, harvesting, and threshing are carried on mainly by human hands. The use of machinery is still confined only to the rich fainters of Punjab, Haryana, western Uttar Pradesh, plains of Uttarakhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, and Maharashtra.

❖ Rain-fed Agriculture: In the greater parts over 56% of the country, agriculture is largely dependent on rainfall, especially the summer monsoon. Unfortunately, the high which affects the agricultural return adversely. Only about 55 per cent of the total cropped area is under irrigation in which the farmers are more confident about their agricultural returns even at the failure of monsoon, as it happened in 2009.

❖ High Percentage of the Reporting Area under Cultivation: In India, about 55 per cent of the total reporting area is under cultivation of crops and pastures. This is much higher when compared with about 4 per cent in Canada, 12 per cent in China, 15 per cent in Japan, and 16 per cent in USA.

❖Limited Intensive Agriculture: In India, only about one-third of the total cropped area is under double and multiple cropping. Increase in the double cropped area is difficult unless heavy investment is made in development of canal and tube-well irrigation.

❖Primitive Technology: Most of the farmers of the country, especially in the rainfed areas, use draught animals bullocks, male buffaloes and camels for ploughing and other agricultural operations. The health and efficiency of draught animals is low which often retards the timely operations of sowing, weeding, and harvesting.

1. **Jammu & Kashmir:** Big Landed Estates Abolition Act, 1950
2. **Uttar Pradesh:** Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950
3. **West Bengal:** West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953 and *Operation Barga* tenant registration started 1978
4. **Maharashtra / Gujarat:** Bombay Tenancy and Agricultural Lands Act, 1948
5. **Assam:** Assam State Acquisition of Zamindaris Act, 1951
6. **Tamil Nadu:** Tamil Nadu Land Reforms Fixation of Ceiling on Land Act, 1961/1972
7. **Kerala:** Kerala Land Reforms Act, 1963
8. **Andhra Pradesh :** Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms Ceiling on Agricultural Holdings Act, 1973
9. **Manipur:** Manipur Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960
10. **Tripura:** Tripura Land Revenue and Land Reforms Act, 1960
11. **The Karnataka Government had enacted the Karnataka Land Reforms Act, 1961:**

with the great objective of changing the social and economic status of the rural people and the tenants. This was a revolutionary scheme in the country itself. The main objectives of this Act were to grant usufruct rights to the tenants, fix a limit on the ownership of agricultural land and implement a programme of additional land distribution to the landless poor. Despite the enactment of the Karnataka Land Reforms Act, 1961, the implementation of the programme was slow. Therefore, in 1974, several major amendments were made to the Karnataka Land Reforms Act, 1961 and this process continued very seriously till 1984-85 and as per Section 44 of the amended Act, all the lands declared before 01/04/1974 and owned or in possession of the tenants were transferred and vested in the Government from that date. Several limitations were set under Section 63 for holding land as a landowner or tenant or mortgagee. All persons eligible to be registered as usufructuary were allowed to apply to the concerned Taluk Land Tribunal at that time.

The Jammu and Kashmir Agrarian Reforms Act, 1976: The Act imposed an optimum retainable area to prevent the monopolization of large landholdingsVesting in the State Any land not held under personal cultivation, or held in excess of the prescribed ceiling, was vested in the state, which then distributed surplus land to landless farmers and the rural poorPersonal Cultivation Rule is a landmark legislation enacted to abolish absentee landlordism, set land ceilings, and transfer ownership rights to the actual tillers. It aimed to promote social justice and better agricultural utilization of Transfer to the Tiller; The primary objective was to transfer ownership rights directly to tillers who personally cultivated the land as of Kharif 1971Ceiling on Land Holdings:: Individuals were generally prohibited from holding agricultural land if it was not under their personal cultivationExceptions**.** The law safeguarded certain lands, including those belonging to places of worship like Ladakhi Gompas, public trusts, charitable institutions, and designated orchardEnacted on August 21, 1976, and enforced in 1978, the Act fundamentally restructured land ownership. Over the decades, especially following the 2019 reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir, several modifications and rules have been enforced to align regional land laws with the rest of the country.

The **Uttar Pradesh Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950** : is a landmark agrarian legislation that abolished the feudal *Zamindari* system. It vested all land rights directly in the State, established direct revenue contact between cultivators and the government, and introduced simplified land tenure systems.Here is a breakdown of the act's essential features:

- **Village Management:** The act established village,level institutions like the Gram Sabha and the Land Management Committee to manage common village lands and resources.

- **Abolition of Intermediaries:**Vesting in the State: All estates, rights, titles, and interests of intermediaries Zamindars were transferred to the Uttar Pradesh State Government on July 1, 1952**Compensation:** Zamindars were entitled to compensation and rehabilitation grants determined by their net assets to offset the loss of land rights.
- **Prevention of Eviction:** Occupants and secured/unsecured tenants in possession at the time of the reforms continued to hold their cultivating rights.

- **Simplification of Land Tenures:**The act replaced the highly complex pre-independence tenure systems with uniform categories of land holding, most notablyBhumidhar, Highest tier of rights with full transferability, the right to make improvements, and the right to use the land for any purpose.
- **Protection for CultivatorsOwnership Rights:** Intermediaries who cultivated their land directly were granted ownership of those plots.

- **Consolidation and Cooperatives:** It was structured to prevent uneconomic land holdings and promote cooperative farmingFor comprehensive legal text and historical analysis of the legislation, you can consult the UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 or explore the act's clauses on Indian Kanoon. If you want, let me know if you need to:Right to cultivate and inherit, but limited transferability and no right to use the land for non-agricultural purposes

- **The West Bengal Estates Acquisition Act, 1953/1978:**abolished the feudal Zamindari system, vesting land in the State. In October 1978, the Left Front government launched ,Operation Barga**,** a mass registration drive for sharecroppers These twin pillars of agrarian reform fundamentally changed rural West Bengal:

✓ **Abolition of Intermediaries:** Eliminated the centuries-old Zamindari system.

✓ **Direct Tenancy:** Brought actual tillers raiyats directly under the State Government's revenue collection.

✓ **Ceilings Imposed:** Set strict limits on the amount of agricultural land an intermediary could retain khas *l*and, with surplus land acquired by the State.

✓ **Operation Barga Started 1978**

✓ **Legal Recognition:** Bypassed slow, traditional court methods to legally register bargadars sharecroppers right at their village camps

✓ **Eviction Protection:** Provided tenants with heritable cultivation rights, ensuring landlords jotedars could not arbitrarily evict them

✓ **Secured Yields:** Ensured tenants kept a majority of the harvest up to 75%, which significantly boosted rural productivity and reduced povertyFor further details on the exact statutes that govern these rights, refer to the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955 or review the Section 6(3) Provisions for land retention limits

➢ **The Major Challenges Indian Farmers Face Today :**

Indian farmers face structural challenges such as fragmented landholdings, unpredictable climate changes, and heavy debt burdens. These are compounded by high production costs, inadequate irrigation, and exploitation by middlemen, which collectively restrict yield growth and keep small-scale agricultural livelihoods vulnerableHere is a quick, structured breakdown of the core problems faced by Indian farmers today:

✓ **Land and Finance**

❖ **Fragmented Landholdings:** Successive property divisions have made most operational holdings small and marginal, severely restricting the use of large-scale mechanized equipment**Debt Traps:** High costs for seeds, fertilizers, and labor force many small farmers to borrow from informal, high-interest lenders, triggering cyclical debt. **Credit Access:** Timely access to institutional credit remains a hurdle for many marginal farmers.

❖ Climate and Resources

❖ **Monsoon Dependency:** A vast majority of agricultural land relies on erratic rainfall, making yields highly vulnerable to droughts or unseasonal floods.

❖ **Resource Depletion:** Intensive farming and over-extraction have severely depleted groundwater levels in many states, while continuous use of chemical fertilizers has degraded soil fertility

❖ **Yield and Technology**

❖ **Low Productivity:** Crop yields consistently lag behind global averages, largely due to a reliance on outdated farming practices and lack of awareness.

❖ **High Input Costs:** The escalating prices of quality seeds, pesticides, and electricity make farming an expensive venture.

❖ **Supply Chain and Infrastructure**

- **Inadequate Storage:** A critical lack of cold-chain infrastructure and local warehouses results in massive post-harvest losses and forces farmers to sell quickly at lower prices.
- **Market Exploitation:** The agricultural marketing system is complex, with middlemen often taking large margins and preventing farmers from getting fair prices during bumper harvests.

Understanding these challenges requires analyzing how different regions respond to these pressures. If you want, tell me:

- **Which specific region** or **crop type** are you most interested in?
- Would you like to explore modern technological solutions **or** government-sponsored programs meant to alleviate these issue Despite being the backbone of India's economy, Indian farmers continue to grapple with severe, persistent issues that hinder their productivity and profitability. From erratic weather to rising input costs, the problems faced by farmers are complex and evolving.

✓ Shriram Farm Solutions, we believe in tackling these challenges through targeted, science-backed agri-inputs and technology-driven solutions that address real issues on the ground.

✓ agricultural problems faced by farmers in India is key to delivering meaningful solutions. Below are the major pain points today's farmers encounter across the country:

✓ Unpredictable Weather & Climate ChangeErratic monsoons, unseasonal rains, and extreme temperatures are threatening crop cycles.
✓ Climate-resilient seed varieties likeoffer higher yield under heat and drought stress.
✓ DripIT irrigation systems ensure water efficiency, even in drought-prone areas. See how it transformed watermelon farming.
✓ Declining Soil HealthYears of chemical overload and mono-cropping have eroded soil fertility, affecting yields.
✓ Biofertilizers and organic solutions like Shriram Calific and Shriram Ultrazib improve soil structure and nutrient uptake.
✓ Targeted herbicides and fungicides help manage early blight and viral infections that affect tomato crops.
✓ Rising Input Costs and Limited Market Access
✓ Pest and Disease InfestationsFrom tomato leaf curl virus to stem borers in maize and rice, pest outbreaks can devastate entire crops.
✓ Use of broad-spectrum fungicides like Shriram Alesky and Shriram Doppelt Fungicide to tackle fungal threats.
✓ Insecticides like Shriram Trexter for powerful pest control.
✓ Problems Faced by Tomato Farmers

Tomato farmers specifically face price crashes, pests, and nutrient imbalance,leading to poor fruit quality and losses.High prices of quality seeds, fertilizers, and transport add pressure on already tight profit margins.Cost-effective nutrient management through AI-driven advisory tools and integrated products.Wide distributor network makes Many farmers still rely on traditional practices due to a lack of awareness, training, or capital to invest in modern tools.Field-level demonstrations and training for farmers on how to use DripIT, SprayIT, and foliar nutrition.Digitally enabled crop advisory systems for real-time guidance on weather, pests, and application.

Conclusion : Agriculture contributed 75% of India's GDP a few decades ago, but it now only contributes 14%. According to the CIA's World Factbook 2014, India was the second-largest producer $ 367 billion after China $ 1,005 billion among four other countries that accounted for 42 percent of global India's experience confirms its agricultural productivity, favorable climatic conditions, and abundant natural resources. India which cultivates wheat, rice, and cotton on large swaths of its land is also a major exporter of spices, pulses, and milk on the international market. Agricultural production Most of the farmers especially the poor and marginal ones are dependent on seeds sold in the market. Moreover, the HYV seeds as well as the GM seeds which promise higher yields force the farmers to buy seeds for every crop. With spurious seeds hitting the market, the farmers' woes have exceeded all limits. Sometimes seeds do not give the stated/claimed yields and farmers run into economic troubles.

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