

# Socio-Political Empowerment of Bhumij Tribal Community in West Bengal: An Ethnographic Study

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## **Abstract**

*Empowerment of the stigmatized and the tribal society has ever been the most important concern of Indian society. However, basically no universal measure exists to tap it. The aim of the study is to know the socio-political empowerment of Bhumij tribal community to understand the present status and changes among the Bhumij tribal community. This study is purely qualitative in nature and Ethnographic method has been followed. The study has been conducted by surveying 255 Bhumij households in West Bengal. Checklist cum household survey and interview schedule are used for collections of data. Participatory observation method also plays an important role for the collections of data. Occupational status, transaction with other communities, inter-caste marriage, position in local panchayat and awareness of their Democratic rights with some notable changes in Bhumij community has been analysed by the researcher. The social and political empowerment remains a burning issue across the tribal communities in India. The Present study tries to find out the socio-political empowerment of Bhumij community in West Bengal.*

**Keywords:** *Bhumij in the tribe, Socio-political status of Bhumij, Socio-political empowerment of Bhumij, West Bengal in India.*

## **Introduction :-**

The Bhumij tribes have a traditional identity with certain territories of community living, especially in West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha. As per the 2011 census report, the total Bhumij population is 911,349. Bhumij is known by different names to Mundari linguistic family within the 'kherwari group', an essential branch of the great "AUSTRO-ASIATIC" family. In Jharkhand, they are found in the districts of Singhbhum, Hazaribagh, Ranchi, and Dhanbad. Risley observed, Bhumij are the pure Dravidian race that has lost their original language and now speak only in Bengali; they worship Hindu God in addition to their own (the tendency being to relegate the tribal gods to the women) and are more advanced among them employ Brahmans as family priests.

Although the social and cultural changes of the Bhumij community have undergone some changes due to the impact of modernization, their socio-political empowerment is a burning issue in the socio-political context of India. This study tries to shed light on how aware of Bhumij community of the political situation of their country as well as their social problems. The word "empowerment" has been used more commonly to promote the engagement of all citizens, particularly the marginalised, in the political, social, and economic concerns of society. Increasing a person's or a community's spiritual, political, social, or economic strength is referred to as empowerment. Through socio-political empowerment, they are able to overcome the problems in their own society, increase economic and cultural growth, and become conscious of their democratic rights. Political representation directs empowerment's course as its compass.

Indigenous leaders raise their voices in a call for equal chances and rights. Policies of fairness and inclusivity arise via cooperation with governing entities, creating a framework for a more promising future.

### **Significance of the study:**

The significance of the study arises from the empowerment of tribal peoples, especially on the Chotnagpur plateau. Some tribal communities in India have converted to Christianity; they give financial support and have NGOs working actively for those communities, but the Bhumij live in remote areas and are deeply influenced by Hinduism. Although the government makes policies and provides various facilities to tribal people, in many cases they are apathetic to taking the facilities. Knowing the position of socio-political empowerment leads to their progress and aspects of social and political awareness.

### **Objectives of the study:**

To know the socio-political empowerment of BHUMIJ community of West Bengal in India.

### **Study population:**

The present research study conducted on Bhumij tribal community. Bhumij are a Branch of Munda ethnic group and Austroasiatic language family of India. Bhumij are the settled agriculturist's group on the basis of tribal cultural types. Bhumij community is the Fourth largest tribal community in West Bengal.

### **Study area:**

The present study had been delimited to Puruliya, Bankura and Jhargram districts of West Bengal in India. From these three districts only eleven blocks had been taken-; four from Puruliya (Puncha, Hura, Bandwan, Manbazar-1), four from Bankura (Hirbandh, Ranibandh, Khatra, Raipur) and three from Jhargram (Binpur-1, Binpur-2, Nayagram). Only Bhumij tribe community had been taken under consideration.

### **Methodology of the study:**

- ❖ The present study used traditional ethnographic method. Purposive sampling and snow-ball sampling methods is used by the researcher for house hold (field) survey and collection of data. Present researcher has selected 57 villages in three districts of West Bengal. researcher selected 255 house hold survey and conducted 109 parent's interviews in West Bengal.

### **Tool for data collection:**

In order to get entry to the accurate findings of objectives the researcher had made a Check list cum interview schedule for house hold survey and Interview schedule for parent's tools for collection data.

### **Source of Data:**

Primary data were original, raw and extracted directly. It was collected by participatory observation, indirect oral investigation, case study, telephonic interview, in-depth personal interviews, focus- group discussions and house survey method through wide fieldwork in the study area. Study related secondary sources were journals, books, government documents and reports,

webpages blogs. Following research methods were used by researcherto collect information in respect of research objectives:

(A) Participatory observation (B) Non- Participatory Observation (C) In-depth interview

### Analysis & Discussion:

**Table no-1: West Bengal Demographical profile of studied Population.**

State	Total House	Total Family Member	Gender	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	1167	Male	592	50.73
			Female	575	49.27

The present study has been conducted 255 house hold survey, from those have 1167 totalmembers which50.73% were male and 49.27% were fem

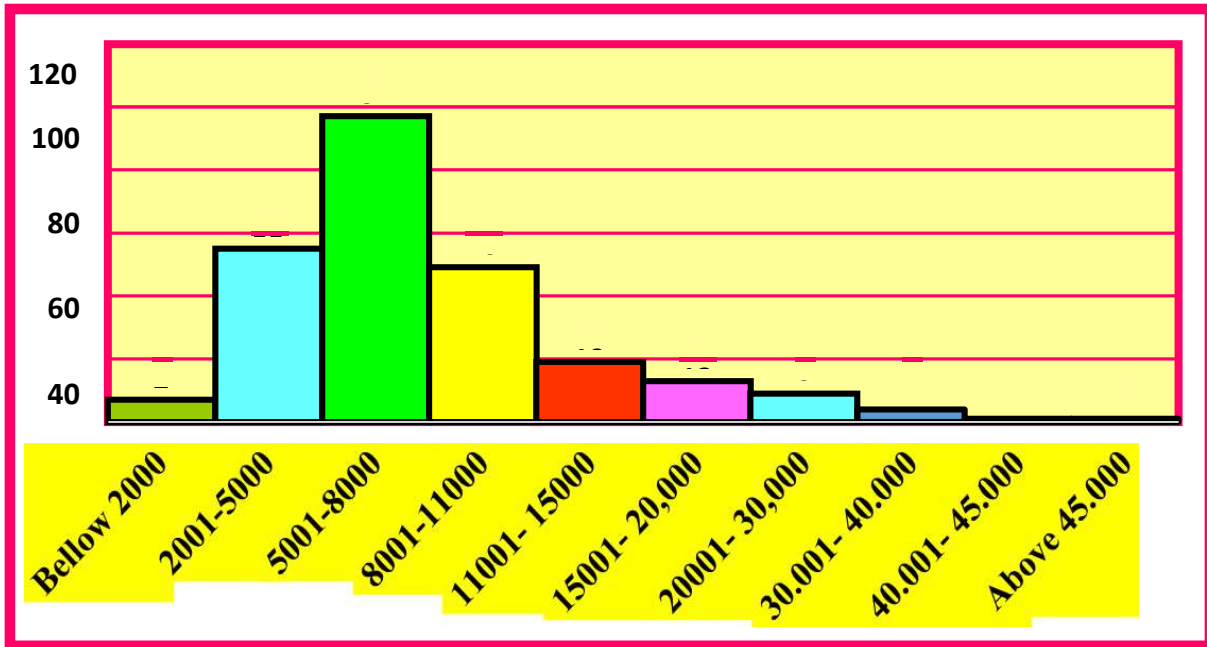
**Table No-2: Average Percentage of Different Occupations of the Bhumij FamilyMembers in the State of West Bengal.**

State	Total Occupated Members	Different Occupation	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	823	Govt. Service	21	2.55
		Private Service	40	4.86
		Shops Income	24	2.92
		Business	29	3.52
		Self Help Group	31	3.77
		Daily Labor	225	27.34
		Forest Related Work	34	4.13
		Cultivation	367	44.59
		Sale of Fire Wood and cow dung cake	6	0.73
		Other if any(Specify)	46	5.59

Source: Field Survey

This table shows the occupational status of 823 Bhumij people out of 1167 people in the state of West Bengal. It is found that only 2.55% (21) people have government services, 4.86% (40) people are working in the private sector, 2.92% (24) people earn their income from shop income, and 3.52%( 29) people are involved in businesses such as sand, wood, buying and selling cows and goats, vegetable businesses, etc. 3.77% (31) people are associated with the self-help group; about 27.34% (225) people are daily labourers. Although their daily wage is one hundred and fifty to two hundred rupees, 4.13% (34) people are involved in forest-relatedwork such as "*Hula bahini*", casual forest guard, collection of leaves and wood for sale, 44.59% (367) people main occupation is cultivation, 0.73% (6) people are sailing of fire woodand cow dung cake, and 5.59% (46) people are working others such as carpenters, fishermen, drivers, and masons. From the total sample of Bhumij people in West Bengal, it is clearly foundthat the maximum occupations of Bhumij people were cultivation and daily labour.

**Figure-1: Average Percentage of Monthly Income Group of the Bhumij Family in the State of West Bengal.**



Source: Field Survey

This figure presents the different monthly income groups of the Bhumij family on the basis of field data in the state of West Bengal. It is found that the monthly family income of the Bhumijis: 2.75% family income is below 2000 rupees, 21.57% family income belongs to 2001-5000 rupees per month, 38.04% family income is around 5001-8000 rupees per month, 19.22% family income is 8001-11000 rupees, 7.45% family income is around 11001-15000 rupees, which is not enough for a family. So it can be said that the people of the Bhumij community of West Bengal are economically poor.

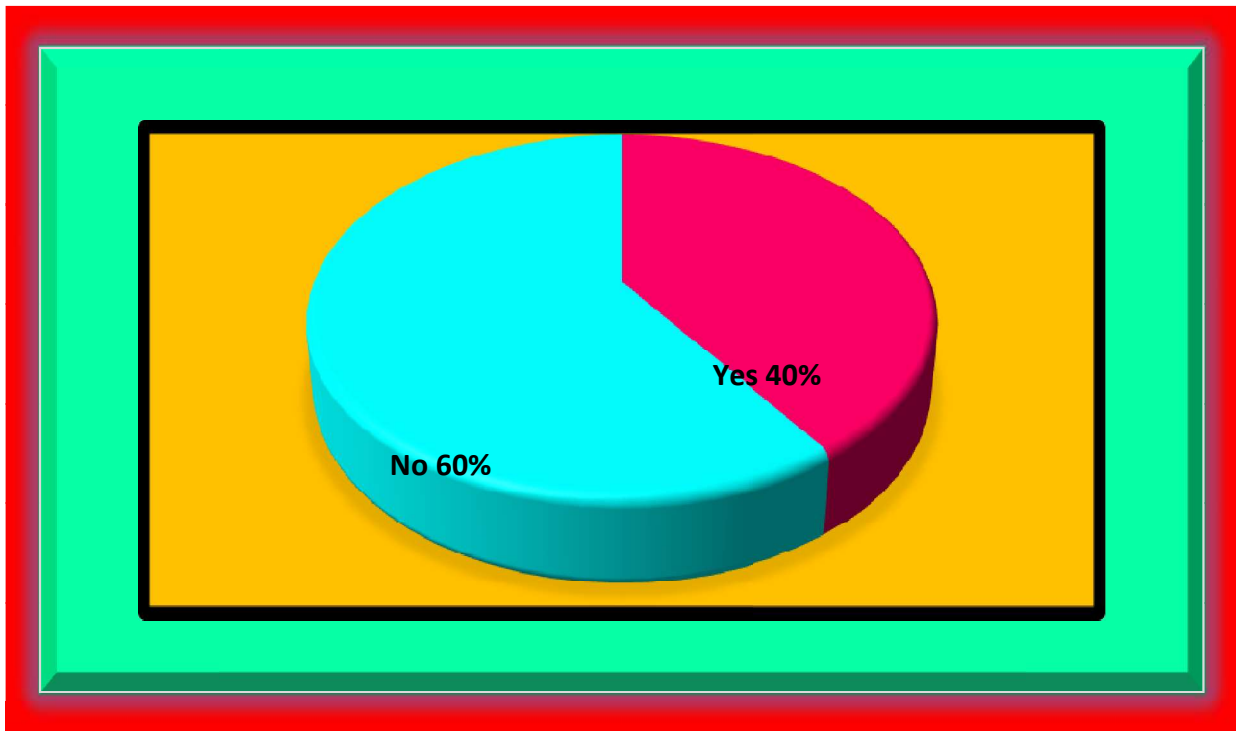
**Table No-3: Average Percentage of having Inter Caste Marriage of Bhumij Community People in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Having Inter Caste Marriage	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	Yes	5	1.96
		No	250	98.04

Source: Field Survey

In the state of West Bengal, 98.04% of families (out of 255) opinion is no inter-caste marriage in their society; only 1.96% of Bhumij families found inter-caste marriage. So it can be said that the people of the Bhumij community of West Bengal do not support inter-caste marriage at all.

**Figure No-2: The Upper Caste People and Bhumij People Were Invited to Each Other's Ceremonies: Average Percentage of Household in the State of West Bengal.**



Source- field survey

This figure presents, Out of 255 Bhumij families in West Bengal, 40.39% (103) of the family opinion is that uppercaste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other to their ceremonies, and 59.61% (152) of the family opinion was that upper caste people and Bhumij people were not invited to each other to their ceremonies. Here, upper caste means not only the Brahmin family but also the lower caste Hindu community, *Khatriya*, and *Kayastha* communities.

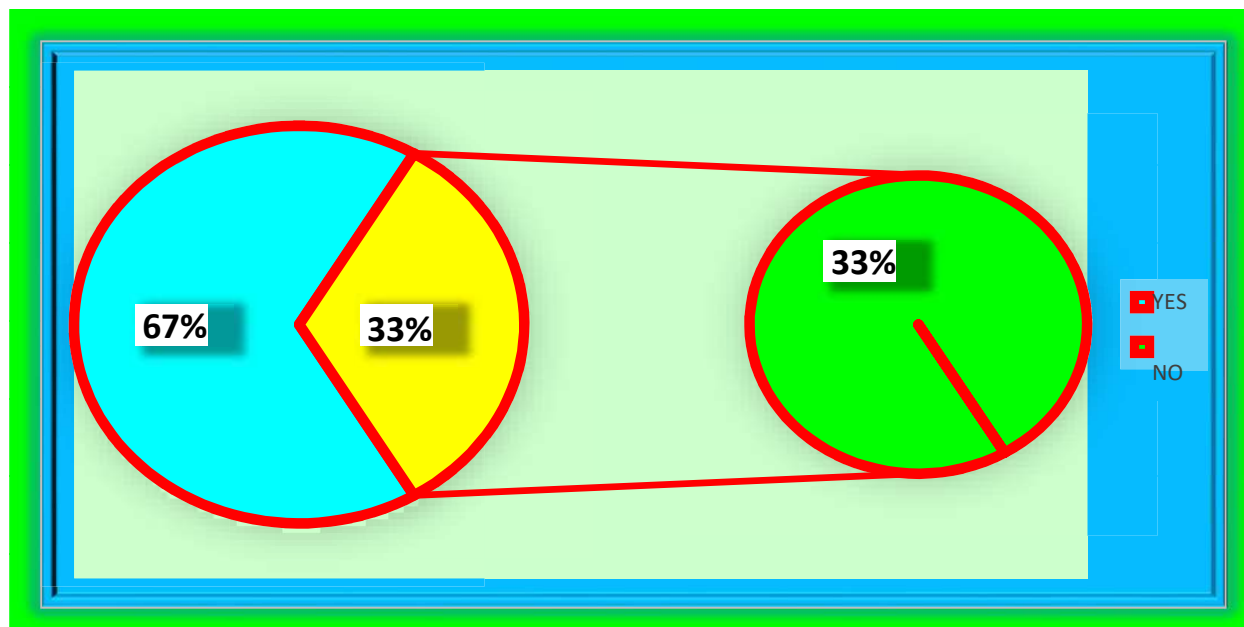
**Table No- 4: Average Percentage of the Own Old Traditional Justice System in Bhumij Community Village in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Own Old Traditional Justice System Exist	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	158	61.96
		NO	97	38.04

Source: Field Survey

On the basis of a 255-household survey in the state of West Bengal, 61.96% of families have their own traditional justice system. It indicates that the majority of Bhumij families believe in their traditional justice system. It has constructed a five-step hierarchy system in their community.

**Figure No-3: Average Percentage of Knowing About the Political Context of the Country in the State of West Bengal .**



Source- field survey

It is seen that 67.06% (171) of the Bhumij family in West Bengal does not know about the political context in the country, and only 32.94% (84) of the Bhumij family is aware of the political context in their country. It indicates that Bhumij family members are not aware of the political context in our country.

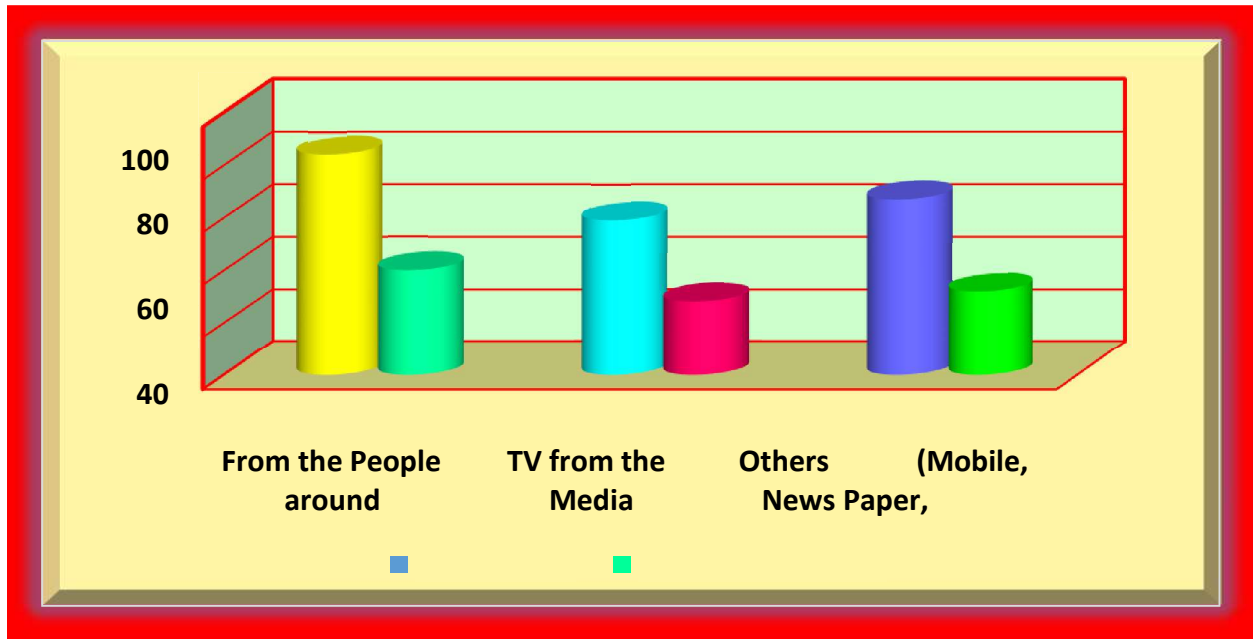
**Table No-5: Average Percentage of Family Members Who Were or Are in the Position of Local Panchayat in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Added To Any Post Of Local Panchayat	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	15	5.88
		NO	216	94.12

Source: Field Survey

Only 5.88% of Bhumij family were in position in local panchayat in West Bengal. It clearly indicates that the percentage of family members elected to local panchayat is extremely low.

**Figure No-4: Average Percentage of the Various Types of Medium for Knowing About the Political Context of the Country in the State of West Bengal.**



Source: Field Survey

It is known from 255 household survey that 40% of the Bhumij family in West Bengal knows about the political context of the country and state from the local people, 28.10% of the family knows through television news, and 31.90% of the family knows through other mediums such as a mobile phone, newspaper, or radio.

**Table No-6: Average Percentage of Attendance at Gram Sabha Meetings in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Attend Gramsabha Meeting	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	149	58.43
		NO	106	41.57

Source: Field Survey

It is known that about 58.43% of the Bhumij family members attend the "*Gramsobha meeting*" of the panchayat, and 41.57% of the family members do not attend the "*Gramsabha meetings*" of the local panchayat in the state of West Bengal.

**Table No-7: Average Percentage of Giving Importance to the Opinion of Bhumij People in the Gram Sabha in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Gives Importance To Bhumij Opinion	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	141	55.29
		NO	114	44.71

Source: Field Survey

In the state of West Bengal, 55.29% (141) of the Bhumij family said that the panchayat gives importance to their opinions in *Gramsobha meetings*, and 44.71% (114) of the family said that the panchayat does not value their opinions in *Gramsobha meetings*.

**Table No-8: Average Percentage of Going to Gramme Panchayat to Report Various Problems in the Bhumij Community in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Reported Various Problems To Local GramPanchayet	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	189	74.12
		NO	66	25.88

Source: Field Survey

It is found on the basis of 255 Bhumij family's opinion in West Bengal that 74.12% (189) of the Bhumij family are going to "*Grampanchayat*" to report various problems in their community, and 25.88% (66) of the Bhumij family does not go to the panchayat to report problems in their community. It indicates that the majority of the Bhumij family is aware of legal administration.

**Table No-9: Average Percentage of Awareness about Democratic Rights of Bhumij Community People in the State of West Bengal.**

State	House	Awareness Democratic Rights	Number	Percentage
West Bengal	255	YES	80	31.37
		NO	175	68.63

Source – field survey

From the field survey in west Bengal it is found 68.7% Bhumij family do not aware about their democratic rights. It is very significant result about Bhumij community.



**Table No-10: Average Percentage of Some Notable Changes in the Bhumij Community in Their Socio-Political Context in the State of West Bengal.**

State	TotalNo of Family	Dimention of Noteable Changes	Number of Family	Percentage
West Bengal	255	Gender equity	188	73.72
		Economic progression	60	23.52
		Occupational change	49	19.21
		Educational awareness	98	38.43
		Social inclusion	145	56.86
		Improvement of status	122	47.84
		Political participation	64	25.09
		Cultural development	136	53.33
		Financial opportunity	14	5.49

**Findings:**

- About 58.43% of the Bhumij family members attend the "**Gramsobha meeting**".
- Only 55.29% (141) of the Bhumij family said that the panchayat gives importance to their opinions in *Gramsobha meetings*.
- About 74.12% (189) of the Bhumij family are going to "*Grampanchayat*" to report various problems in their community
- Only 5.88% of Bhumij family were position in local panchayat in west Bengal
- About 68.7% Bhumij family do not aware about their democratic rights.
- only 1.96% of Bhumij families found inter-caste marriage.
- About 67.06% (171) of the Bhumij family in West Bengal does not know about the political context in the country.
- About 40.39% (103) of the family opinion is that upper caste people and Bhumij people were invited to each other to their ceremonies
- About 62.36% family income belongs to less than 8000 rupees per month.
- About 27.34% (225) people are daily labourers. Although their daily wage is one hundred and fifty to two hundred rupees, 44.59% (367) people main occupation is cultivation.
- About 73.72% Bhumij family seen in cases of gender equity.

## Conclusion:

In the sphere of the empowerment of Bhumij tribes, notable progression is anticipated about the distribution of authority to the grass root level of their society. The present study has shown grave uncertainties regarding the tribal developmental programmes which are lacking synchronization and timely execution. The reality is that the weakest bond in the series of the entire process of tribal development and empowerment is the execution element through democratic rights and values in truest sense. The tribal development agenda is still incapable to put into practice effectively with the existing strict and multifarious structure of various developmental agencies. They are still living in solitude and their life style illustrate modest transformation over the years. The need of the hour is to follow the multi-dimensional approach to tribal development and their empowerment. There is no other option rather a dire need of the variety of schemes for Bhumij tribal population in terms of obliteration of the impediments of the access to education. Genuine development of the Bhumij tribe and empowerment would necessitate that tribal communities should themselves be engaged in self-management rather than completely depending on the management and complete negation of social exclusion.

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