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Impact of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act on Rural Households: A Case Study in Davanagere District of Karnataka

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Abstract

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) has been playing an important role in employment generation and poverty alleviation in rural India. It was "an Act to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members' volunteer to do unskilled manual work and for matters connected or incidental thereto". In this paper, an effort has been made to evaluate the changes in terms of employment level, income level, expenditure pattern, savings pattern, and living standard of the sample beneficiaries in the study area between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period; and to offer policy measures to improve the performance of the MGNREG program in generating rural livelihood. The present study is mainly based on primary data collected directly from the selected sample beneficiaries of MGNREGP through personal interviews. Simple statistical tools like averages, ratios, percentages have been employed for the analysis. The main findings reveal that the proportion of employment generation, income generation, average expenditure, and savings, and assets creation were found to be quite significant in the post-MGNREGP period as compared to that of in pre-MGNREGP period in the study areas.

Similarly, the MGNREGP has made a positive impact on the living standard of sample beneficiaries in the study areas. Based on the findings, the study suggested that the statutory 100 days of employment per adult member of the rural household should be guaranteed instead of 100 days per rural household. This would help to improve the income level of households who mainly depend on MGNREGP for their livelihood, and the performance of MGNREGP in backward (Jagalur) taluk is low. Therefore the officials should take for effective implementation of the program in the backward areas.

Keywords: Unemployment, Poverty, Employment, Income generation, Expenditure, Savings, Assets creation, Living standard, Social groups, etc,

Introduction

India is the third-largest economy in the world concerning GDP on purchasing power parity and the tenth-largest economy on a nominal basis (World Bank, 2014). One of the biggest challenges India faces is to provide livelihood security to its citizens, especially to rural mass best with seasonal unemployment. Government of India, as well as the State Governments, have given due importance to employment generation and poverty alleviation in rural India in all of their developmental plans and budgetary allocations since independence. It has been found that in India, the non-availability of regular employment for a majority of workers. To face this challenge, the Government of India launched many programs for job creation from time to time. Prominent among those are Swarnjayanti Gram Swarajgar Yojana (SGSY), Swarnjayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) and Integrated Development Programme (IRDP) among the old ones and National Food for Work Programme(NFWP), Sampoorna Grameen Rojagar Yojana (SGRY) and Mahathama Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (MGNREGP) among the new ones.

The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) was enacted on August 23, 2005, and got presidential assent on September 5, 2005, expressing the consensus of the state to use fiscal and legal instruments to address the challenges of unemployment and poverty. It came into force in 200 districts of India on February 2, 2006. It was “an Act to provide for the enhancement of livelihood security of the households in rural areas of the country by providing at least one hundred days of guaranteed wage employment in every financial year to every household whose adult members’ volunteer to do unskilled manual work and for matters connected or incidental thereto” (NREGA, 2005).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To study the changes in terms of employment level and income of the sample beneficiaries in the study area between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period;
- To examine the expenditure and savings pattern of the sample beneficiaries in the study area between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period;
- To assess the asset creation and living standard of the sample beneficiaries in the study area between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period
- To offer policy measures to improve the performance of the MGNREG program in generating rural livelihood.

Hypotheses

The study aims at testing the following hypotheses;

- There is a difference in the number of days employed per annum for the sample beneficiaries between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period.
- The average household income per annum of sample beneficiaries is higher in the post-MGNREGP period as compared to the pre-MGNREGP period.
- Assets of sample beneficiaries are higher in post-MGNREGP period as compared to the pre-MGNREGP period.

- There has been a positive impact of MGNREGP on the living standards of the sample beneficiaries.

Data Base and Methodology

The present study is a descriptive one, mainly based on primary data. Keeping in view the main objectives of the study, the primary data is collected directly from the selected sample beneficiaries of MGNREGP through a personal interview by canvassing the pre-tested interview schedule in taluks of Davanagere district, namely Harihar, Davanagere and Jagalur taluks.

Multi-stage stratified random sampling technique, state as the first stage, region as the second stage, district as the third stage, blocks as the fourth stage, panchayats as the fifth stage, and the beneficiaries as the final or ultimate stage, was adopted for collection of the primary data. Karnataka State is selected for the present study. It is because the state which witnessed the effective implementation of MGNREGP has been chosen for an in-depth study. The next stage of selection is the region. Karnataka state has been classified into two sub-regions viz., North Karnataka and South Karnataka. Both regions are at different levels of development. Out of the two regions, only one region, namely South Karnataka, was selected for the present Study. It is because, as per Dr.D.M. Nanjundappa committees report, this region is socio-economically developed as compared to North Karnataka.

The third stage of the selection was the districts. North Karnataka consists of around half of the total districts in the state. Among them, only one district viz., Davanagere was chosen based on the progress of MGNREGP, physical and financial performance of MGNRECP, man days of employment generation, asset creation under MGNREGP, and the like. The reason for choosing Davanagere district is that his district has diversified (more and most backward) taluks as recommended in Dr. D.M.Nanjundappa committee report (2005).

At the fourth stage of selection were the blocks (taluks). Davanagere district consists of six (Harihar, Harapanahalli, Jagalur, Davanagere, Honnali, and channagiri) taluks, which are at different levels of development. Form Davanagere district three taluks

one advanced (Harihar), one medium (Davanagere), and one backward (Jagalur) were selected based on selected economic indicators.

At the fifth stage, 6-gram panchayaths from 3 selected taluks were selected on the basis physical and financial progress of MGNREGP, man days of employment generation under MGNREGP and asset creation under MGNREGP, agricultural growth, rate of literacy the SC/ST population density, availability of infrastructure and proximity to urban areas. Based on the above criteria, two-gram panchayaths one advanced (Salakatte) and one backward (Kunabelekeri) from Harihar block, one advanced (Igooru) and one backward (Hunnur) from Davanagere block and one advanced (Hanumanthpura) and one backward (Kenchhanahalli) from Jagalur block were chosen.

In the last stage, the sample households were selected from the sample gram panchayaths. From each selected gram panchayath, 40 beneficiaries of which ten from SCs, ten from STs, ten from OBCs, and ten from others were selected. For the selection of the samples beneficiaries, a list of MGNREGA beneficiaries was collected in each of the sample gram panchayath. The total sample size of the study was 240 beneficiaries consisting of 40 beneficiaries each from 6 gram panchayaths.

Tools of Data Collection and Analysis

In the present study, the essential supporting primary sources information was collected through the interview method. The researcher personally visited to sample beneficiaries 'household and collected the information with the help of the interview schedule prepared by him. Simple statistical tools and techniques like averages, ratios, percentages, were employed for analysis of data.

Scope of the Study

The present study examines the impact of MGNREGP on rural households; data for this study were collected from the selected sample beneficiaries. For this study, Harihar, Davanagere and Jagalur taluks of Davanagere district were selected.

Results and Discussion

This section, an attempt has been made to analyze the impact of MGNREGP on rural households in Davanagere district of Karnataka.

Employment Generation

Growth with social justice demands that the fruits of economic growth should be shared by all, the rich as well the poor. Effective employment policy is the most appropriate instrument for achieving this goal within the framework of the existing economic and political system. In the absence of full productive employment, the poorest people of the developing countries would not be able to meet their basic needs because of lack of purchasing power and development. One of the major objectives of MGNREGP is to provide substantial employment opportunities to rural households through assets generating activities. An attempt is made to assess the impact of MGNREGP on additional employment.

Table 1 provides the data on employment generation among sample beneficiaries in the pre and post-MGNREGP periods by social groups. The data indicate that at the aggregate level, the proportion of employment generation was found to be significant in the post-MGNREGP period as compared to that of in pre-MGNREGP period in the study areas. Going by social groups, the percentage increase in employment is very high in the OBC category consisting of 36.73 percent, and it is the least in the SC category, where the percentage was 29.76 only. Across taluks, the proportion of employment generation was found to be higher in Harihar taluk as compared to that of in Davanagere and Jagalur taluks in all the social groups. This implies that the average number of days the sample beneficiaries could get themselves employed was high, due to work provided by the MGNREGP. So the hypothesis "There is a difference in a number of days employed per annum for the sample beneficiaries between pre- MGNREGP and post- MGNREGP period," is justified and hence, it is accepted.

Table 1 Employment Generation among Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP Period by Social Groups

Social Groups	Pre- MGNREGP (Man days)	Post- MGNREGP (Man days)	Incremental employment	Percentage increase
Harihar Taluk				
SCs	392.83	519.01	126.27	32.14
STs	390.96	520.29	129.33	33.08
OBCs	307.51	431.71	124.20	40.39
GMs	338.65	451.95	113.30	33.46
Total	357.49	480.74	123.28	34.77
Davanagere Taluk				
SCs	390.50	505.63	115.13	29.48
STs	374.73	495.18	120.45	32.14
OBCs	303.00	412.40	109.40	36.11
GMs	322.64	437.20	114.56	35.51
Total	347.72	462.61	114.89	33.04
Jagalur Taluk				
SCs	380.00	485.13	105.13	27.67
STs	363.23	468.68	105.45	29.03
OBCs	289.00	386.4	97.40	33.70
GMs	310.14	408.7	98.56	31.78
Total	335.59	437.23	101.64	30.55
All				
SCs	387.78	503.26	115.51	29.76
STs	376.31	494.72	118.41	31.42
OBCs	299.84	410.17	110.33	36.73
GMs	323.81	432.62	108.81	33.58
Total	346.93	460.19	113.27	32.79

Source: Primary Survey.

Income Generation

Income is one of the important indicators to measure the level of living of the members of the society. The data regarding the average household income of sample beneficiaries was estimated at two points of time, i.e., pre and post- MGNREGP. To find out the differences, if any, in the generation of income from MGNREGP, the data was further analyzed across social group's viz., SC, ST, OBC, and GMs. Table 2 presents the data on income generation among sample beneficiaries in the pre and post- MGNREGP periods by social groups. It is clear from the data that at the aggregate level, the average household income of the sample beneficiaries during

the post -MGNREGP is Rs.14, 187.53 constituting 21.84 percent. Going by social groups, the percentage increase in income is found to be highest in the case of OBCs constituting 33.72 percent ,and it is just 22.29 percent only in SCs category which is the least. Across taluks, the proportion of income generation was found to be higher in Harihar taluk as compared to that of in Davanagere and Jagalur taluks in all the social groups. So, the hypothesis "Average household income per annum of sample beneficiaries is higher in the post- MGNREGP period as compared to pre- MGNREGP period", is supported, and hence, it is accepted.

Table 2 Income Generation among Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP Period by Social Groups

Social Groups	Pre- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Post- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Incremental Income	Percentage increase
Harihar Taluk				
SCs	37283.57	46114.87	8831.30	23.69
STs	43566.91	53967.70	10400.79	23.91
OBCs	67366.91	92734.33	25367.42	37.66
GMs	63233.57	78967.67	15734.10	24.88
Total	52862.74	67946.14	15083.4	27.535
Davanagere Taluk				
SCs	37135.99	45733.82	8597.83	23.15
STs	43517.45	53668.23	12150.78	23.32
OBCs	66451.19	88785.08	22333.89	33.61
GMs	63217.76	78084.99	14867.23	23.52
Total	52580.60	66568.03	14487.43	20.07
Jagalur Taluk				
SCs	35786.90	42951.68	8164.76	20.02
STs	43066.89	52267.69	11200.76	21.36
OBCs	63933.57	83034.33	19100.76	29.88
GMs	62100.24	75601.00	13500.76	21.74
Total	51221.90	63463.68	12991.76	17.91
All				
SCs	36735.49	44933.46	8531.30	22.29
STs	43383.75	53301.21	11250.78	22.86
OBCs	65917.22	88184.58	22267.36	33.72
GMs	62850.52	77551.22	14700.70	23.38
Total	52221.75	65992.62	14187.53	21.84

Source: Primary Survey.

Expenditure Pattern

The expenditure pattern reveals the improvement of living standards of sample beneficiaries. When the level of income is increased, the expenditure also tends to increase. How the MGNREG program has influenced the expenditure pattern of the sample beneficiaries is discussed in the following tables. Table 3 provides the data on average household expenditure among sample beneficiaries in the pre and post- MGNREGP period. The data indicates that the expenditure incurred by the sample beneficiaries is comparatively very high in the post- MGNREGP period with the pre- MGNREGP period. It is

interesting to note that the expenditure incurred by OBCs and GMs is very high in the Post-MGNREGP period comparatively with SCs and STs. The percentage increase is 42.72 and 31.49 percent among OBCs and GMs, respectively. Whereas it is 28.15 percent and 27.71 percent among STs and SCs, respectively. This implies that generally, in OBCs and GMs, the expenditure is very high due to their higher level of income. When the income increases, expenditure also tends to increase. Therefore, the expenditure incurred by OBCs and GMs is naturally high. Across taluks, a similar trend by and large was observed.

Table 3 Expenditure Pattern among Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP Period by Social Groups

Social Groups	Pre- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Post- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Incremental expenditure	Percentage increase
Harihar Taluk				
SCs	30199.69	38658.8	8459.098	31.32
STs	37467.54	47510.61	10043.07	31.07
OBCs	51872.52	76042.15	24169.63	46.59
GMs	45528.17	60105.11	14576.94	33.55
Total	41266.98	55579.17	14312.18	35.63
Davanagere Taluk				
SCs	29337.43	37546.41	8208.978	27.98
STs	36854.66	46658.2	9803.54	26.60
OBCs	49838.39	70940.21	21101.82	42.34
GMs	44252.43	57963.74	13711.31	30.98
Total	40070.73	53277.14	13206.41	25.39
Jagalur Taluk				
SCs	26840.18	33591.34	6751.17	25.15
STs	34453.51	43227.54	8774.03	25.47
OBCs	45392.83	63199.45	17806.62	39.23
GMs	40986.16	53254.71	12268.55	29.93
Total	36918.17	48318.26	11400.09	29.95
All				
SCs	28792.43	36598.85	7806.42	28.15
STs	36258.57	45798.78	9540.21	27.71
OBCs	49034.58	70060.60	21026.02	42.72
GMs	43588.92	57107.85	13518.93	31.49
Total	39418.63	52391.52	12972.89	30.32

Source: Primary Survey.

Savings Pattern

The MGNREG program plays an imperative role in improving the saving habits of sample beneficiaries and to improve their economic well-being. This has given scope to the sample beneficiaries to generate savings to provide economic security to their future life. Table 4 provides the data on average household savings among sample beneficiaries in the pre and post- MGNREGP period. The data indicates that the average household savings by the sample beneficiaries are comparatively very high in the post- MGNREGP period with the pre- MGNREGP period. Social groups' wise analysis shows that the proportion of

savings rate during the post-MGNREGP period was found to be quite significant in OBCs as compared to that of other social groups. The percentage increase in savings was estimated at 7.38, 6.16, 5.34, and 4.95 in OBCs, GMs, STs, and SCs respectively. This indicates that the proportion of average household savings was found to be quite significant in OBCs as compared to that of other social groups. Across taluks, the proportion of average savings was found to be higher in Harihar taluk as compared to that of in Davanagere and Jagalur taluks both in pre and post-MGNREGP periods.

Table 4 Savings Pattern among Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP Period by Social Groups

Social Groups	Pre- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Post- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Incremental savings	Percentage increase
Harihar Taluk				
SCs	7083.88	7456.08	372.20	5.25
STs	6099.37	6457.09	357.72	5.8 16
OBCs	15494.39	16692.18	1197.79	7.73
GMs	17705.40	18862.56	1157.16	6.54
Total	11595.76	12366.98	771.22	6.35
Davanagere Taluk				
SCs	7798.56	8187.41	388.85	4.99
STs	6662.79	7010.03	347.24	5.21
OBCs	16612.80	17844.87	1232.07	7.42
GMs	18965.33	20121.25	1155.92	6.09
Total	12509.87	13290.89	781.02	5.93
Jagalur Taluk				
SCs	8946.73	9360.34	413.62	4.62
STs	8613.38	9040.15	426.77	4.95
OBCs	18540.74	19834.88	1294.14	6.98
GMs	21114.08	22346.29	1232.21	5.84
Total	14303.73	15145.42	841.69	5.60
All				
SCs	7943.06	8334.61	391.56	4.95
STs	7125.18	7502.42	377.24	5.34
OBCs	16882.64	18123.98	1241.33	7.38
GMs	19261.60	20443.37	1181.76	6.16
Total	12803.12	13601.10	797.98	5.96

Source: Primary Survey.

Asset Creation

The hard core of the rural poverty is constituted by the marginal farmers, agricultural laborers', non-agricultural laborers, and rural artisans, possessing little or virtually no assets. Any employment generation program which aims at improving the rural poor must aim at creating new productive assets for them. The philosophy underlying the MGNREGP creates from the imperative that the main attack on rural poverty has to be by endowing the rural poor people with productive assets and or skills so that they are assured of income which raises them above the poverty line.

Table 5 presents the data on assets creation among sample beneficiaries in the pre and post-MGNREGP

periods by social groups. The data reveals that comparatively, the asset creation in the post-MGNREGP period is the highest as against the pre-MGNREGP. Social groups wise analysis shows that at the aggregate level regarding sample beneficiaries, OBCs stood top recording 32.15 percent in the creation of assets during the post-MGNREGP period and it is the least in SCs consisting 26.15 percent. Across taluks, the proportion of assets creation was found to be higher in Harihar taluk as compared to that of in Davanagere and Jagalur taluks during both periods. It is evident from the above analysis that the hypothesis "Assets of sample beneficiaries are higher in the post-MGNREGP period as compared to the pre- MGNREGP period" is justified, and therefore, it is accepted.

**Table 5 Assets Creation among Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP
Period by Social Groups**

Social Groups	Pre- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Post- MGNREGP (in Rs)	Incremental assets	Percentage increase
Harihar Taluk				
SCs	22370.14	28591.22	6221.08	27.81
STs	27882.82	36158.36	8275.54	29.68
OBCs	43788.49	58422.63	14634.14	33.42
GMs	41101.82	54487.69	13385.87	32.57
Total	33785.82	44414.97	10629.16	32.57
Davanagere Taluk				
SCs	22910.23	28897.63	5987.4	26.13
STs	27615.99	35421.03	7805.04	28.26
OBCs	41528.76	55046.75	13517.99	32.55
GMs	40459.37	53097.79	12638.42	31.24
Total	33128.59	43115.80	9987.21	29.55
Jagalur Taluk				
SCs	22472.14	27977.63	5505.49	24.50
STs	24940.13	31819.35	6879.22	27.58
OBCs	34360.14	44833.00	10472.86	30.48
GMs	35260.14	45652.67	10392.53	29.47
Total	29258.14	37570.66	8312.53	28.01
All				
SCs	22584.17	28488.83	5904.66	26.15
STs	26812.98	34466.25	7653.27	28.51
OBCs	39892.46	52767.46	12875.00	32.15
GMs	38940.44	51079.38	12138.94	31.09
Total	32057.51	41700.48	9642.96	29.47

Source: Primary Survey.

Improvement in Living Standard

Improvement in income due to the hundred day's employment provided under MGNREGP should also be accompanied by other indicators of development of the living standard of the persons covered by such programs. Hence, information was sought from the 240 sample beneficiaries about the improvement in their living conditions consequent to the getting employment under MGNREGP. Table 6 provides the data on improvement in the living standard of sample beneficiaries in the post-MGNREGP period. The data indicates that a majority of 82.92 percent of sample beneficiaries have stated that the man days of employment provided under MGNREGP have

substantially improved their living conditions in the post-MGNREGP period. While a minimum of 17.08 percent sample beneficiaries have stated that the man days of employment provided under MGNREGP have marginally improved their living conditions in the post-MGNREGP period. None of the sample beneficiaries have stated that there is no improvement in their living conditions. Going by taluks, the proportion of the positive impact of MGNREGP on the living standard of sample beneficiaries was found to be higher in Harihar taluk as compared to that of in Davanagere and Jagalur taluks in the post-MGNREGP period.

Table 6 Improvement in Living Standard of Sample Beneficiaries in Pre, and Post-MGNREGP Period

Response	Harihar taluk	Davanagere taluk	Jagalur taluk	All
Substantially Improved	87.50	83.75	77.50	82.92
Marginally Improved	12.50	16.25	22.50	17.08
No Improved	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Total	100.00 (80)	100.00 (80)	100.00 (80)	100.00 (240)

Source: Primary Survey

Areas of Improvement in Living Standard

The impact of MGNREGP on the living standard of SHG members is examined in terms of improvement in various aspects. On the other hand, the increased income of the sample beneficiaries contributes to access to electricity, drinking water, sanitation and other basic needs of life, and also the household assets such as tailoring machine, television, mobile, vehicles, LPG, etc. If the sample beneficiaries have pucca houses with electricity, drinking water, sanitation, and also household assets, their living standard is considered to be improved. Table 6 provides the data on areas of improvement in the living standard of sample beneficiaries in the post-MGNREGP period. The data reveals that identical responses have expressed from majority of sample beneficiaries about the improvement in their living standard in different areas viz., household assets (94.58 percent), food (100.0 percent), clothing (100.0 percent), recreation, (93.33 percent) children

education and health care (95.83 percent), acquisition of gold and silver (23.33per cent), land/site (8.33 percent) and miscellaneous (100.0 percent). This is apparently due to the very moderate increase in their income generated from getting additional employment under MGNREGP. Across taluks, a similar trend, by and large, was observed.

However, it is encouraging to note that there has been an all-round improvement in terms of household assets, food consumption, clothing, recreation, social status, education of children, and health care. These are the vital areas for the improvement of human resources. Hence, the impact of MGNREGP on this aspect of the sample beneficiaries is positive and encouraging. It is evident from the above analysis that the hypothesis, “There has been a positive impact of MGNREGP on living standards of the sample beneficiaries,” is proved, and therefore, it is accepted.

Table 7 Areas of Improvement in Living Standard of Sample Beneficiaries in Pre and Post-MGNREGP Period

Areas of Improvement	Harihar taluk	Davanagere taluk	Jagalur taluk	All
Household assets	97.50	95.00	91.25	94.58
Food	100.00	100.0	100.00	100.00
Clothing	100.00	100.0	100.00	100.00
Recreation	96.25	93.75	90.00	93.33
Children’s education/health care	98.75	96.25	92.50	95.83
Gold/Silver	26.25	23.75	20.00	23.33
Land/Site	11.25	8.75	5.00	8.33
Miscellaneous	100.00 (80)	100.00 (80)	100.00 (80)	100.00 (240)

Note: The total percent will not be tally to 100 because of multiple answers; Source: Primary Survey.

Policy Suggestions

In light of the findings of empirical study, the following suggestions are offered for the effective implementation of the MGNREG program;

- MGNREGP has much more to do to strengthen

the Panchayat Raj system, restriction of the direct intervention of other departments or agencies associated with it would be a welcome step in this regard. The village administration should be brought down to the taluk level. So that the

development activities under MGNREGP can reach the villages situated at a distance from development block.

- Statutory 100 days of employment per adult member of the rural household should be guaranteed instead of 100 days per rural household. This would help in improving the income level of households who mainly depend on MGNREGP for their livelihood.
- The sample beneficiaries have also suggested increasing man days of employment from 100 days to 200 days in a year.
- Minimum wages need to be revised upward, as is done in Karnataka. Men's participation is restricted due to low wages under MGNREGP. Hence there is a strong case towards the revision of minimum wages prescribed and also paid under MGNREGP.
- The sample beneficiaries have suggested increasing the wage rate due to an increase in the general price index.
- The performance of MGNREGP in backward taluk is low. So the officials should take for effective implementation of the program in the backward areas.

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