

CHALLENGES FACED IN ADOPTING ORGANIC FARMING: A STUDY OF THE WOMEN SHGs IN EAST KHASI HILLS DISTRICT OF MEGHALAYA

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ABSTRACT

From the experiences of the past years, it is indicated that modern farming methods have overused the natural resources base. Excessive chemical fertilizers and pesticides were used, which created the problems of loss of soil fertility and water pollution. Therefore, efforts in advancing technologies which are eco-friendly are necessary, and one such eco-friendly innovation is organic farming. An organic farmer maintains biodiversity and reduces environmental pollution such as air, water and soil. Organic farming has grown out of the conscious effort inspired by people to create the best possible relationship between the earth and men. This paper aims to study the socio-economic status of the women SHGs as well as to find out the challenges with regards to organic farming. Using Stratified Random Sampling, 100 respondents were taken from Mawphlang, Mawkynrew and Laitkroh khatarshnong block in Meghalaya, respectively. Primary data was collected from the respondents through semi- structured interview schedules. To analyse the challenges of women engaged in organic farming, statistical tools such as percentage and chi square test was used. The findings were as follow: firstly, many of the farmers face transportation problem as most of their places are located in steep slopes and far away from market area. Secondly, most of them are illiterate therefore it creates a problem as a group to carry on with organic farming activities since they are not aware of the procedures involved. Thirdly, since practising organic farming does not require any pesticides which creates challenge for most of the farmers due to uncertain weather conditions. The research suggests that by addressing research areas like these stakeholders can gain valuable insights into the potential of organic farming to enhance agricultural sustainability, improve livelihoods, and contribute to the food security in East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya.

Keywords: Adoption of Organic Farming; East Khasi Hills; Meghalaya; Organic Farming; Self-Help Groups (SHGs).

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INTRODUCTION

From the experiences of the past years, it is indicated that modern farming methods have overused the natural resources base. Excessive chemical fertilizers and pesticides were used, which created the problems of loss of soil fertility, soil and water pollution. Ordinary farming depends intensely on compound composts and poisonous pesticides, etc., which enter the food supply, degrade water sources, harm animals and affect the ecosystem. Efforts in advancing technologies which are eco-friendly are necessary, and one such innovation, which is eco-friendly is organic farming. The future prospects of organic farming synchronizes with Sustainable Development's goal, which targets to 'end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'. However, only 2% of the net sown area in India is organically cultivated, and only 1.3% of farmers in India are registered for organic farming.

Organic food is being preferred in the huge domestic market. Organic farming has arisen as an elective means of cultivating that may address quality and sustainability concerns, yet additionally guarantees a loan-free future, with expanding awareness about the security and nature of food.

Organic farming works in harmony with nature rather than against it. This involves using techniques to achieve good crop yield without harming the natural environment or the people who live in it. An organic farmer produces vegetables, fruit, cereal crop or livestock without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides or herbicides. In another way, Organic Farming is a kind of agriculture that provides the consumers with fresh, tasty and reliable food while regarding natural life cycle system. In addition to health benefits of organic products for consumers, there are vital environmental benefits for the earth. An organic farming keeps biodiversity and reduces environmental pollution such as air, water and soil. Organic farming has grown out of the conscious effort by inspired people to create the best possible relationship between the earth and men.

Literature Reviews

Md Sikandar Azam (2022) conducted a study on "Adoption of Organic farming: Exploring Challenges and Prospects for Small and Marginal Farmers". This study aims to understand the growth of organic agriculture, barriers to adopting organic farming, and opportunities for potential farmers. The primary data from 200 farmers have been collected through structured questionnaires. To understand the significant stimulates or roadblocks, variables have been ranked based on the mean value. The logic regression model has been applied to analyse the data. The study found that lack of expert service and conversion compensation were significant roadblocks to adopting organic farming, whereas quality food and chemical-free farming were influencing factors with an expectation to receive a price premium for organic production. Therefore, the study suggested that government should encourage farmers by providing conversion compensation, a separate market for organic products, and knowledge-based expert services to encourage farmers to adopt organic agriculture.

A review by Lampkin and Measures (2019) found that limited availability and high costs of organic inputs, such as fertilizers and pesticides, were major challenges for organic

farming. Organic farming also faces challenges in terms of yield, as it may produce lower yields compared to conventional farming due to lower nutrient inputs and pest control. Furthermore, organic farming requires specialized knowledge and skills, which can limit its adoption and scalability.

Climate change is a significant challenge faced by organic farming, as it can lead to increased weather variability and extreme weather events that can damage crops and disrupt natural processes. A study by Gomiero *et al.* (2017) found that organic farming practices, such as crop diversification and intercropping, can improve soil health and water retention, making them more resilient to climate change. Furthermore, organic farming can reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as it relies less on fossil fuels-based inputs, such as synthetic fertilizers

A review by Ponisio *et al.* (2015) found that organic farming can produce yields that are comparable to or even higher than conventional farming, especially in systems that incorporate agro-ecological principles. However, the effectiveness of organic farming may depend on factors such as soil quality, climate and pest pressure.

Satyajeet *et al.*, (2019) in their study, "Constraints Faced by Farmers in Adoption of Organic Farming" explored the major constraints in adoption of organic farming. The study was based on the inferences of 120 sampled participants collected during training programme on organic farming. Based on the mean values, the constraints were ranked and it was observed that 'unorganized organic market for organic growers' was ranked first with the mean score of 2.69 out of maximum possible score of 3. The last constraint for not practicing organic farming was the ground of '*organic registration process being costly and complicated*' with the mean score of 1.61.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital Theory and Theory of Embeddedness: Social Capital Theory and the Theory of Embeddedness highlight the significance of social networks and relationships as a resource (Granovetter, 1973). 'Social capital' refers to actual or potential resources linked with strong or weak relationships based on trust, norms and reciprocity that enable the participants to pursue shared objectives more effectively. This theory of social capital postulates that the existence and success of collaborations and collective actions are mediated by the presence or absence of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation among the actors of the society. The theory of embeddedness tries to understand the influence of social relations on behaviour and institutions. It argues that most behaviour is closely embedded in the networks of interpersonal relations.

Resilience Theory: Resilience theory is an amalgamation of theories floated to understand how specific individuals and communities sustain themselves in the face of adversity. Resilience is the capability of a system and its actors to deal effectively with the change and continue growing in the face of a changing environment. James and Brown (2019) employed the resilience theory to understand conventional to organic farming conversion among UK farmers. The study found the antecedents of farmers' conversion decisions to be characterised by a complex set of abrupt and gradual changes beyond their farms and being

experienced differently and unequally by the farmers.

Theory of Diffusion of Innovations: The innovation diffusion process comprises four elements, namely innovation, communication, time and social system. Innovation includes ideas, practices, or other entities perceived to be novel. Rogers listed five diffusion rate-deciding characteristics of an innovation. They include a relative advantage (over the established idea), compatibility (consistency with the values, experiences, and needs of likely adopters), complexity (difficulty of interpretation and usage), trialability (possibility of application of innovation on a limited basis) and observability (result visibility). Innovations with greater perceived relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability and less complexity are more prone to rapid penetration. Communication means information generation and sharing among the participants to reach a mutual understanding. Time element defines the diffusion process through the innovation-decision process by which individuals pass from initial learning of innovation through its adoption or rejection. In his studies, older farmers, females, less educated, and less experienced farmers were more open to adopting organic cotton farming. Farm characteristics such as nearness of farm to house and household size had a positive relationship with the adoption of organic farming, while size had a negative relationship. Among institutional factors, credit access and membership in cooperatives had a positive but insignificant relationship with the adoption of organic farming, but extension services support had a positive relationship. Wheeler (2008) found small market size and 'willingness to pay', information needs, lack of government support, production difficulties, and pests and diseases to be the major barriers to adoption.

Problem of the study

Despite the matrilineal structure of Khasi society, women face labour challenges similar to those in patriarchal societies. Also, the limited supply of organic fertilizers and pest control measures can be challenging for the farmers procuring it. Limited access to markets for organic produce also poses a significant challenge. The perishable nature of many organic products necessitates efficient marketing channels which were often lacking. Additionally, the economic returns may not always be competitive but making it less attractive.

Need of the study

Although organic farming is gaining popularity due to its environmental and health benefits organic farmers up till date face numerous challenges that hinder their growth as a group or either as an individual. Organic crops although it has health benefits in them but can be less profitable due to certification expenses and lower yields. They also struggle with market access, competition from conventional crops, dealing with natural methods of pest control and also dependency on monsoon rains and sun heat to make their crops yield. Also, many of the farmers lack technical knowhow and training in organic farming practices therefore studying these gaps can help improve education and extension services.

Objectives of the study

- I. To study the socio-economic status of the women SHGs in organic farming.
- II. To find out the challenges encountered by the Women SHGs before and after joining the group.

Research Question

- Q1. What is the socio-economic status of the women SHGs engaged in organic farming activities in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya?
- Q2. To find out what are the challenges encountered by the Women SHGs before and after joining the group?

METHODOLOGY

Primary data was collected from the respondents from the selected area of study.

A. Tools to be used : Semi-structured interview schedule was developed by the investigator for the purpose of data collection.

B. Sample size and Sampling Method : Using Stratified Random sampling of 100 respondents was taken from Mawphlang, Mawkynrew and Laitkroh khatarshnong block respectively.

Analysis and Interpretation

The following section is devoted to the analysis and interpretation of data

Section 1: Socio-Economic characteristics of the Respondents

Table 1.1: Social Characteristics of the Respondents (N=100)

Age			
SL. No.	Variables	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	18-27	21	21%
2	28-37	31	31%
3	38-47	30	30%
4	47 and above	18	18%
	Total	100	100%
Educational Qualifications			
5	Illiterate	45	45%
6	Primary	25	25%
7	Upper Primary	10	10%
8	Secondary	7	7%
9	Higher Secondary	9	9%
10	Graduation and above	4	4%
	Total	100	100%

Marital Status			
11	Single	14	14%
12	Married	83	83%
13	Widowed	3	3%
14	Divorced	0	0%
15	Separated	0	0%
	Total	100	100%
Religion			
16	Christian	58	58%
17	Indigenous Religion	41	41%
18	Hindu	0	0%
19	Islam	0	0%
20	Any other (Sikh)	1	1%
	Total	100	100%
Type of Houses			
21	Own Cottage	80	80%
22	PMAY assisted house	6	6%
23	Hut	0	0%
24	Detached House	2	2%
25	Rented	12	12%
	Total	100	100%
Family Size			
26	Up to 3 Members	19	19%
27	4-7 Members	66	66%
28	8-11 Members	13	13%
29	12 Above	2	2%
	Total	100	100%

Family Assets			
30	Mobile	86	86%
31	Radio	3	3%
32	Motorcycle	1	1%
33	Television	1	1%
34	Car	0	0%
35	Two-Wheeler	9	9%
	Total	100	100%
Landholdings			
36	<1ha	58	58%
37	1-2ha	8	8%
38	2-5ha	28	28%
39	>5ha	6	6%
	Total	100	100%
Migration Status			
40	Rural to Urban	21	21%
41	Urban to Rural	8	8%
42	Living in the Birthplace (Urban)	5	5%
43	Living in the Birthplace (Rural)	66	66%
	Total	100	100%
Family Type			
44	Nuclear	67	67%
45	Joint	30	30%
46	Extended	3	3%
	Total	100	100%

Caste			
47	Scheduled Caste	1	1%
48	Scheduled Tribe	99	99%
49	Other Backward classes	0	0%
50	General	0	0%
	Total	100	100%
SHG Size			
51.	6-10 Members	63	63%
52	11-15	33	33%
53	16-20	1	1%
54	21 and above	3	3%
	Total	100	100%

Table 1.1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. It shows that 31% of the respondents belonged to the 28–37 years age group, followed by 30% in the 38–47 years age group, 21% in the 18–27 years age group, and 18% who were aged 48 years and above.

With regard to educational qualifications, 45% of the respondents were illiterate, 25% had completed primary education, 10% had studied up to the upper primary level, 7% had completed secondary education, 9% had attained higher secondary education, and only 4% were graduates or had qualifications above the graduate level.

In terms of marital status, 83% of the respondents were married, 14% were unmarried, and only 3% were widowed. Regarding religion, the majority of the respondents (58%) were Christians, while 41% followed indigenous faiths such as *Niam Tynrai* of the Khasi community. None of the respondents practising Hinduism or Islam were engaged in organic farming in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya.

With respect to housing, 80% of the respondents lived in their own cottages, 12% resided in rented houses, 6% lived in houses constructed under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), and only 2% lived in detached houses.

The Table further indicates that the majority of the respondents (66%) had families comprising four to seven members. This was followed by families with up to three members (19%), families with eight to eleven members (13%), and families with more than twelve members (2%).

Regarding household assets, 86% of the respondents owned mobile phones, 9% owned two-wheelers, 3% possessed radios, and only 1% each owned motorcycles and televisions. The pattern of landholdings indicates that 58% of the respondents owned marginal holdings (less than 1 hectare), 8% owned small holdings (1–2 hectares), 28% owned medium holdings (2–5 hectares), and 6% owned large holdings (more than 5 hectares).

With regard to migration status, 66% of the respondents were living in their rural birthplace, 5% were living in their urban birthplace, 21% had migrated from rural to urban areas, and 8% had migrated from urban to rural areas. Regarding family structure, 67% of the respondents belonged to nuclear families, 30% belonged to joint families, and only 3% lived in extended families. The caste composition revealed that 99% of the respondents belonged to the Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, while only 1% belonged to the Scheduled Caste (SC) category.

Finally, with regard to the size of Self-Help Groups (SHGs), 63% of the respondents belonged to SHGs comprising 6–10 members, followed by 33% belonging to groups with 11–15 members. Only 3% belonged to SHGs with 21 or more members, while 1% belonged to SHGs comprising 16–20 members.

Table 1.2: Economic Characteristics of the Respondents (N=100)

SL NO	Variables	No of respondents	Percentage
Farming experience			
1	Below 5 years	16	16%
2	6- 10 Years	37	37%
3	11-15 years	13	13%
4	More than 15 Years	34	34%
	Total	100	100%
Start of Organic Farming			
5	Immediately Started	25	25%
6	1-5 years later	50	50%
7	After 5 years have passed	25	25%
	Total	100	100%
Livestock Possessed			
8	Local Cows	12	12%
9	Pigs	31	31%

10	Poultry	53	53%
11	Goat	4	4%
	Total	100	100%
Income			
12	<20000	36	36%
13	21,000-40,000	42	42%
14	41,000-60,000	19	19%
15	>60,000	3	3%
	Total	100	100%
Monthly expenditure on self			
16	<than 1000	8	8%
17	1100-2000	28	28%
18	2100-3000	46	46%
19	3100-4000	10	10%
20	>4000	8	8%
	Total	100	100%
Land Ownership			
21	Own Land	54	54%
22	Rent the land	45	45%
23	Contract Land	1	1%
	Total	100	100%

The respondents were asked whether they began practising organic farming immediately after learning about it or whether they adopted it after a certain period. The findings reveal that 50% of the respondents started practising organic farming one to five years after becoming aware of it, 25% adopted it immediately, and the remaining 25% began practising it after more than five years.

With regard to livestock ownership, 53% of the respondents reared poultry as their primary livestock, followed by 31% who reared pigs. Local cows were owned by 12% of the respondents, while the remaining 4% reared goats.

Regarding the annual income of the respondents, 42% earned between ₹21,000 and ₹40,000 per annum, followed by 36% who earned less than ₹20,000 annually. Nineteen

percent reported an annual income ranging from ₹41,000 to ₹60,000, while only 3% earned more than ₹60,000 per annum.

With respect to monthly personal expenditure, 46% of the respondents spent between ₹2,100 and ₹3,000 per month. This was followed by 28% who spent between ₹1,100 and ₹2,000, 10% who spent between ₹3,100 and ₹4,000, and 8% each who spent less than ₹1,000 and more than ₹4,000 per month. Regarding land ownership, 54% of the respondents cultivated their own land, 45% cultivated rented land, and only 1% cultivated land under contractual arrangements.

Table 1.3: Challenges faced by the SHGs members before and after joining the group

S. No.	Challenges before and after joining the group faced by the SHGs members	Before joining the group		After joining the group		Total		Chi square test value
		Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
1	Lack of subsidy from the government to purchase the tools	20 (29%)	30 (21%)	38 (29%)	12 (21%)	58 (58%)	42 (42%)	13.3**
2	Investment is more than income generated	12 (28.5%)	38 (21.5)	45 (28.5%)	5 (21.5%)	57 (57%)	43 (43%)	44.4**
3	Compelled to sell organic crops at lower prices to middlemen	28 (34%)	22 (16%)	40 (34%)	10 (16%)	68 (68%)	32 (32%)	6.61**
4	The cost of organic crops is more than conventional crops	14 (28.5%)	36 (23.5%)	39 (26.5%)	11 (23.5)	53 (53%)	47 (47%)	25.0**
5	Loss of income due to seasonal income of crops	37 (42%)	13 (8.0%)	47 (42%)	3 (8.0%)	84 (84%)	16 (16%)	7.44**
6	Difficulty to identify potential markets	3 (21.5%)	47 (28.5%)	40 (21.5%)	10 (28.5%)	43 (43%)	57 (57%)	55.8**

7	Unavailability of polyhouse to prevent crops from heavy rains	9 (16%)	41 (34%)	23 (16%)	27 (34%)	32 (32%)	68 (68%)	9.0**
8	Unavailability of storage facilities to preserve the crop	40 (41%)	10 (9%)	42 (41%)	8 (9%)	82 (82%)	18 (18%)	0.27*
9	Unforeseen weather conditions	34 (34.5%)	16 (15.5)	35 (34.5%)	15 (15.5)	69 (69%)	31 (31%)	0.04*
10	Lack of knowledge about the availability of potential schemes for availing support	8 (19.5%)	42 (30.5%)	31 (19.5%)	19 (30.5)	39 (39%)	61 (61%)	22.23**
11	Lack of information about the trainings conducted	19 (26.5%)	31 (23.5%)	34 (26.5%)	16 (23.5%)	53 (53%)	47 (47%)	9.03**
12	Irregularities of supply and demand	25 (32%)	25 (18%)	39 (32%)	11 (18%)	64 (64%)	36 (36%)	8.50**
13	Requiring more manual labour	28 (38%)	22 (12%)	48 (38%)	2 (12%)	76 (76%)	24 (24%)	21.9**
14	Lengthy procedure in the certification process	14 (18.5)	36 (31.5)	23 (18.5%)	27 (31.5%)	37 (37%)	63 (63%)	3.47**
15	Inability to meet market demands	29 (37.5%)	21 (12.5%)	46 (37.5%)	4 (12.5)	75 (75%)	25 (25%)	15.4**

A chi-square test of independence was conducted to examine the challenges faced by Self-Help Group (SHG) members before and after joining the group. The analysis revealed that some of the relationships between the variables were statistically significant, while others were not ($df = n - 1$, $N = 100$). The findings indicate that women were generally less likely to encounter certain challenges after joining an SHG, suggesting that group

membership had a positive influence on their organic farming activities.

The data further revealed that one of the major challenges associated with organic farming was the high initial investment relative to the income generated. Respondents reported that crop losses frequently occurred because no chemical pesticides were used, thereby reducing productivity and income. Other major constraints included difficulties in identifying potential markets, limited awareness of government schemes, the high cost of organic farming inputs, and inadequate government subsidies.

Before joining the SHGs, respondents reported several marketing and production-related challenges. These included crop losses caused by unforeseen weather conditions and the compulsion to sell produce to middlemen at lower prices because of limited market access. Other frequently reported problems included irregularities in supply and demand (32%) and inadequate government subsidies (29%).

After joining the SHGs, respondents continued to face several challenges, although their nature and intensity varied. About 42% reported that the seasonal nature of organic farming resulted in reduced income, while 41% identified the lack of storage facilities as a major constraint. Furthermore, 38% indicated that organic farming required greater labour input, 37.5% reported difficulties in identifying potential markets, and 34% stated that crop losses due to adverse weather conditions, coupled with the need to sell produce to middlemen at lower prices, continued to affect their farming activities.

Main Findings

The present study examined the challenges faced by Self-Help Group (SHG) members before and after joining SHGs engaged in organic farming in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. The findings revealed that several interrelated factors continue to hinder the growth and development of both the SHG members and the groups as they strive to promote and sustain organic farming practices.

One of the major challenges identified was the difficult geographical terrain of the region. Most respondents resided in hilly areas with steep slopes, making the transportation of agricultural produce both difficult and expensive. As a result, farmers were often compelled to hire labourers to transport their produce to nearby markets. The high transportation costs substantially reduced their profit margins and limited their ability to market their products effectively.

Another significant challenge was the low educational status of the respondents. The demographic profile indicated that a large proportion of the respondents were illiterate or had only a primary level of education. This limited their ability to fully understand training programmes, technical demonstrations, and information related to organic farming practices. Consequently, many respondents experienced difficulties in identifying potential markets, accessing government support schemes, and adopting improved farming and marketing practices.

The climatic conditions of Meghalaya also posed a major constraint to organic farming. The state is characterised by exceptionally high rainfall.

Discussion of the Result

The study found that the limited availability and high cost of organic inputs, such as organic fertilizers and biopesticides, constituted major challenges to the adoption and practice of organic farming in Meghalaya (Lampkin & Measures, 2019). Furthermore, the low educational level of many respondents, coupled with inadequate access to expert advisory services and insufficient compensation during the conversion period from conventional to organic farming, emerged as significant barriers to the successful adoption of organic farming practices.

The findings also indicate that climate change poses a major challenge to organic farming. Increasing weather variability and the growing frequency of extreme weather events adversely affect crop production and disrupt natural ecological processes essential for organic agriculture (Gomiero et al., 2017). These conditions often result in substantial crop losses, thereby causing considerable financial hardship for farmers through the loss of both the time and resources invested in cultivation.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to promote the adoption and sustainability of organic farming in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya:

- The Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should encourage farmers to form and strengthen Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), or other farmer groups to facilitate collective action, improve market access, and enhance bargaining power.
- Government agencies and certification bodies should simplify the organic certification process by reducing procedural complexities, streamlining documentation, and providing technical assistance to farmers throughout the certification process.
- Financial institutions and government agencies should provide low-interest loans, grants, and targeted subsidies to support farmers during the transition from conventional to organic farming and to reduce the financial burden associated with organic cultivation.
- Awareness campaigns should be conducted regularly to educate consumers about the health, environmental, and economic benefits of organic products. Increasing consumer awareness would stimulate demand, ensure better prices for farmers, and create more stable markets for organic produce.
- Rural infrastructure should be strengthened by improving roads, transportation networks, storage facilities, and market infrastructure. Such improvements would reduce post-harvest losses, lower transportation costs, and enhance farmers' access to profitable markets.
- Regular capacity-building programmes, training workshops, and field demonstrations should be organized to improve farmers' knowledge of organic farming practices, certification procedures, pest and nutrient management, and market opportunities.

Continuous technical support would enhance farmers' confidence and encourage the sustained adoption of organic farming practices.

CONCLUSION

Organic farmers in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya face numerous challenges in adopting and sustaining organic farming practices. Limited access to quality organic inputs, inadequate training and technical support, poor market access, and the absence of an efficient certification system constitute major barriers to the successful expansion of organic farming. Although the region possesses a rich tradition of indigenous farming knowledge, integrating these traditional practices with modern organic standards remains a challenge for many farmers without adequate institutional support. Financial constraints, coupled with the delayed economic returns associated with organic farming, further discourage farmers from transitioning from conventional to organic agriculture.

Despite government initiatives to promote organic farming, significant gaps remain in infrastructure development, market access, awareness generation, extension services, and institutional support. Addressing these challenges through continuous capacity building, improved market linkages, simplified certification procedures, strengthened extension services, and sustained financial and technical assistance will be essential for enhancing the adoption, sustainability, and long-term success of organic farming in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya.

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