



Original Article

Choosing a marriage partner: Insights from young Indians on beliefs, perceptions, and preferences, and 3 key questions for screening

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Date of Submission:

02 May 2023

Date of Acceptance:

11 June 2023

Keywords:

Life partner, India, Arranged marriage, Love marriage, Choice, Selection

Abstract

Background: Although several studies have been conducted on marriage and marriage partner selection, there is still much to understand about the multifaceted aspects of this phenomenon in India.

Objective: This study aimed to explore beliefs, perceptions, and preferences related to marriage partner selection and identify three key questions to screen potential marriage partners.

Methodology: This cross-sectional study was conducted online through a self-administered questionnaire created on Google Forms and distributed through popular social media channels like WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The study targeted young adults aged 18 years and above and collected data from Jul 22, 2022 to Feb 7, 2023. The semi-structured questionnaire captured demographic information, beliefs, perceptions, and preferences regarding marriage partner selection. Participants were also asked three key questions they would prefer to ask their potential

marriage partner. The questionnaire was filled out anonymously after obtaining informed consent from all participants. The data collected were exported to Microsoft Excel, and quantitative data analysis was done using R software, while qualitative data were open-coded by the authors and categorized into meaningful groups. After several discussion sessions, the three key questions were selected from personal, marriage and family, and career and life domains, and disagreements were

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How to cite the article: Chandra A, Sankhyan S, Priya M. Choosing a marriage partner: Insights from young Indians on beliefs, perceptions, and preferences, and 3 key questions for screening. *Indian Journal of Health, Sexuality and Culture*. 2023;9(1):13–28.

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.8248545](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248545)

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resolved by consensus. The results were reviewed and validated by four participants to ensure validity.

Results: The majority of participants considered marriage to be beneficial for emotional stability, companionship, and social support but viewed increased responsibilities as a disadvantage. Love marriage was preferred over arranged marriage, with age and financial stability seen as important factors for marriage. In screening a potential marriage partner, participants identified communication skills as the first quality they would observe and tested loyalty. They also preferred partners who possess loyalty and understanding as top qualities. The majority believed that both marriage partners should work and earn money. Three vital questions to ask a potential marriage partner identified were related to personal and career goals for the next 5 or 10 years, description of themselves, and their family's expectations and preferences for their future partner.

Conclusion: The findings highlight the importance of companionship, emotional stability, and social support in marriages, as well as the potential stressors and expectations associated with marriage. These findings can inform policies and educational interventions to promote healthy relationships and marriages among young adults. To enhance the external validity of the findings, a larger sample size and a more diverse population can be included in future studies.

Introduction

As a fundamental institution in most societies, marriage has always been a subject of intrigue and study. Selecting a marriage partner involves complex dynamics, shaped by cultural, social, and personal factors. Understanding individuals' beliefs, perceptions, and preferences regarding marriage and how they screen potential partners can provide

valuable insights into this intricate phenomenon.^[1-4] Research on marriage partner selection has been conducted from various theoretical perspectives, including sociological, psychological, and anthropological lenses. Scholars have examined how cultural norms, social norms, individual values, and personal preferences influence the decision-making process in choosing a marriage partner.^[5-7] Moreover, studies have shown that partner selection is influenced by factors such as age, education, socio-economic status, religion, ethnicity, and other personal characteristics.^[8-10]

Despite the extensive research on marriage and partner selection, there is still much to explore and understand about the multifaceted aspects of this phenomenon. This research aims to delve into the beliefs, perceptions, and preferences related to marriage partner selection and investigate the factors that shape individuals' decision-making processes in choosing a marriage partner. Furthermore, to identify the vital questions for screening potential marriage partners. By employing a comprehensive research approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods, this study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic and shed light on the complexities of marriage partner selection.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional design and was conducted on a digital platform. The questionnaire was self-administered in English and created on Google Forms. The participants were invited through popular social media channels such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. The target population for this study was young adults (18 years). The data collection period for this survey was from Jul 22, 2022 to Feb 7, 2023. The semi-structured questionnaire captured

demographic information such as socio-demographic details, perceived advantages, and disadvantages of marriage, correct age for marriage, perceptions, and preferences related to marriage partner selection. Every participants were also asked three key questions they would prefer to ask their potential marriage partner.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants digitally, and the questionnaire was filled out anonymously. Responses from the Google Form were exported to Microsoft Excel. For the quantitative data analysis, we did a descriptive analysis using R software ^[11] to present variables in numbers and proportions. For the qualitative data, open coding was done by the two authors and categorized into meaningful categories. All responses were read and coded to select the three key questions, and duplicates or similar responses were removed. We gave priority to the questions which were reported commonly by

the participants. After several discussion sessions among the authors, the questions were condensed and selected from three domains: personal, marriage and family, and career and life. Any disagreements were resolved by consensus, and few senior researchers were also consulted. The results were member checked by two male and two female participants to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings.

Results

We received a total of 42 responses. The mean age of the participants was 27.2 (SD- 4). There was equal representation of females and males, having the highest educational qualification as graduates (52.4%)(Table 1). The majority of the participants were doctors by profession (64.3%), and from Delhi (14.3%) and Himachal Pradesh (14.3%). A proportion of 21.4% were married, and the mean years of marriage was 5.5years (SD - 3.3).

Table 1 : Sociodemographic details of the study participants

Variable		Frequency (percentage)
Gender	Female	21 (50.0)
	Male	21 (50.0)
Highest educational qualification	Higher secondary	3 (7.1)
	Graduation	22 (52.4)
	Postgraduation	17 (40.5)
	Higher than post-graduation	0 (0)
Profession	Doctor	27 (64.3)
	College student	9 (21.4)
	Nurse	1 (2.4)
	Homemaker	1 (2.4)
	Armed force personnel	1 (2.4)
	Civil servant	1 (2.4)
	Engineer	2 (4.8)

Relationship status at the time of study	Single / post break up / looking for someone	25 (59.5)
	officially engaged to love of my life /love marriage	8 (19.0)
	In relationship / complicated	7 (16.7)
	officially engaged to someone / arrange marriage	2 (4.8)
Residence (State / UT)	Delhi	6 (14.3)
	Himachal Pradesh	6 (14.3)
	West Bengal	5 (11.9)
	Bihar	4 (9.5)
	Haryana	4 (9.5)
	Puducherry	3 (7.1)
	Maharashtra	2 (4.8)
	Odisha	2 (4.8)
	Rajasthan	2 (4.8)
	Tamil Nadu	2 (4.8)
	Uttarakhand	2 (4.8)

A. Beliefs and perceptions about marriage

Among the participants who preferred marriage as an option for life (n=37), most participants (64.8%, n= 24) said that marriage is needed for companionship/partner for life. Others mentioned marriage is required for procreation (n=4), to have a support system (n=3), to transform you into a responsible person (n=1), just a phase of life (n=2), to improve the quality of life (n=2), to boost one’s potential (n=1). One participant emphasized that the family life cycle begins with being single and ultimately ends with being alone. She highlighted the significance of having a family, as it allows for creating joyful memories, provides support in times of hardship, and plays a crucial role in the later stages of life. Nearly all participants (95.2%) reported that they viewed marriage as beneficial in terms of economic, physical, and social support, as well as emotional stability provided by having someone to rely on. A few mentioned as happiness and sex as benefit. Most participants perceived marriage’s disadvantage as increased responsibilities

(23.8%) that come with marriage, not only for themselves but for the partner, children, and in-laws. This includes financial, emotional, and household responsibilities and support, which may be expected from them once they are married (Table 2). One participant mentioned that there could be negative aspects associated with marriage, including harmful social practices like dowry, demands, and child marriage, and can even sometimes lead to honor killing. These practices are deeply rooted in certain cultures and societies and can have severe consequences.

When participants were asked how they would know if they were ready for marriage, the most common response was when they were financially independent and feel emotionally prepared to settle down with a compatible partner (vibing with the right person). For arranged marriages, there would be external pressure from family or society for marriage as individuals age biologically. Few also mentioned that a person is never ready for marriage until you do it. The majority suggested the correct age for marriage for

boys to be around 28-30 years old or when they are financially stable and emotionally mature. Some respondents suggest that boys should be at least 25-26 years old or financially independent before getting married. As for girls, many respondents suggested the age

between 26-28 years with financial independence and maturity. Some suggested that the age for girls can be the same as boys, while others emphasized the importance of having their own life before getting married.

Table 2: Responses of participants regarding perceived disadvantages of marriage

Responses *	N (%)
Increase in responsibilities	10 (23.8)
Loss of space and freedom	8 (19.0)
Compromise in personal choices & career	6 (14.3)
Doomed if married to wrong person	5 (11.9)
Increased co-dependency	5 (11.9)
Extended family issues	4 (9.5)
Possible complications of divorce/separation	3 (7.5)
It affects decision making	3 (7.1)
Pressure for kids	3 (7.1)
Increase in accountability and obligations	2 (4.8)
Legal binding	2 (4.8)
Stuck to a person	1 (2.4)
Increased expectations	1 (2.4)
Loss of peace	1 (2.4)
Financial issues	1 (2.4)
Monotony	1 (2.4)
Social evil (dowry, child marriage, honor killing)	1 (2.4)

*Multiple responses

Based on the responses from the participants, the majority (78.6%) believed that a love marriage is better than arranged marriage (Table 3). However, two participants mentioned ‘no marriage’ were married (one had a love marriage, and the other had an arranged marriage). One participant expressed that arranged marriage can be advantageous as it involves a systematic screening process of the potential partner and their family, devoid of emotional biases. In arranged marriages, commitment and terms/conditions are discussed in detail, and both parties reach a mutual agreement before marriage. Furthermore, the individuals and their families involved in the arranged marriage are mentally prepared for the forthcoming marriage and the associated responsibilities. This preparation can potentially reduce the occurrence and intensity of conflicts post-marriage. Another participant highlighted the benefits of love marriage, emphasizing that individuals in love marriages can make well-informed choices after getting to know their partner comprehensively. This thorough understanding and analysis of the person can prove beneficial in the long run, contributing

to a more fulfilling and harmonious relationship. One participant mentioned, “Marriage is a gamble. You never know what you are getting into. But in love marriage, you at least increase the chances of success. Love gives you the strength to overcome the challenges in your married life”.

A majority (52.4%) believed that a man should be working/earning, and 42.9% believed that a woman should also be working/earning. Additionally, 88.1% believed both partners should be ambitious in their careers. Most participants (95.2%) considered cheating /affairs in marriage as abnormal, and 73.8% believed that it is good to share about previous relationships. The key to a long and happy marriage is understanding, as 21.4% of participants stated. Additionally, 21.4% of participants mentioned that the biggest change after marriage is the shift in responsibilities. Female participants expressed concerns about losing freedom and restrictions in their responses. A proportion of 47.6% of the participants believed in sharing everything in a relationship, while 14.3% mentioned that they would not share anything about their previous relationships.

Table 3: Responses of participants regarding belief and perception about marriage

Question	Response	N	%
Which type of marriage is better ?	Love	33	78.6
	No-marriage	5	11.9
	Arranged	4	9.5
A guy in marriage should be...*	Working / earning money	22	52.4
	Ambitious	17	40.5
	Good looking	8	19.0
	Rich	6	14.3
	Whatever he wants to be	5	11.9
	Compatible	4	9.5

	Honest & faithful	4	9.5
	Understanding	2	4.8
	Loving	1	2.4
	Caring	1	2.4
	Courageous	1	2.4
	Dependable	1	2.4
	Empathetic	1	2.4
	Equal	1	2.4
	Good communicator	1	2.4
	Independent	1	2.4
	Loyal	1	2.4
	Morally correct	1	2.4
	Respectful	1	2.4
	Shouldn't die early or should not give up on life	1	2.4
	Spend quality of time with partner	1	2.4
	Supportive	1	2.4
A woman in marriage should be...*	Working / earning money	18	42.9
	Ambitious	17	40.5
	Independent	7	16.7
	Good looking	6	14.3
	Compatible	5	11.9
	Kind and loving	4	9.5
	Honest	2	4.8
	Loyal & faithful	2	4.8
	Whatever she wants to be	2	4.8
	Adaptable	1	2.4
	Good communicator	1	2.4
	Homely / not working	1	2.4
	Rich	1	2.4
	Supportive	1	2.4
	Understanding	1	2.4
	Morally correct	1	2.4
	Equal	1	2.4

Secret or mantra for a happy and long -lasting marriage*	Good communication	9	21.4
	Understanding	9	21.4
	Don't know	5	11.9
	Show love and affection	5	11.9
	Trust	4	9.5
	Adjustment	3	7.1
	Honesty	3	7.1
	Sharing everything	3	7.1
	Fights	2	4.8
	Loyalty	2	4.8
	Mutual efforts	2	4.8
	Patience	2	4.8
	Respect for both families & each other	2	4.8
	Sort out problems together	2	4.8
	Accept yourself	1	2.4
	Appreciate personal spaces	1	2.4
	Avoid conversation when in anger	1	2.4
	Be good friends	1	2.4
	Common goal	1	2.4
	Don't complain	1	2.4
	Don't judge	1	2.4
	Don't lie	1	2.4
	Don't restrict	1	2.4
	Financial stability	1	2.4
	Freedom to talk without judgement	1	2.4
	Logical thinking	1	2.4
	One should lead and one should follow	1	2.4
	Sacrifice	1	2.4
	Self sufficient	1	2.4
	Self-love	1	2.4
Submissive	1	2.4	

What is the biggest changes after marriage ?	Responsibilities	9	21.4
	Loss of freedom to make choice	5	11.9
	Lifestyle	4	9.5
	Outlook toward world and life	4	9.5
	Restrictions / new rules and regulations	3	7.1
	Daily routine	2	4.8
	Finances	2	4.8
	Desires and preferences	2	4.8
	Social circle	2	4.8
	Adjust as per partner and children	2	4.8
	Partner and family	1	2.4
	Expectations	1	2.4
	Loss of personal space and time	1	2.4
	House	1	2.4
	Relationship with parents	1	2.4
	Career goals	1	2.4
	Self-love	1	2.4
Is it good to share about your past relationship ?	Yes	31	73.8
	No	11	26.2
Is cheating (having an affair) in marriage is a normal?	Yes	2	4.8
	No	40	95.2
In a marriage, who should be more ambitious toward career ?	Man	5	11.9
	Woman	0	0.0
	Both	37	88.1
What we should never share with our marriage partner?	Share everything	20	47.6%
	Past relationship	6	14.3%
	Family issues	3	7.1%
	Personal space	4	9.5%
	Don't know	2	4.8%
	Sex life	2	4.8%
	Finances	2	4.8%
	Professional secrets	1	2.4%
	Food	1	2.4%
	Passwords	1	2.4%

*multiple responses

B. Preferences while selecting a marriage partner

A majority of the participants (88.1%) indicated that they would prioritize intelligence/smartness over physical beauty when selecting a potential marriage partner.

When asked about the features or qualities that one should look for in a marriage partner, the majority of participants mentioned loyalty (26.2%) and understanding (26.2%) as the most important characteristics (Table 4).

Table 4 : Responses of participants regarding preferences in selecting a marriage partner

Question	Response	N	%
Which thing will you give more priority while selecting in a marriage partner?	Intelligence / Smartness	37	88.1
	Physical beauty	5	11.9
Features or qualities one should consider while selecting a marriage partner*	Loyalty	11	26.20%
	Understanding nature	11	26.20%
	Supportive	7	16.70%
	Caring	6	14.30%
	Honesty	6	14.30%
	Respectful	5	11.90%
	Matching beliefs and values in life	4	9.50%
	Attractiveness	3	7.10%
	Compatibility	3	7.10%
	Complimentary to each other	3	7.10%
	Matching priorities / choices / dream	3	7.10%
	Similar thought process	3	7.10%
	Adaptability	2	4.80%
	Empowering	2	4.80%
	Lovable	2	4.80%
	Patience	2	4.80%
	Character	1	2.40%
	Common interest	1	2.40%
	Easy to communicate	1	2.40%
	Humour	1	2.40%
Kindness	1	2.40%	
Open minded	1	2.40%	
Tolerability	1	2.40%	
Trustworthy	1	2.40%	
Willing to sacrifice	1	2.40%	

One thing your marriage partner should be good at ...	Understanding	10	23.8%
	Sharing his/her feelings and thoughts / communication	9	21.4%
	Decision making /problem solving / handle tough situations	6	14.3%
	Cooking	3	7.1%
	Taking responsibilities	2	4.8%
	compensating for his/her partner	2	4.8%
	Listening	2	4.8%
	Behaviour/nature	2	4.8%
	Social dealing	1	2.4%
	Sex	1	2.4%
	Patience	1	2.4%
	Humour	1	2.4%
	Honesty	1	2.4%
	Balancing things between the family and partner	1	2.4%

C. Screening a potential marriage partner

Based on the survey, communication skills /talking etiquette were the top qualities that participants would observe first while screening their marriage partner (28.6%). Education (88.1%) and sexually transmitted diseases (64.3%) were the top things that participants would check during the background check. If allowed to test one quality of their potential marriage partner, the majority of participants (19%) chose loyalty (Table 5). We received 114 questions from participants about the three most important questions to ask a potential marriage partner. We categorized the questions into three domains: personal (49 questions), marriage and family (36 questions), and career and life (29 questions). After removing duplicates, we condensed and refined the questions to three vital questions, which are:

1. What are your personal goals (joint/nuclear family, children, house, etc.) and your career goals (work, ambition, financial status, etc.)for the next 5 or 10 years (time line)?
2. Describe about yourself like qualities (good and bad), likes and dislikes, hobbies, achievements, personality, life principles /philosophies, political ideologies, religious/spiritual beliefs, diet and habits, addictions, lifestyle, leisure time activities, etc.
3. What are your and your family’s expectations and preferences for your future partner? (job, roles and responsibilities, temperament, diet and habits, value system, qualities, lifestyle, etc.)?

Some other important questions were: How do you typically handle tough situations or conflicts in relationship? what coping mechanisms do you use? To what extent do you feel influenced by your family, and would you be able to stand up against them if necessary when making important decisions? Could you share some insights into your childhood and how life has shaped you? How do you view the division of household chores and financial responsibilities in a relationship? How would you describe a typical weekday and weekend day in your life? How is the culture

and value system in your family? What do like to watch on social media and internet?

A participant stressed the significance of evaluating a potential marriage partner’s family and childhood background, as their family largely shapes a person’s values, habits, and cultural upbringing. This can majorly impact how your marriage partner and their family will treat you, since much of a person’s behavior is influenced by subconscious learning and absorption from their family during childhood. Another participant mentioned the idea of selecting a potential

partner from a group of candidates using a technical approach. The participant suggested creating a spreadsheet in Microsoft Excel and assigning each person a ranking based on factors such as education, income, physical appearance, street smarts, personality traits, values, smoking and substance use habits, attraction, horoscope compatibility, and other relevant criteria. These scores could then be weighted according to personal preferences and compatibility, and a composite score could be generated to aid in the decision-making process.

Table 5 : Responses of participants regarding screening a potential marriage partner

Question	Response	N	%
What are the key factors or qualities that you observe when screening a potential marriage partner?	Communication skills / talking etiquettes	12	28.6%
	Behaviour toward others	9	21.4%
	Temperament	8	19.0%
	Looks	5	11.9%
	Thinking process / view points	5	11.9%
	Education, career and ambition	3	7.1%
	Personality	3	7.1%
	Honesty	2	4.8%
	Interest in me	2	4.8%
	Anger issues	1	2.4%
	Dress, makeup and ornaments	1	2.4%
	Financial status	1	2.4%
	Hairline	1	2.4%
	Humour	1	2.4%
	Hygiene	1	2.4%
	Knowledge	1	2.4%
	Language	1	2.4%
	Life approach	1	2.4%
	Lifestyle	1	2.4%
	Patience	1	2.4%
Smile	1	2.4%	
Truthfulness	1	2.4%	
Vibe	1	2.4%	
Family values	1	2.4%	

What would you choose to test one quality in a potential marriage partner, if given the opportunity?	Loyalty	8	19.0%
	Patience	5	11.9%
	Honesty	4	9.5%
	Resilience	3	7.1%
	Disposition	3	7.1%
	Ethics and values	3	7.1%
	Compatibility	2	4.8%
	Commitment	2	4.8%
	Trustworthiness	2	4.8%
	Support in time of distress / conflicts	2	4.8%
	Temperament	2	4.8%
	Cooking skill	1	2.4%
	Temperament	1	2.4%
	Dependability	1	2.4%
	Responsibility	1	2.4%
	Thinking	1	2.4%
Kindness	1	2.4%	

*multiple responses

Discussion

This study explored the beliefs, perceptions, and preferences related to marriage partner selection among young adults in India. The findings indicate that the majority of participants view marriage as beneficial for companionship, emotional stability, and social support. This is consistent with previous research highlighting the importance of social support and emotional intimacy in marriages.^[12,13] The perceived disadvantage of marriage was the increased responsibilities that come with it. This finding is also consistent with previous research identifying responsibilities as a potential stressor in marriages.^[14] The findings of this study are consistent with previous research that has identified financial stability and emotional maturity as important factors in determining readiness for marriage.^[15,16] Age was reported as a factor for considering readiness for marriage as age the fertility pattern, which was similar to the

findings of the study which analysed the past 30 years of data in India.^[17] Additionally, the preference for love marriage over arranged marriage is consistent with previous research conducted in India.^[18] This indicates a transition from traditional arranged marriages to individuals choosing their own marriage partners.^[19] The emphasis on loyalty and understanding as important qualities in a marriage partner is also a common theme in the literature on partner selection.^[20] The study also highlighted the importance of communication skills and loyalty in a potential marriage partner, as well as the importance of personal and career goals, life principles, and family expectations when considering a marriage partner. These findings are consistent with previous research that has identified communication skills and compatibility in values as important factors in successful marriages.^[14,21] The focus on education and sexually transmitted diseases

during the background check process also aligns with the importance of health and education in partner selection.^[22] Given that the majority of participants in the study were from medical backgrounds, it is possible that they placed a greater emphasis on education during the background check, as well as on screening for sexually transmitted diseases and other hereditary conditions within their families. In this study less stress was given on horoscope matching by the participants.

The study provides insights into the beliefs, preferences, and expectations of young Indian adults regarding marriage, which can be used to develop effective counselling and educational programs to promote healthy relationships and marriages among young adults in India. For instance, educational programs can focus on developing communication skills and helping individuals identify and prioritize their personal and career goals, life principles, and family expectations when considering a marriage partner. The three vital questions identified in this study can be useful for individuals seeking to understand their potential marriage partner better. Specifically, these questions can help individuals assess their potential partner's communication skills and compatibility.

The qualitative data analysis was performed in English since all the responses were in the same language. To ensure the accuracy of the results, member checking was conducted. To increase the external validity of the findings, a study with a larger sample size is recommended, including participants from diverse regions and socio-economic backgrounds of India. This would allow for a better representation of the population and increase the generalizability of the findings. The study has several limitations, including a small sample size and limited to only a few geographical areas and professions. Future studies should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample to validate the findings of this study.

This study was limited to the perspectives of heterosexual individuals on choosing a marriage partner. Future studies could investigate the views and preferences of homosexual and transgender individuals to provide a more comprehensive understanding of partner selection in India.

Conclusion

This study provides insights into the beliefs and perceptions of young adults towards marriage. The findings indicate that the majority of participants view marriage as beneficial for companionship, emotional stability, and social support. However, the perceived disadvantage of marriage was increased responsibilities that come with it. Participants also had clear expectations regarding the age and financial stability required for marriage, with a preference for love marriage over arranged marriage. The study highlights the importance of communication skills and loyalty in a potential marriage partner, and the importance of personal and career goals, life principles, and family expectations when considering a marriage partner. The three vital questions identified in this study can be useful for individuals seeking to understand their potential marriage partner better. Overall, these findings can inform policy and educational interventions aimed at promoting healthy relationships and marriages among young adults.

Acknowledgement

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the participants for their valuable contributions to this study, which have greatly enriched our understanding of marriage partner selection among young adults in India. We would also like to sincerely thank Dr. Sonali Sarkar, Dr. Shrutikant, and Mr. Prashant Patwa for their valuable insights that enhanced the research quality.

Conflict of interest: None

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