

# AN EXTENSIVE CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHILD LABOR IN INDIA, ASSESSING ITS CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS

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## **Abstract**

Child labor remains a significant social issue in India, where millions of children are engaged in various forms of labor that deprive them of their childhood and education, and expose them to hazardous work conditions. This paper critically analyzes the factors contributing to child labor, such as extreme poverty, large family size, lack of educational opportunities, cultural norms, and economic instability. The study highlights the gender disparity in child labor, with boys often employed in physically demanding jobs while girls are engaged in domestic and lighter tasks. A review of literature emphasizes the socio-economic factors and consequences of child labor, drawing insights from various studies conducted in India and beyond. The findings suggest that child labor is prevalent in both rural and urban settings, with a higher incidence among disadvantaged communities. Despite various government initiatives and policies aimed at eradicating child labor, the problem persists due to deep-rooted socio-economic challenges. The paper concludes with recommendations for more robust interventions to address the root causes of child labor, ensuring a safe and nurturing environment for every child.

**Keywords:** Child labor, socio-economic factors, poverty, gender disparity, education, India, child rights, exploitation, hazardous work, socio-economic challenges.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2011 India Census office, child labor is defined as any economically creative activity in which a kid under the age of 17 is involved, whether or not they receive payment in the form of salaries or profits. This kind of involvement could be mental, physical, or both. This work entails helping out part-time or performing unpaid labor on the farm, with family members, or in any other economic endeavor.

Child labor is widely seen as a social evil that has impacted and harmed the lives of numerous youngsters worldwide. According to UN estimates, one in ten children worldwide are involved in child labor. India is one of the countries with high rates of child labor; therefore, in order to reduce and eliminate the risk of child exploitation, action must be taken at the local level. According to 2019 statistics, there are about 12 million child laborers in India; however, many non-governmental organizations believe that the true number is closer to 60 million. There are almost as many girls as boys in this group. The problem of child labor is not limited to India; it is a major concern for the entire world.

Child labor is a major issue in India since early entry into the workforce at a critical age might result in dropping out of school, which reduces future opportunities for a better life. Usually, it has to do with poverty. The main reasons why child labor is so common are extreme poverty, a lack of employment opportunities, irregular income, and a regressive standard of life. While it is easy to identify child labor in the organized sector, which represents a small portion of all child labor, the unorganized sector is primarily affected by the problem and needs to receive the most attention. Although child labor is a global problem, it is particularly serious in India.

In India, child labor is prevalent in almost every area of the unorganized economy. Children are employed as domestic helpers as well as at textile factories, building sites, restaurants, and beedi rolling businesses. It is generally assumed that children will gradually stop working to fund their education as family income rises. Due to their lack of knowledge, they have limited access to opportunities, prospects, and outlooks in the world. Therefore, any employment that violates their entitlement to an education must be considered dangerous.

The issue of child labor cannot be resolved by opening schools in underdeveloped and rural areas, offering midday meals, or holding awareness campaigns for parents who fall below the poverty line. Severe action must be done to ensure that India's impoverished population has a better standard of living. All parents hope for a bright future for their children, so once they start making the money necessary to support their family overall, they will start sending their kids to industries and schools.

Since children are the most significant asset in the public eye, they ought to reserve the option to be secured, energized, and furnished with a safe, supporting climate. Children have worked over the entire course of time and in pretty much every culture, except this was normally finished in a family setting where they were raised and presented to different grown-up liabilities and abilities, acquiring regard as individuals from the family and local area and creating skills that supported their certainty as able, independent grown-ups. While it could be sensible for children to attempt to help their families in manners that are neither harming nor shifty, many are constrained to embrace undertakings that are improper for their formative stage overstretched timeframes, which comprises a grave infringement of their freedoms.

The term "child labor" describes the exploitation of minors through any type of employment that robs them of their youth, prevents them from attending a regular school, or otherwise negatively impacts their development. It specifically refers to work that:

- slows down their schooling by keeping them from joining in; driving them out ahead of schedule; or expecting them to attempt to offset school participation with unduly extended and laborious work.
- employment is risky and hurtful to their psychological, physical, social, or moral turn of events.

### **1.1.Causes of child labour**

- Structural and economic reasons

A child who works typically does as such to enhance the family pay. This is particularly significant for outsider networks whose guardians probably won't be working or could have the option to

work in low-paying position. Most of young people in non-industrial countries work since they want to help their families, guarantees the hypothesis of child work as a commitment to the family.

- Child labour as a means of self-actualization

According to this argument, some kids would still prefer to engage in constructive activities even in the absence of poverty. Children who work on family farms serve as an example of this, which also holds true for kids in underdeveloped nations and kids looking for part-time employment in developed nations.

- Child labour as a consequence of family dynamics

Additional significant factors that contribute to child labor include parental education and occupation. Parents are less likely to let their children work the more educated they are, especially women. However, families in labor-intensive professions, like farming, are more likely to have a large number of children who begin to contribute financially at a young age since their labor income exceeds their raising expenses. It is typical for children to enter the workforce when crop failures, job losses, or the death of an income earner threaten the stability of the family's livelihood.

- Escaping abuse at home

When they are mistreated, some kids flee their homes in search of employment. This is most frequently the result of stepparent maltreatment or a youngster moving in with an extended family member.

## **1.2.Types of Child Labour**

Child labor can be categorized based on the nature of the work, the environment in which it occurs, and the level of exploitation involved. Here are the main types of child labor:

### **1. Economic Exploitation**

- **Agricultural Labor:** Involves children working on farms, plantations, or in fields. Tasks may include planting, harvesting, and caring for livestock. This type often exposes children to harmful pesticides, heavy machinery, and extreme weather.

- **Industrial Work:** Includes employment in factories, workshops, and mines. Children might work in garment production, brick kilns, or processing plants, often facing dangerous machinery, toxic chemicals, and poor working conditions.

## 2. Hazardous Work

- **Mining and Quarrying:** Children are involved in the extraction of minerals and rocks. This work is extremely dangerous, with risks of cave-ins, explosions, and exposure to harmful dust and chemicals.
- **Construction Work:** Includes tasks such as carrying heavy materials, mixing cement, and working on scaffolding. It exposes children to heavy machinery, falls, and other construction-related hazards.

## 3. Unhealthy Work

- **Fishing and Seafood Processing:** Children work in fishing, sorting, and processing seafood, often in hazardous conditions involving harmful equipment and chemicals.
- **Brick Kiln Work:** Children perform tasks such as molding, drying, and transporting bricks. This work is physically demanding and performed in extreme heat.

## 4. Domestic Work

- **Household Chores:** Children work as domestic helpers, performing tasks such as cleaning, cooking, and caring for younger siblings. They often face long working hours, isolation, and a lack of access to education.

## 5. Street Work

- **Begging and Vending:** Children engage in begging or selling goods on the streets. They are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, often working long hours under dangerous conditions.
- **Street Performers:** Includes activities such as performing or entertaining on the streets, which can involve significant risk of exploitation and neglect.

## 6. Sexual Exploitation

- **Prostitution and Pornography:** Children are forced into sexual exploitation, including prostitution or pornography. This form of child labor is among the most abusive and damaging, causing severe physical and psychological harm.

## 7. Bonded Labor

- **Debt Bondage:** Children work to repay family debts. They are often bound to work long hours under harsh conditions, with little hope of ever paying off the debt.

## 8. Scavenging and Rag-Picking

- **Waste Collection:** Children work as scavengers or rag-pickers, collecting recyclable materials from garbage dumps. This exposes them to hazardous waste, toxic substances, and unsanitary conditions.

## 9. Craft and Artisan Work

- **Handicrafts:** Children are involved in the production of handicrafts, such as carpets, textiles, or toys. They often work long hours on intricate tasks, leading to health problems from repetitive strain and poor working conditions.

## 10. Forced Labor and Trafficking

- **Human Trafficking:** Children are trafficked for forced labor, which can involve any of the aforementioned types of work, often under coercive conditions and with severe exploitation.

## 11. Domestic and Informal Sector Work

- **Unregulated Jobs:** Children work in informal sectors where labor laws are weakly enforced. This includes tasks like working in family businesses or small-scale enterprises with poor working conditions.

Each type of child labor presents unique risks and challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving legal enforcement, educational opportunities, economic support for families, and community engagement to protect children and ensure their rights are upheld.

### **1.3.Effects of Child Labour**

Child labor in India has severe and multifaceted effects on children, families, and society at large. Physically, child laborers are often exposed to hazardous conditions that lead to chronic health problems, injuries, and malnutrition, undermining their overall well-being. Educationally, child labor significantly impedes access to schooling, resulting in lower literacy rates and limited skill development, which perpetuates the cycle of poverty. Psychologically, children endure emotional trauma and developmental delays due to the stress and loss of childhood experiences, impacting their mental health and social growth. Economically, reliance on child labor reinforces poverty, as families depend on the meager earnings of child workers, hindering long-term economic progress. Socially, child labor exacerbates inequalities, perpetuates social divisions, and erodes societal values regarding children's rights. Legally, it contravenes numerous international conventions and Indian laws designed to protect children. The broader societal impact includes stunted national development and an intergenerational cycle of poverty and exploitation. Addressing these issues requires a multifaceted approach involving legal enforcement, educational reforms, economic support, and increased societal awareness to protect children's rights and improve their quality of life.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**Parvathamma (2015)** highlights the causes and reasons behind child labor, examines the issue of child labor in India, examines child labor that is bonded, examines the effects, and examines the misuse of child labor. The government's policy attempts to protect child labor were also highlighted in the study. Rather than attending school and getting a good education, almost 11 million youngsters are learning about textile and garment manufacture, workshops, domestic work, farming, firefighting, restaurants, and many other vocations throughout their formative years.



**Dulera (2020)** outlined the main causes of child work, including the annoyance of poverty, illiteracy, societal and financial regression, addiction, the allure of low-cost labor, and family customs.

A research paper of **Mohapatra and Dash (2011)** attempted to investigate the socioeconomic issue of child labor. A number of important causes, including poverty, unemployment, poor income, lack of education, regressive tradition, superstition, and low status of women, have come together to give rise to the horrific practice of child labor. techniques used to get sample data on expansion rates through interviews. The results show that migrant families from various districts in Odisha have extremely poor socioeconomic conditions, which forces them to look for work.

The **Sarkar (2015)** draws attention to the issue of child labor by utilizing Indian government census data from 1971 to 2011. The NSSO 68th round data regarding child labor engagement in India was also used in this study. In this article, bivariate and multivariate analysis have been carried out specifically for that aim. The relationship between child labor and other social and economic factors has been examined using the chi-square test. This research has investigated the rate at which child labor in India is progressing, how it is distributed among socioeconomic factors, and how many children work. In addition, the report made a number of recommendations for the eradication and management of child labor in India.

**Kim et al (2020)** found that the largest number of children engaged in child labor worldwide is found in India. According to the Census Report, 12 million youngsters between the ages of 6 and 17 worked as primary laborers in 2011. In this study, we integrate the most recent UNICEF time standards for domestic chores and economic activity with the ILO's approach to define hazardousness.

**Nanda et al (2019)** Describe the extent, causes, and effects of child labor as well as the steps the government has taken to end it in the state of Odisha. Since gaining its independence, India has made a commitment to oppose child labor. An analysis of the state of child labor and other forms of work in Odisha is attempted in this article. Child labor has been identified as a focus topic, and assessments of the issue's various aspects have been completed.



**Limaye and Pande (2013)** try to enumerate the different meanings associated with the term "child" and offer succinct summaries of the scope of the issue from a national standpoint. In their report, they acknowledge that while numerous policy plans have been developed, a societal movement is still essential for this issue to be properly acknowledged and resolved.

**Dash et al (2018)** has brought attention to India's child labor growth rate, how it relates to socioeconomic factors, and how many children work there. The study has projected the estimations of child labor in India through the use of logistic regression. In addition, the essay included a number of recommendations for the outlawing and controlling the use of child labor in India.

A study of **Satyanarayana and Rao (2017)** examines the main causes of child labor in Andhra Pradesh's Krishna district. For this study, a convenience random sampling strategy was used to collect 300 samples. According to the research, there is a correlation between the social and economic conditions and the main causes of child labor. The paper concludes by outlining policy recommendations to resolve the issue of child labor.

## **2.1.OBJECTIVES**

- To examine the various causes of child labor.
- To identify the regions where gender discrimination in child labor occurs.
- To critically examine the problem of child labor in India.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper's research design is grounded in descriptive studies. Both primary and secondary data form the study's foundation. The study's second goal is accomplished through the employment of the observation method. The researchers employed analytical terms to achieve the third objective. The data used in the analytical analysis spans the last 50 years, from 1971 to 2011.

### **3.1.The Socio-Economic Aspects of Child Labor**

Poverty as the primary cause: Various factors influence child labor. Research has indicated that the primary cause is impoverishment. Parents typically make the decisions about child labor and education.

**Family size:** Children are more associated with enormous ruined families than in more modest ones, which recommends that family size influences child work. Because of their powerlessness to deal with the obligations of an enormous family, guardians force their children to work.

**Family situation:** Many growing children who have lost either of their folks, as well as those impacted by HIV/Helps, are constrained to work to accommodate their kin and themselves.

**Cultural or traditional factors:** Another component driving children into the workforce is culture. Because of customs and cultural elements, many societies in numerous social orders force children to start working early in life.

**Corruption:** Any place there is poverty, there is likewise corruption, which is one of the primary drivers of asset misuse. "Corruption exacerbates poverty and imbalance, sabotages human development and strength and supports struggle, disregards common freedoms, and disintegrates the vote based working of nations," expresses the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2012).

**Urban migrations:** Due to both rural push and urban pull forces, a large number of rural households relocate to metropolitan areas. Because they cannot afford basic necessities like food, shelter, etc., they are frequently compelled to live and work on the streets, where they end up as street sellers.

**Globalization:** Another factor contributing to child labor is globalization. Although globalization has both positive and bad effects, it may also present developing nations with new trade opportunities and a boost to foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows, allowing them to raise GDP per capita.

**Table 1:** Participation of boys and girls in distinct domains (based on overall observations)

Areas	Participation of boys and girls in distinct domains
Domestic work	Girls
Dhabas / restaurants / hotels	Boys
Agarbati, dhoop and detergent making	Equal Involvement

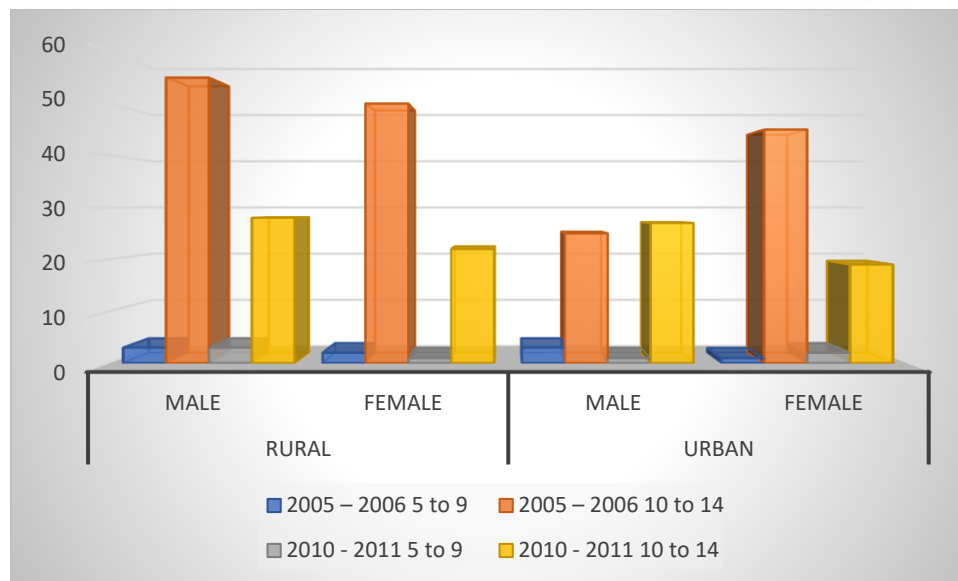
Paan, bidi and cigarettes	Boys
Spinning / weaving	Girls
Construction	Boys
. Brick – Kline, tiles	Boys
Jewellery	Boys
Carpet making	Boys
Automobile, vehicle, repairs	Boys

#### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The presence of gender disparities is evident in child labor. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the various elements associated with this. Gender disparities typically stem from distinct cultural factors, familial history, and the customs of the work cultures that are assigned to men and women. Workplace discrimination exists between males and females. Because these jobs are viewed as heavy labor, boys may be drawn to the automotive, mining, fishing, construction, and other industries, while girls are more likely to be encouraged to perform household chores and lighter labor, such as the textile industry, where women are typically employed. This prejudice is unjustified because it is based on biological characteristics.

**Table 2:** Children's Work Participation

Year	Age	Distribution of people (per 1000) by main category of regular activities			
		Rural		Urban	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
2005 – 2006	5-9	3	2	3	1
	10-14	55	50	25	45
2010 - 2011	5-9	3	1	1	2
	10-14	28	22	27	19



**Figure 1:** Graphical representation on Work Participation of children

The data presented in Table 2 illustrates the work participation of children aged 5-9 and 10-14 in rural and urban areas for the years 2005-2006 and 2010-2011. In the 2005-2006 period, the participation rates of children aged 5-9 were minimal, with both rural males and urban males showing a work participation rate of 3 per 1000, while rural females participated at a rate of 2 per 1000 and urban females at 1 per 1000. For the 10-14 age group, the work participation was significantly higher, with rural males at 55 per 1000 and rural females at 50 per 1000, indicating a high level of engagement in work activities. In urban areas, the participation rates were lower, with 25 per 1000 for males and 45 per 1000 for females.

By 2010-2011, there was a noticeable decline in work participation across all groups, reflecting potential improvements in policies related to child labor and increased emphasis on education. For children aged 5-9, the participation rates dropped slightly, particularly for rural females (1 per 1000) and urban males (1 per 1000). In the 10-14 age group, the reduction was more pronounced, with rural male participation falling to 28 per 1000 and rural female participation to 22 per 1000. Urban areas saw a similar trend, with male participation at 27 per 1000 and female participation decreasing to 19 per 1000. This downward trend suggests enhanced efforts to curb child labor and possibly increased access to educational opportunities, particularly for girls in rural settings.

However, the persistence of child work participation, albeit at reduced rates, indicates ongoing challenges in fully eradicating child labor, especially among older children in rural areas.

More kids are entering the trade and service industries than the marketing field as a result of urbanization. It is believed that more boys than girls are employed in laborious activities, allowing for gender differentiation. This is taken into account because it is challenging to count the number of girls employed in households.

**Table 3:** Number of children engaged in activities

Activities	Number of children in 100's	
	Boys	Girls
Economic Activities	52977	45619
Domestic duties only	3771	37207
Domestic duties with free collection of goods	3177	22694
Children at Work	59914	105520
Attending School	925351	725965
Neither at work nor at school	218887	241256

Table 3 presents the distribution of boys and girls engaged in various activities, highlighting significant gender disparities in children's involvement in economic, domestic, and educational pursuits. A total of 52,977 boys and 45,619 girls are involved in economic activities, showing a relatively high engagement of children in work, with boys slightly outnumbering girls. However, the gender gap becomes more pronounced in domestic duties, where only 3,771 boys are involved compared to 37,207 girls, indicating that girls are overwhelmingly responsible for domestic tasks.

When it comes to domestic duties combined with the free collection of goods (such as firewood or water), 3,177 boys participate compared to 22,694 girls, reinforcing the trend of girls being more engaged in unpaid household labor. Overall, the number of children categorized as "Children

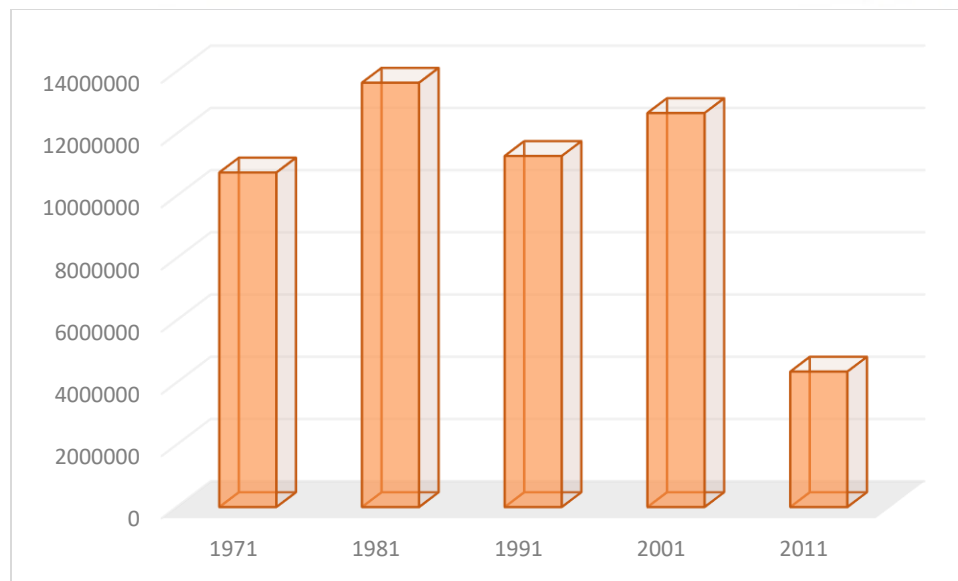
at Work" is 59,914 boys compared to a significantly higher 105,520 girls, underscoring the greater burden of work responsibilities on girls.

In contrast, school attendance figures reveal a positive trend, with 925,351 boys attending school compared to 725,965 girls, indicating better educational access for boys. However, a substantial number of children, 218,887 boys and 241,256 girls, are neither at work nor in school, suggesting that a significant proportion of children, particularly girls, remain disconnected from both education and formal economic participation.

According to the 2011 census, there is now 65% less child labor in the nation overall. Additionally, the government said that ending child labor was its "priority." From 1.26 crore in the 2001 census to 43.53 lakh in the 2011 census, a 65 percent decrease, there are now fewer working children in the nation.

**Table 4:** Child labor as reported by census 1971 to 2011

Year	Child labor as reported by census 1971 to 2011
1971	10753985
1981	13640870
1991	11285349
2001	12666377
2011	4353247



**Figure 2:** Graphical representation on Child labor as recorded by the 1971–2011 Census

Table 4 highlights the trend in child labor in India from 1971 to 2011 as reported by census data, showing fluctuations and a significant decline in the most recent decade. In 1971, the number of child laborers was recorded at 10,753,985, reflecting the prevalence of child labor during that period. This number increased substantially to 13,640,870 by 1981, marking the peak of child labor during the four decades, which could be attributed to socio-economic challenges and limited enforcement of child labor laws.

However, the trend began to reverse in the 1990s, with the number of child laborers dropping to 11,285,349 by 1991, suggesting early effects of increasing awareness and initial policy interventions aimed at reducing child labor. In 2001, the figure rose again slightly to 12,666,377, indicating persistent challenges despite ongoing efforts. The most dramatic change occurred between 2001 and 2011, with the number of child laborers plummeting to 4,353,247—a reduction of over 65%. This sharp decline reflects significant progress made through stronger legislation, enhanced enforcement of child labor laws, and increased emphasis on compulsory education, particularly through initiatives like the Right to Education Act, awareness campaigns, and poverty alleviation programs.



## 5. CONCLUSION

The majority of youngsters that work illegally in different industrial businesses are found in India. The major industry in India is agriculture, where a high number of young children work to support their families. Many of these kids are compelled to work at an early age because of a variety of family circumstances, including low parental education, unemployment, having a large number of family members, and poverty. This is frequently the main reason why child labor is so common in India. Numerous Indian social scientists and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have conducted in-depth analyses of the numerical data about child labor in India and concluded that the country accounts for one-third of child labor in Asia and one-fourth of global child labor. The Indian government started implementing significant measures to lower the number of children working and to emphasize the significance of supporting children's healthy growth and development as a result of a significant number of youngsters being worked illegally. Between 2001 and 2011, there was a 65 percent decrease in child labor because of the heightened controls and legal prohibitions on it. Even though this is a significant decline for India, a large proportion of children are still employed there in rural areas. There are still many regions in India that warrant worry, with 15% of child labor occurring in urban areas and 85% occurring in rural ones.

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