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INTERROGATING SOCIAL (GENDER) EXCLUSION AND SEARCHING FOR INCLUSIVITY: FROM HISTORY TO MODERN TIMES

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Abstract:

In the last couple of years there has been a spurt of growing interest in and awareness about questions of social exclusion and inclusion. While the nature of exclusion in India has centred around the caste system, other disadvantaged groups such as tribals, women and poor have also suffered from similar disabilities. This opens up a number of possibilities for future investigations. In the present work, I have focused on exploration of the gendered nature of social exclusion. If we look at women today their lives are located at the intersection of caste, class and patriarchy/ies. In many areas they face exclusion, discriminations and remain on the margins. To understand (dalit) women exclusion, marginalization and discrimination it is necessary to delineate both internal and external (structural/institutional) factors that have bearing on their lives. The paper wishes to interrogate conventional and historical writings on women and mainstream portrayals of Dalit and discuss the contradictory Dalit and feminist perceptions of the history.

Their politics of exclusion and inclusion, censure and celebration shows that they wish to be a part of the so called mainstream academic discourse yet cannot be. Their search for inclusivity to translate in to a reality can be only possible through contesting the existing knowledge base and providing for an alternative strategy.

KEYWORDS —

Gender(Dalit) Exclusion, Pedagogical Inclusivity

INTRODUCTION

In the last couple years there has been a spurt of growing interest in and awareness about questions of social exclusion and inclusion. While the nature of exclusion has centered around the caste system, other disadvantaged groups such as tribals, women and poor have also suffered from similar disabilities. This opens up a number of possibilities for future investigations. In the present work, I have focused on exploration of the gendered nature of social exclusion. If we look at women today their lives are located at the intersection of caste, class and patriarchy/ies. In many areas they face exclusion, discrimination and remain on the margins. To understand (dalit) women exclusion, marginalization and discrimination it is necessary to delineate both internal and external (structural/ institutional) factors that have bearing on their lives.

Exclusion is, in common parlance, is a process of socio- political and cultural denial and rejection. Certain communities have long been excluded on the basis of caste, class, religion ,etc, in most civilizations

since antiquity. In Indian case this exclusion can be classified into a range of castes, but broadly there are two categories as defined by the Constitution-scheduled castes (SCs) and scheduled tribes (STs) who constitute around 23% of the total population. Women have also been conceptualized as an excluded category by radicals and feminists due to their inferior status and unequal treatment meted out to them by the patriarchal structure and behaviour of the society.

India now has a six decades experience in dealing with sharp inequalities and disparities rooted in several millennia of its independence. But we still see sharp inequalities of caste, creed, and tribe, rural and urban divide. Gender cuts across all these layers, making women and girls of the disadvantaged groups, the most deprived members of our society. And these gender disparities are reflected on all the indicators. In many areas women face exclusion, discrimination and remain on the margins. Discrimination is a process and disparity and inequality is its end product. Since the relationship between caste and gender has yet to be satisfactorily explored we can more easily begin by examining the historical evolution of class and caste and thereafter, engender these processes of evolution. An examination of all these aspects is needed to ascertain the direction of change in the position of women irrespective of caste class or religion in a society and the forces affecting these changes. Virtually, in every society there are characteristically different sets of rights and duties for different social groups. These groups may be classified as privileged or under privileged in the light of organization and values prevailing in the society.

As we all know discourses and attitudes also change within specific cultures overtime. Although social and institutional discourses and their related technologies formulate our subjectivity, they are themselves social effects and respond to changes in social practices. What is right or ethical in any given time/ period is simply what fits the dominant episteme and is authorized by the discourses and institutions in which the practice is framed.

Accordingly, the position of women belonging to the respective groups was arranged hierarchically with reference to the social stratification. Unless we take this into account and analyze the societal role of women from this perspective also, we cannot make a comprehensive evaluation of 'woman's question'. In the dominant academic discourse 'Man' was constituted as the subject of historical processes, whereas questions about women were framed in terms of their nature, which was, by definition, unchanging, and hence to some extent ahistorical. This disciplinary legacy is still with us

Males have been always projected as 'productive', 'political', 'public' and 'rational'; women as 'non-political', 'non-productive', 'private', and 'emotional'. All socio-political and epistemological structures and institutions-the state, market, organizations of civil society and cultural institutions and knowledge system have been an instrument in reinforcing gender inequality. It has been claimed by feminist thinkers that philosophers are using "value hierarchical" thinking and "normative dualism". They give greater value to what is seen as higher. (for example, men, culture, minds, or reason) and lesser value to what is seen as lower (for example, women, nature, bodies, or emotion). This kind of valuation results in "logic of domination" – an attempt to justify the subordination of the group of "lower value" by the dominant group of "higher value." Like value-hierarchical thinking, "normative dualism" is exhibited when philosophers always create binary distinctions as mind/body, reason/emotion, man /woman, and so on. Historically the principle of exclusion works on these grounds: Law, Rationality and Tradition.

Looking into this dichotomy if we locate the case of (Dalit)women it appears to be worsening. Understanding social exclusion is incomplete without seeing the interface of caste, class and gender. In India, the gender discourse is used by the caste discourse in the interests of caste and women's sexual purity.

The disparity raises the 'woman question', but it cannot be answered by referring to women only. It draws our attention to deal with two important aspects-1) Social structure at a particular period of operation of the society in which distinctive groups are discriminated against differentially,2) Social customs and institutions which affect women directly and are the expression of a particular social system.

Due to the tyranny of social custom women are comparatively weak and subordinated to men. Owing to this weakness and domination by men, women have to spend their lives in ignominy and subordination. The dominant males tyrannize over, and exploit them accordingly as they like, and women have no option but to submit helplessly to the same and eke out their existence.

For India, an answer to the 'woman question' is very urgent but at the same time the issue of dalit women becomes a valuable site for enquiry. Along with independence we have achieved some political rights for women. But socially and economically, Indian women have still long way to go. Legislation from above is not of much help when the beneficiaries from below are slow or unable to take advantage of it. We should, therefore, take stock of the situation and ascertain where the fault lies--- the task is complicated by the chequered course of India's development over a long period.

A few relevant key questions of this paper are:

- * To what extent can gender take account not only of the differences between men and Women, but also between women along the axes of class, age, ethnicity, race, caste, Sexuality etc?
- * To what extent have participatory/inclusionary methods (at the level of pedagogy and praxis) allowed the expression of divergent voices along the lines of gender, as well as other differences?
- * And to what extent the inclusionary efforts have been instrumental in translating the search for inclusivity into a reality of an egalitarian society?

HISTORICAL FORMULATIONS

Continuous debates have been carrying out on the issues of women's status whenever the cases emerged out related to oppression of women. The number of mainstream feminists claimed that there is no sharp line between Dalit women and caste Hindu women; however, both are the victims of patriarchic society as well as suffering social disabilities at par level.

The problem of Indian women would be located in the above context. India has been experiencing the gender discrimination since centuries whether it is in the creation of knowledge base at the level of pedagogy or in the development at the level of praxis.

If we go back to history on the levels of episteme there are evidences of exclusion within exclusion in the category of gender if we go through the written documents. Except for a few notable exceptions, reflections on the transcoding of caste in feminist discourse and practices have been rare. Most of these women now included in History are Hindu, upper caste and upper class. There has been some attention to non –elite women and regional patterns. But not nearly enough, there had been the marginalization of the non-brahmanical perspectives and experience. Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar had pointed to caste as a system of graded inequalities, that patriarchies in the subcontinent were contained within a large system which was graded according to caste. The differences were arranged according to a conceptual grid-that of brahmanical patriarchy. Despite major differences of practice in relation to women, brahmanical patriarchy was a single framework which linked caste, gender, land control and demography together. It held within its ambit both the brahmanized upper castes and less brahmanized middle and dalit castes. This caste system with its status quo was legitimized during the British rule through various ways. The constitution has formally ended caste based discrimination in public spaces(abolition of untouchability act-1955), but it has neither broken the hold of the upper castes on material resources nor their hold over the State machinery or social mindsets. Even in contemporary world women's position is still governed by the same sets of institutional and structural agencies.

We see that the linkages between the brahman's control over knowledge and the canonical understanding of caste cannot be ignored. In this context Chakravarty has highlighted the politics of the knowledge of caste (Chakravarty2003).

Traditional historiography has excluded women not only inadvertently but sometimes programmatically from 'universal', 'general' history. Available scholarships on these oppressed communities especially the dalit women suffer from lack of historical and written documentations. The current historical trends, as regards "outcaste" history, are ambiguous, elusive in nature. For instance censorious references to them appear in 'nationalist historiography, a narrative of struggle for freedom. This narrative does not recognize non-elite and non-brahmin contribution towards national movement.(Rao2007) Likewise Cambridge historiography, while it contests the ideological basis of the national narratives, does not initiate a dialogue with the social periphery and projects the lower castes as mere passive followers of elite leaders. Marxist historians working within the rigid class perspective show reluctance to address issues related to caste. Finally, the subaltern school of thought that emerged in 1980's postulated an alternative framework but their research suffer from the same limitation that they failed to raise fundamental issues related to outcaste historical experience. (Ibid)

Unfortunately, neither the official nor the unofficial sources are detailed and sophisticated enough to be put together to give a comprehensive picture of the dalits. Till recently their origins are obscure and their presence was neglected (Ibid). In most of the Indian historical works, dalits are treated either as marginal people, without a history of their own or as objects rather than as subjects. Recent initiatives to reconstruct dalit history generally draws from traditional historical sources like archival material, reports of census, commissions, committees and gazetteers. Talking about dalit women, V. Geetha (1991) has rightly pointed out, dalit women are not seen as active agents, making and remaking their lives and hence history

In this paper an attempt has been made to highlight the distinction between Dalit women and caste

Hindu women in terms of social conditions and to show how the need and requirement of Dalit women are different from the upper caste Hindu women and particularly focus on the hypocritical approach of Brahminical feminist movement in terms of women's progress and how their preservation of the caste system through their words and actions.

Contemporary Conceptual Dimension

Bearing all these constraints in mind, it becomes very important to examine the contemporary situation. It is truism that after independence the government of India has launched various economic and social development programmes for dalits i.e. the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled tribes (STs), yet even after 60 years of independence the condition of this deprived section of Indian society needs much improvement. Majority of women specifically dalit women have very little or nothing to inherit, educational and occupational opportunities for them are very limited, legal help costs money and above all, legal rights are meaningless as women are ignorant about system. Nevertheless, since independence, the demands of women for social justice have become more and more strident.

The persistence of inequality, disparity between women and men as a problem is sharper in Asia than any other continent in the world. It applies even to sex-related mortality rates with Asia providing the bulk of the estimated 'missing women' in the world(Sen1999,Bardhan and Klasen 1999) .It has been empirically noted that the neglect of the interest of women related closely to their being excluded from employment opportunities, basic education and land ownership .(Boserup 1970 ,Bardhan 1984, Sen1984, 1985,1990)These exclusions are, thus, of great instrumental importance. And the resultant impact of all these lead to deprivation, marginalization, discrimination and inequalities.

Deprivation exists whenever there is a factor constraining the opportunities open to an individual, groups, community or society. Restriction of opportunities open to an individual leads to deprivation. It means that each caste or race does not get equal chance to make its preferences felt and to determine its life style. Eliminating deprivation means that each caste or race has an equal chance to make its preferences felt and to determine its lifestyle. In the broadest sense, eliminating deprivation involves eliminating the present effects of historic injustices. Some of the effects are not reversible but alternative compensation such as moral regeneration of the suppressed class by providing them with 'liberty, equality and fraternity' should form the basis of any society.

Deprivation and development are very much linked with the issues of distributive justice. Different forms of deprivation have been identified and analyzed by the experts from cross section of the society. The basic tenet of inclusive development viz., social justice is eroded, letting loose a process of extensive exclusion market by growing inequalities, deprivation and marginalization. Deprivation has various discriminatory dimensions—economic, social political, etc., which led to emergence of the process of mobilization against deprivation. History suggests that consolidated mobilization efforts of deprived masses with increasing level of consciousness emerged as consequential force and led to the development of the concept of egalitarian society. But do we have a just society in actual? How far our mindsets and attitudes egalitarian in nature?

Process of Inclusion (Pedagogy and Praxis level)

As noted above we saw how the exclusionary processes have been stumbling blocks on the road to development. Now the question is whether something has been done for the inclusion of these excluded groups at the level of pedagogy and praxis over these years? In actual how far these efforts have been instrumental in translating these attempts into a reality .All these need to be examined carefully and seriously.

If we trace back, conceptual perception of inclusive development has been very much in the Indian Society since ages. It can be traced back in the post vedic era in a couplet of post vedic literature: “ sarve bhavantu sukhinah,sarve santu nirmayah, sarve bhadrani pashyanti,ma kasehid dukh bhag bhavet” reflecting a harmonious model of co-existence in the society. It was later practiced as sarvodaya by Gandhiji. Focus on poor man (daridra narayan) constructive programmes, eleven vows, trusteeship and village swaraj was the summum bonum of inclusive development, which emerged through experiments in Phoenix, Tolstoy Farm and Satyagraha Ashram during freedom struggle of apartheid in Africa and India from the British discriminatory colonial rule respectively. Vinoba emphasized on class co-ordination for inclusive development and took up this issue through Bhoodan and Gramdan. But it was not very much clear among them, that harmonious model may not work in heterogeneous class divided society.(Diwakar:2000) However, Dada Dharmadhikari, an important ideologue in Gandhian folds had clearly advocated that co-ordination is almost impossible if there is existence of classes. There is need to dissolve classes for inclusive development. Scattered experiences of Gandhian practices during life time and after, have positive suggestion for inclusive development strategies in pockets but a social scientists

can hardly generalize these experiments (Ibid) The results of these experiments need to be reflected, practised and modified, time and again.

In the modern terminology Inclusive Development refers to an approach of development from inside through effective partnership of people(World Bank2000) in order to include more than what is done at the moment. As Amartya Sen observes: "Freedom as central feature of development emerges powerfully from the internal views. These unrestrained voices deserve attention not only of scholars and academics but also of government, international institutions, business communities, labour organizations and civil society across the world. This is a marvelous concept of development seen from inside." (<http://media.worldbank.org>)

Strategy adopted and measures initiated by the Government of India since independence has claimed considerable progress towards inclusive development in several areas.

Various policy initiatives have taken up to bring the deprived masses into the mainstream of development through inclusive development packages.. To ensure the development programmes on empowerment of women, a national policy for the empowerment of women was also introduced in the same year (2001) to bring about changes, advancement and empowerment of women. Women access to equality, freedom and social justice was envisaged in all spheres of activities and social life. In addition to equal access and equal opportunities to women the need for changing societal attitudes and community practices and to mainstreaming a gender perspective in the development. Constitution of India lays these principles as the very basis of development policy and could be seen in retrospect as the beginning of rights based approach to development which is inclusive in nature. The concern for human rights framework means the need to respect the rights and entitlements of all. It emphasizes the civil, political, economic, cultural and social rights of individuals. It broadens the range of basic human rights beyond the socio-economic sphere of needs to include right to life, health care, education, shelter, food, water, remedy, security, subsistence and livelihood. But all this is in jeopardy under the restructuring initiated under the pressure of globalization, the State is increasingly distancing itself from these constitutional obligations.

Still there is a long way to go, as challenges remain with wider dimensions to be addressed despite having various policy interventions by the government and advocacy by the experts and activists. A long march to attain social justice for the deprived sections of the society and to bring them into mainstream of development is awaited.

PEDAGOGICAL INCLUSION

Feminist Perspective

Women had no history because the expropriation of history is an important mechanism for reproducing in the ideological sphere, social inequality (Sudhir.) The expropriation of history from the women is a means of reinforcing male dominance.(Ibid) Topics that were intimately interwoven with women's lives-house-hold and agricultural technology; religious rituals and sentiments; fertility and family size; furnishings, jewellery and clothing; inheritance and property rights; and marriage and divorce-were largely overlooked.

The historical evidences cited earlier confirmed that women have been left out of history, or when included, relegated to the periphery. This revelation startled the feminist historians at large and they realized the need to rethink historiography and rewrite history, which would not only enrich the knowledge about women in the past societies but would also reformulate traditional concepts and categories. Thus, emerged the women's history.

The concern of the women historians with gender further altered the shape of history. It was in the late 20th century that gender became a category of historical analysis. Earlier it was absent from the major bodies of social theory.

The reconstruction of women's history is made difficult because of the nature of available historical sources. As most of the historical sources were written and collected by men, and libraries and archives organized their materials within the traditional categories of male oriented history, there were few entries under 'women', and women were generally subsumed under the "male" category.

Recent Feminist scholarship illustrates the possibilities, which arise from looking at older sources afresh, from a different perspective and with a new set of questions in mind.

Contributions to enrich our knowledge have come from many quarters: scholars both men and women, action groups, legal practitioners, creative writers, social workers, people committed to the emancipation of women. It is out of this theorizing began to emerge. In an attempt to reconstruct women's history on the lines of caste and class one has to go back to historical formulations framed from time to time.

Towards Equality: The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974) was a

major landmark to assess the position of women. It argued for the inclusion of all women--- from minority communities, marginalized groups, and the lower socio-economic strata—in the nation's progress and its history. This report not only influenced historians about history of women, it set the research agenda for the future. From the mid-1970s to the mid -1980s, historians focused on locating and preserving women's records, making women visible, and documenting the lives of non-elite women. Consequent upon, this period saw scholars utilizing the new historiography to reread and recast existing sources and examine newly discovered and preserved records. Initiatives to write a more inclusive history that is honest about differences and conflicts over these differences have started gaining ground.

In the late 1980's feminist scholars began talking about the need for a specialized archive for women that would collect materials and at the same time become 'an agent of conscientisation' (SPARROW1997-98)

As we discussed earlier that this work is undertaken for the study of women in general and dalit women in particular, which leads to consideration of the interlocking of multiple structures of oppression—caste, class, gender—which shape the multiplicity of these women's subjectivities. The patriarchal brahmanical upper middle class perspective sees these women as lowest of the low; a paternalistic perspective sees them entirely passive victims annihilated under the combined weight of oppressive structures, to be uplifted only by benevolent outsider. But we need to point out that dalit women are in some respects freer and more self-sufficient than upper caste women. At the same time, it is necessary to remind ourselves that a ritually high status is what ensures that one is perceived to be an 'Indian woman' and confers upon 'upper' caste women the right/ moral duty to feel (consciously or sub consciously)superior to or contemptuous of dalits in general dalit women in particular.

The newer challenges to the task of writing women's history come from the subaltern school and from historians interested in resistance in everyday life. In their attempts to explain hegemonic processes, subaltern historians have uncovered and articulated the stories of suppressed peoples. Although they have paid some attention to women, the uncovering of women's subalternity has not been their forte. However, Feminist historians, both male and female, have brought to light these lacunae of traditional history. They claim that the ignorance of women's contribution to the society in the past made it easier to deny their contribution in the present too. Thus, the scholars of women's history took up the dual task of “restoring women to history” and 'restoring history to women'. There are three ways in which feminist historians have altered our perceptions of the past:

They have redefined methods and categories.

They have focused on sex along with race and class as a category of analysis which helped them in rejecting stereotypes attributed to women's nature.

They have further transformed our understanding of social changes: how domestic and public spheres diverged and as a consequence, women lost control over production, property and their own personhood.

Gerda Lerner (1979) cites the two approaches towards writing women's history by traditional historians; 'Compensatory history' and 'contributory history' both reflected male bias.

Lerner opines that till very recently women's history which has been written as a compensatory history, is a history of few notable women, ignores the majority, and their experiences. It also ignores the fact that different classes of women have different historical experiences and to comprehend the full complexity of society at a given stage of its development, it is essential to take into account such differences.

The next approach of conceptualizing women's history has been “contribution history”. It describes women's contribution to, their status in, and their oppression by male-defined society. However, this contribution is judged first of all with respect to its effect on the movement or event and secondly by standards appropriate to men.(Lerner1979) Even the conceptual frameworks adopted by historian have been male centric in nature. Established institutional structures and traditions of practice are extremely powerful in framing how we understand ourselves as people, our place in our communities, our cultures and identities.

Insights into the processes of exclusion related to gender and sexual identities have much to offer an understanding of the exclusion of marginalised groups and the ways that these interact with gender. However, these processes are necessarily contextually constructed as people in different contexts do not have access to the same range of possibilities (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000). This implies the importance of recognising multiple gender configurations. As Chandra Mohanty comments (1991): To define feminism purely in gendered terms assumes that our consciousness of being 'women' has nothing to do with race, class, nation, or sexuality, just with gender. But no one becomes a woman' (in Simone de Beauvoir's sense) purely because they are female. Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex.

While SC and ST women share common problems of gender exclusion with their high caste counterparts, they also suffer from problems specifically related to their caste and ethnic backgrounds. Keeping this in mind it becomes necessary to incorporate 'dalit perspective' while dealing with the dalit women.

Dalit Perspective

One recent and welcome development being evident in many fora, is the growing depth and breadth of dalit scholars and the possibility of a new dalit studies intellectual movement similar to subaltern studies. Ultimately this dalit studies in future seems to be more vibrant with dalit scholars exercising leadership and agency. (EPW, 2009, 25)

Since the early years of Indian society, the brahminical mode of composing defining and interpreting history, culture and stories became the basis of formation of narratives in the form of puranic stories, vrat kathas, folk lores loaded with brahminical values, ritual stories and songs. Through this the Brahmans created a brahminical mindset and a normative frame of reference by which accorded an inferior position. To counter such oppressive historical constructions, the subaltern groups have continuously engaged in communicating their own stories, which they had composed in various forms. They have also constructed a plethora of symbols which are used as tools for empowerment in response to the urge to acquire self respect. The creation and compilation of contesting histories and narratives are ongoing process that is transmitted to the dalit at the grassroots level in the form of stories, riddles and genealogies.

Apart from these, Dalit literature as a creative intervention of dalit intelligentsia played a significant role in constructing dalit history. The historical consciousness is very much internalized in the structure of their literary narratives. The importance of dalit writings lies in authentic representation of the community by questioning the existing brahminical and progressive writings. The protest against the caste and class dominance is central to the dalit writings. Mostly, Dalit literary writings are autobiographical reflections of the community. Dalit writings are conscious effort of bridging the oral and written cultures. Dalit writings often invoke social memory as the source of their knowledge system. This also helps in maintaining the historical continuity.

Dalit intellectuals and academicians believe that dalits of many castes played significant roles as leaders and commanders in the revolt. The mainstream academicians on the other hand opine that the dalits as a community have always been docile, inactive and subjugated.

The efforts to create an alternative space by subverting the mainstream culture through their own cultural resources like their myths, legends, folktales and folk heroes etc., are being constructed.

Alternative history or alternate history develops out of historiography to identify historical points of view that have been ignored, overlooked, or unseeable. It usually denotes a history told from an alternative viewpoint, rather than from the view (actual or ascribed, obvious or inferred) of imperialists, conquerors or explorers. A search for 'inclusivity at the level identity formation, consciousness building, awareness generation have started taking deeper roots among the intellectual community. They can be enumerated as following points:

Question the existing brahminical sources and break the brahminical mindset.

Strengthen knowledge base of Dalit writings, which often invoke social memory as the source of their knowledge system. This also helps in maintaining the historical continuity

Dalit literature has emerged as a creative intervention of dalit intelligentsia. It also serves as means for Dalit writers to reclaim narrative authority over the construction of the 'Dalit self'.

An attempt of marginalized group to renegotiate narrative authority of autobiography, which has been originally defined and continually policed according to the interests of the dominant sections.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, it can be said that gender becomes an entry point into the analysis of the ways that exclusions are produced in the every day enactments of identity and power in social institutions. These processes are often normalised in ways that sustain the social, political and economic power dynamics of the status quo. For this reason, it is important to look at how power and identity processes are used to deny people their rights. Developing social exclusion policies from gender perspective however, requires information on the forms, nature and mechanism of exclusion of dalit women in social, political and economic spheres and their consequences on human development. As long as members of societies or sub-groups in societies permit or enable the subjugation of other members or sub-groups, gender equality in those sub-groups and societies will remain an illusive dream, not a real goal for which strategies and tactics

can be executed. Their politics of exclusion and inclusion, censure and celebration shows that they wish to be a part of the so called mainstream academic discourse yet cannot be. Their search for inclusivity to translate in to a reality can be only possible through contesting the existing knowledge base and providing for an alternative strategy.

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