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The Silence of the Silenced: A Comparative Study of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai's *Toottiyin Makan*, Andal Priyadharshini's *Kazhivu* and Malarvathi's *Thoopukaari*

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Abstract:

The present study proposes to trace the trajectory of the dalits in the inhuman terrain of Indian fiction. However, only the languages and technique differs from state to state and the mental agonies and humiliations remain the same everywhere. Over the years, dalits have undergone the worst exploitation and oppression inflicted on them by the upper caste society. The socially outcaste people are called in diverse terms like 'Untouchables', 'the Broken Men, The Depressed classes, Dalits'(Ambedkar), Harijans (Gandhiji), Taazhthapattor' (Bharathidasan), 'Chandala' and 'Subaltern' (Antonio Gramsci). Even today, the particular occupation is considered as a menial work and the workers as the polluted beings. The mute people never raise their voice against the society and the attitude of public may face a positive shift only when the silent souls realise their strength.

Keywords: Untouchability, socially downtrodden, dalit, manual scavenging

The literary term dalit literature can arguably be extended to any work of literature that "discusses issues related to dalits and their experiences, the question of identity, subjectivity and representation (MLS 3). After independence and exactly since 1970s, the issues of dalits gained currency in literary arena. In the words of Sudhakaran C.B, theoretically, the particular study "draws its strength mainly from the writings of B.R.Ambedkar, Kancha Illia and Michel Foucault (MLS 4). As a matter of fact, ideologically different leaders, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar voiced their views on untouchability in public speeches. Gandhi's article of faith was in social upliftment and in case of Ambedkar, he asserted changes in the Civil rights. However, both the political icons were absolutely against Hindus' conversion to Christianity. In the process of protest, Gandhiji stuck to non-violence campaign; Ambedkar went way ahead in making clear distinction between freedom and power. Being a non-Dalit, Gandhi vocalized for the Harijans and for their betterment in social status. Ambedkar, a dalit endorsed the socially outcaste through his

personal experience. Accordingly, the objective approach is dealt by Gandhi and Ambedkar has done the subjective protest. In the words of Gandhi:

Varnas are four to mark four universal occupations,-imparting knowledge, defending the defenseless, carrying on agriculture and commerce, and performing service through physical labour. These occupations are common to all mankind, but Hinduism, having recognized them as the law of our being, has made use of it in regulating social relations and conduct. (Curse)

Dalits worship Ambedkar all over India as he remains to be the symbol of their sustained struggle. Liberty, Equality and Fraternity were the watch words of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar against Untouchability. He renounced Hinduism and was converted to Buddhism. Gandhi and Ambedkar were not in good terms till 1932 "On 24th Sep, 1932, Dr. Ambedkar and Gandhiji reached an understanding, which became the famous Poona Pact" (Swapsushias). According to the pact, "in addition to the agreement on electoral constituencies, reservations were provided for untouchables in Government jobs and legislative assemblies (Swapsushias).

In India, differences are seen through caste variation and in foreign nations like America and Africa, the domination is seen by the colours. Blacks are restricted their rights like the untouchables. Nevertheless, inspired by the principles of Gandhiji, an activist and humanitarian Martin Luther King Jr., and Rosa Park fought for the justice of the black people. Furthermore, Nelson Mandela, a South-African anti-apartheid revolutionary fought against racism and inequality through non-violence movement and civil disobedience movement. "Malcolm X was a revolutionary of the soul who helped awaken a proud and assertive new black consciousness among the grandsons and grand-daughters of slaves" (Bheemaiah 129). To add, during the American Civil War, 'slavery was put to a similar use in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) in order to draw a contrast between the liberal North and the slaveholding South" (MLS 88). Along with the mentioned novel, *To Kill a Mocking Bird* by Harper Lee, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* of Mark Twain and Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* highlight the racial issues and discrimination in different parts of the world. Medha Patkar and Mahaswetha Devi advocate the forgotten, unsung humans, the tribals through the bold accusation of the Government in protests and in writing. Even the mass exodus of people from villages to different parts of tea plantations and rubber plantations were none other than the socially downtrodden people. Along with those, the problems of the salt workers and the tan workers are also manifolded. Caliban of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* too could not escape the yoke of insult meted out to him by the upper caste. He was the first rebel against Untouchability before anyone has dreamt of it.

Epics were in no way superior in treating the marginalized people. Eklavya, son of the Nishadas (tribal hunters) was not given a chance to learn archery after knowing his background by the Guru Drona, a Bhramin teacher. At the same time, when he excelled in

archery assuming Drona in his heart as his guru, Drona's demand for the thumb of his right hand as the dakshina, reveals the cruelty of his upper caste attitude to preserve his status-quo. Karna, the great archer, faced the same burning- fire situation, when he was denied his rights to archer in the court, indicating him of his lowly birth. In *After Kurukshetra*, Mahaswetha Devi records that the great injustice was done to the Nishadin, tribal or forest dweller, by killing a tribal mother and her five sons in the lac house by Kunti and her five sons.

Keezhvenmani was perhaps the first chronicle of violence against Dalits in independent India both as laboring class and as outcastes finding their nascent voice under the banner of the Communist movement that was gaining ground in the then East Thanjavur region. Here, in a wage struggle, 16 women, 23 children, and five men were charred to death inside a hut in which they took refuge. (Keezhvenmani).

In order to give a clarion call to the world, the non-Dalit writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai, Andal Priyadharshini and a Dalit writer Malarvathi have dealt with the themes of untouchables in their works. Mulk Raj Anand drew his inspiration to write *Untouchable* (1935) from the then living example, Mahatma Gandhi and his story *Uka*. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai had an idea to indite a literary work *Toottiyin Makan* (1947) on the victimed workers through the cases that he was arguing in favour of them. Andal Priyadharshini had her personal instinct to write on the subject in *Kazhivu* (Short Story-around 2005). Malarvathi truly acclaims *Thoopukari* (2011) an autobiographical sketch of personal sufferings of her mother.

In the social arena, the untouchables are bereft of the social status. They grapple with the social problems of discrimination, humiliation and denunciation. Even their very presence is considered polluted, albeit they are morally immaculate. They are treated like the mere soiled clothes by keeping them marooned from the society. They incur virulent abuses and rebukes. The voiceless subalterns could not remove boulders strewn on their paths. The society measures them in the social parameters. The fringes of the society confine them in the shackles of servitude. The stings of the society are very powerful and at the same time, painful and the social atrocities make them crippled permanently. Unlike the mentioned writers, their life remains insipid for most of the writers. The dalit writing is the first of its kind in India dealt by Mulk Raj Anand and Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (Malayalam Fiction). They are the pioneers of this genre of fiction. The target group audiences of the above writers are the upper caste people as they could make changes in the society through their awareness. Though flaks rise, the novels created drastic shifts in the society. Like the brimless container, the issues of untouchables overflow in the chosen novels.

Politically, it is more than 800 years of slavery as in 1212, public toilets were built “in Europe in such a way that human wastes had to be cleaned by the other human” (Neethirajan 5). Before the invasion of the foreigners, India did not need the necessity of

manual scavenging as all had the practice of morning ablutions in the empty grounds. Only after the enslavement of the nation India by British, the meek people were also forced to take up the job and before many decades, by birth, no one was the manual scavengers. In a way, the term manual scavenger is not the apropos word to signify their mental anguish and physical agony as it is beyond anyone's perception. They are nixed of their possibilities to cast the vote or to walk in public roads. The door to the delectable ambience is shut permanently to them.

Life is an unbearable burden for each and every one of them. Cleaning of septic tanks is a life-threat to them. No proper compensation is given on any emergency or for the loss of life. Moreover, the authorities swindle the money that is allotted to them and are given only meager amount. Stale food and left over are the source of food for them. A good feast is not given in their dictionary and torn clothes and the dilapidated houses are their great assets. Easy access to disease is the boon that they have received from the Almighty. The life runs in debts as the low wages do not fit their hand to mouth survival itself. The deferential and gentle characters of theirs gather the profidious people around them.

The novel *Untouchable* records a day in the life of an Indian sweeper, Bakha with Punjab as the setting Bakha, "a young man of eighteen, strong and able-bodied, the son of Lakha, the Jemadar of all sweepers in the town and the cantonment" (Anand 1). He is motherless and has two younger siblings. Right from the death of his mother, he has no companion to share his feelings. Emotionally, he bottles up all his desires. Like every sweeper or the manual scavenger, he too was reluctant to get into the occupation as he considered it menial. Due to the trickery of fate, he entered after the pretension of his father fallen sick. *Toottiyin Makan* documents the three generations of people in Alapuzha who had begun their occupation as the manual scavenger. Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai has taken immense pain to retain the originality of their life and the story revolves around Isakimuthu, Chudalamuthu and Mohan. Malarvathi figures the true misfortunes of the manual scavengers through her personal observation in *Thoopukari*. As the writer belongs to the district of Kanyakumari, she has kept hold of the dialect of the people of these regions. The story circles around Kanaga, Poonkodi and Poonkodi's newly born child. The portrayal of three generations of life resembles the technique of *Toottiyin Makan*. Both the protagonists of *Toottiyin Makan* and *Thoopukari* were unwilling to take up the profession. Yet, they have stepped into the whirlpool because of the sickness of one of the parents. The short story *Kazhivu* by Andal Priyadharshini throws light on the physical and mental inmedicable woes of the night soil worker, Somaiya. The novel is brazen of the truth that the next generation people do not feel any empathy towards the previous generation.

Nevertheless, the locale in which the downtrodden people make their stay is beyond one's description. Those are the storehouses of all infection and the dwellers have open doors to all the deadly diseases. "The workers are unheard of the words cleanliness, hygiene and sanitation in their lives. There was no provision for lights in the sweeper's street." (Anand 66)

and furthermore, “there was a scarcity of water.” (Anand 67). Due to their habitation in filthy surroundings, people tend to get virulent disease like the small pox. The disease reduced the population of the manual scavengers in hundreds and thousands as it is recorded in *Tootiyin Makan*. Malarvathi admits in her novel *Thoopukari* that as their area is situated near the border of Kerala, the influence of Malayalam and their culture is predominant in these people.(20).

In *Untouchable*, Bakha is rebuked both by his father and the society and his father yells and calls him different names. According to the upper caste people, seeing an untouchable on an auspicious day brings them bad luck. Even the sweeper should shout loudly about his arrival in the public places, lest he may be beaten or scolded with strong lashes of humiliations. Even, the positive possibilities are there to falsely accuse the victim that he has beaten the little children too. In addition, the sweepers are denied their rights to stand or sit near the footsteps of their houses. To be concise, the poor people consume only meager food like the stale food or the leftover of any house. Perhaps, they too eat the remains of the sepoy’s “But his hand touched a piece of sticky, wet bread. The picture of a sepoy washing his hands in his round brass tray, over the leavings of bread and salad, and then throwing in Rakha’s basket appeared before him.” (Anand 76).

Somaiya, a manual scavenger in Andal Priyadharshini’s *Kazhivu*, explicates that the spine would break and the legs would go numb by cleaning and disposing umpteen baskets of human wastes. They should walk hundred times to and fro with the loaded baskets on their heads. It is a hell for them during rainy season as along with the rain water; the wastes also enter the mouths of the workers. The smell of the waste could not be removed from the hands even with any sanctified water. The incident resembles the Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* where she tries to wash away the blood in her hands with a phrase that even the sweet scents of Arabia could barely evade her blood stains. They do not know the fragrance of flowers or fruits. In fact, the scavengers in *Kazhivu* and *Thoopukari* find it extremely diffident to differentiate any good smell from the other. Ergo, in order to get rid of the smell the septic cleaners and the manual scavengers booze heavily. In *Thoopukari*, the workers have to dispose the waste food, the used napkins of women and blood-stained clothes from the operation theatre. The workers withstand everything like the mother earth in order to make out their living. The prolonged adversities in life have molded the people to face any situation. Poovarasi consoles herself that she should admire the wastes and the disgusting things to begin the cleaning. When Poovarasi felt embarrassed to do cleaning, Maari reckons, “After entering this profession, nothing should be thought of; should not feel abominable as if doing some heinous work; should know to feel extremely proud of doing the world’s best profession, cleaning.(Malarvathi 79). The same concept is been spoken by Gandhi in *Untouchable*, “If there are any Untouchables here, he heard the Mahatma say, they should realize that they are cleaning Hindu society.” (Anand 138).

In case of *Tootiyin Makan*, manual scavengers are remembered only till they do their cleaning and certainly not after that. To be different from the other workers,

Chudalamuthu did not receive any food from anyone. When he was reminded of his ailing father, he approached the same places where he did his cleaning previously by introducing himself that he is the son of Isakimuthu. With no regards, he was questioned who the mentioned person is. With broken heart, he could see only the cold dead body of his father when he returned home. Even then, the dead body of the old man was not cremated to rest in peace. Due to their declined rights, the underdogs buried the body near their working spot. To everyone's shock, the old man was pulled outside by the hungry dogs and the half of his body was totally missing. The same incident can be traced in U.R. Anantha Murthy's novel *Samskara: A Rite for a Dead Man*, where Naranappa, an upper caste married Chandri, a chandal. After his marriage he too was considered a polluted and no one came forward to do his final rites. As a result of which, his body started decomposing and Chandri cremated the body of her husband. In *Paalithin Paikal* by Era. Natarajan, again a low caste Maari's body was not allowed to take in the paths of the upper caste. By showing faces, people fail to understand that the things that make him stink are also available in the bowels of the big people too. (Malarvathi 25). These people put forth a question very often "Why don't they think that we are also humans?" (Malarvathi 32).

Both in *Untouchable* and *Toottiyin Makan*, education is denied to the underprivileged outcaste people. In the former novel, seeing the anxiety of Bakha towards studies, his father insisted that schools were meant for the babus, not for the lowly sweepers. (Anand 30). In case of an autobiographical novel of Bama's *Karukku*, the writer was also denied her rights for education. Even when education was made common, lots and lots of partialities were seen by the teachers. In *Kazhivu*, Somaiya was declined his right to fondle his child as his wife thinks him to be unfit. Even his wife excludes herself from the family ties. Like his wife, his son Ammavaasai grows disgusted of the profession of his father. However, he changes his name to Dhanapal and lives in the city. Contrastingly, in *Toottiyin Makan*, Chudalamuthu precludes his son to touch him and he doesn't lift his child in a fear that his son should not be accustomed to the smell or the profession of his. In a way, he puts mental handcuffs to himself as his son should not experience the evil pangs of the society. On the contrary to the character of Somaiya's wife, Valli in the novel makes her husband Chudalamuthu to understand that they cannot escape the biting criticism of the society in educating their son. Moreover, she is the hardcore realist of life and also steadily supports her husband till her last breath. In *Thoopukari*, more than cleaning or touching the mean things, what makes them disgusted is to hear the abuses of the upper caste women. They are beaten up with the strong censures. Casually, Kanagam remarked at a woman to spit elsewhere as she had just then done the cleaning. Hearing that the woman made a huge cry and criticized Kanagam as she has entered this profession only because of her character. When Kanagam and Rosy went to the wedding function to dispose the eaten plantain leaves, due to hunger, they both sat down to eat. At this sight, a person would yell at them for eating food before the guests and ordered to get up from the place in middle of their meal. The true love for Mano made Poovarasi to deliver a child of theirs. Unfortunately, without marrying Poovarasi, timid

Mano married some other woman. Eventually, the noble-hearted Maari offered his hands to marry Poovarasi, unmindful of her situation.

According to Homi Bhabha's *Of Mimicry*, the colonized adopt the culture i.e., the language, education and clothing of the colonizer as in when it suites and abandon the same to follow their own habits. Similarly, Bakha imitates the culture and the clothing of the Britishers as the novel is set in the pre-independence era. His total inclination towards imperialistic style is evident through his behaviours, "He felt that to put on their clothes made one a sahib too. So he tried to copy them in everything, to copy them as well as he could in the exigencies of his peculiar Indian circumstances." (Anand 3). On the contrary, Chudalamuthu in *Tootiyin Makan* reflects the mannerisms and life-style of the upper class people as the story is recorded at the time of independence era. He wants to be a tidy person who receives respect from everyone and also wishes to change the future of his clan by educating his child.

Further, the untouchables undergo multiple dominations like physical, emotional and psychological levels through the words and the deeds of the socially superior people. In *Untouchable*, Bakha could not withstand the inhuman torments of the other people. His mind is imprinted with the same phrase that he is an untouchable. No *chandal* shall draw water from the well as it is considered to be polluted. All the lower castes should wait for the arrival and the mercy of upper caste to give them some water. More or less, the same situation shall be witnessed in Tagore's *Chandalika*, in which Prakriti had a separate well to take water. Moreover, they should not offer water to anyone as that it is also a kind of pollution. She regained her spirits only after the soothing words of Anandha, a Buddhist monk. The vexation of Bakha is boundless hearing the same words 'polluted' in diverse contexts by different people. When his sister Sohini was tried to molest by the priest and in order to hide his crime, he shouted as polluted, Bakha could only be a mute observer of the atrocities that happen around him. In the words of Ambedkar, the upper castes muted him on domination. After knowing the truth from Sohini that he held her breasts, at the outset, he remained unperturbed externally, but deep inside; his heart was churning with vengeance. After the incident he felt, "I wish she had been the ugliest woman in the world! Then no one would have teased her!" (Anand 57). In *Breast Stories* of Mahaswetha Devi, she weaves the three stories having the breasts as the common symbol. In three different stories, she has projected breasts as the object of weapon, compassion and pleasure.

In *Tootiyin Makan*, in order to overcome their degradation, the workers decide to start up an union. That was the time when Communism and Marxism were gaining momentum among the keralites. In a way, Chudalamuthu could feel happy of thinking his wife as the source of moral courage and positive strength. When the pernicious small pox was hitting the towns everywhere, it was the under dogs who died everywhere. In that situation, the overseer Kesava Pillai narrated the past to his chairman that when the whole clan of the manual scavengers expired, they have brought people from Tirunelveli without any consideration for the dead people. Even the overseer denied medication for the affected people with a reason

that the injection may end up in fever and consequently the work would be affected. He seldom had an iota of empathy in his mind that they are all humans like him. Perhaps, even in the past, the father and the forefathers of Chudalamuthu faced the same crisis. In both *Kazhivu* and *Paalithin Paigal*, there are statements regarding the elevated feeling of the two protagonists experiencing the joy of touching a new soul in the former novel and a lady-love in the latter. In the same *Kazhivu*, the domination of woman Sarasu is experienced by her husband Dhanapal. Without a tint of concern, he incessantly abuses his wife for everything. Susila of *Paalithin Paigal* too faces the verbal attack of her husband throughout her life. Perhaps, men think women as some dough to beat how much ever they want. Even Dhanapal is absolutely heartless as he visited the house of his father in the last days only to collect the money. His sadism is evident through his way of attacking his father physically without any regards.

In both *Untouchable* and *Toottiyin Makan*, the protagonists inherit the occupation as their fathers were at it. For an untouchable, he/ she does not choose any occupation, rather, the profession chooses them through hereditary. Hence, for ages, the individuals of the society remain weak and so that the society can engulf an individual for its dire thirst of life. For aeons, the weakness of the caste makes them cringe before to the upper caste people, "Charat Singh's generous promise had called forth that trait of servility in Bakha which he had inherited from his forefathers, the weakness, of the down-trodden, the helplessness of the poor" (Anand 9). The thoughts of his social order races in the minds of Bakha, "He came of peasant stock, his ancestors having come down in the social scale by their change of profession. The blood of his peasant ancestors, free to live their own life even though they may have been slaves" (Anand 56). For the better future, Gandhi advises them on good habits and also geared up "their spirit through optimistic words which said that they, should realize that they are cleaning Hindu society." (Anand 138). In *Toottiyin Makan* in order to make sea of changes in their standard, the untouchables tried for the conversion to Christianity. However, that did not work out for them, though they changed their religion, the caste remains unchanged. To oppose the prevailing class struggle, the workers decided to organize a union to voice their opinion or disinterest. Individually whatever a person lacks to accomplish was made possible through strike or protest by the union. Like a hurricane, the union of the workers created certain differences in the social outlook. The wife of Chudalamuthu, Valli questions her husband dubiously, "Will there be a future where there will be no thottis?"

The change in the normal life pattern of the manual scavengers is translucent in *Kazhivu* when with the pressure from Moorthy, Somaiya decided to pen down his thoughts and personal experiences in writing. Even without any bewilderment, Somaiya takes a stand on his own by gifting his prize money to the welfare of the school. He was given felicitation in a grand way which any night soil worker cannot afford in his life. When Moorthi queried Dhanapal about the nature of his work, the latter responded that his division is sanitary

maintenance in a star hotel. Hearing this, with a mocking smile, Moorthi told on his face that other than the name of the designation, the occupation of his and his father is the same.

Maari in *Thoopukari* repeatedly articulated his fellow workers and Poovarasi, “People invent so many thing. Right? Let them invent instrument for cleaning too. We should also desire to live with dignity and respect.” (Malarvathi 54). Maari admits to Mano that he and Poovarasi are going to take care of the child; “they would educate the child to invent an instrument for cleaning; so that in future there will not be a clan for cleaning; and let everyone clean their own dirt. The low castes are treated worse than cats and dogs. They think we are mere dirt because we clean their dirt.” (Malarvathi 96). This particular profession is not the sinful occupation, but the society has made it the degraded job.

The slim novel of Mulk Raj Anand, follows the technique of story taking place in a single day like James Joyce’s *Ulysses* where the author webs the incidents of a single day, June 16, 1904. Albeit, it is more of a novelette, Mulk Raj Anand has furnished all the incidents that happen in the life of a sweeper. Drawing a heavy influence from Mahatma on non-violence campaign against Untouchability, the writer was totally motivated to write on the concept. Moreover, Anand gives three conclusions for the readers like Christianity, Gandhi’s principles and Flush system. In the words of Gandhi, “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable” (138). Perhaps, the most powerful influence on Thakazhi Sivasankar Pillai and Mulk Raj Anand was the spirit of their times. Both the writers being aware of the social responsibilities chose the core idea of Untouchability to create awareness through their works. The writers have not adhered to any clichéd remark on the chosen subject. The influence of Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai is mainly from Communism and Marxism. As a result of which he hints at the readers for a social agitation through Unions. In all the novels the external features have actuated the minds of people to subdue or to revolt. Though Andal Priyadarshini’s short story *Kazhivu* lends itself for a novel, the writer has confined herself to a short story. Hence, many incidents are obscure and the writer has failed to throw light on several areas. In that way, the story talks less on the sufferings underwent by Somaiya. The writer boldly states, “Waste’ means- It’s not alone the faeces that are excreted from the human body, isn’t also to dispose a man?” (Priyadharshini 222).

Malarvathi accentuates the plight of women in the particular job of cleaning. Being men writers, Thakazhi and Anand have focused their attention more on men characters. On the contrary, Malarvathi’s prime focus rests on women as she has seen her mother’s grievances in her personal life. Throughout the novel, with reference to the context, the writer has penned plenty of short poems. In case of *Toottiyin Makan*, Chudalamuthu had the burning desire to educate his sons to elevate their standard. Nevertheless, in *Thoopukari*, though Poovarasi could not take care of her daughter in impecunious standard, she is reluctant to give the child to the rich couple. It is simple because, when the child lives in a luxuriant environment, then though born as an untouchable, she too will not understand the miseries of a low caste people.

Despite the fact that they are impeccable, like the prostitutes they make themselves unclean by cleansing the dirt of the society. The dirty work of the pure hearts is still prevalent throughout India and the number of scavengers remains unchanged. May be the numbers have become less in these periods. When a manual scavenger was questioned whether she likes the work, she has replied that she works only for money. To conclude, the lines in *Man with the Hoe* poem of Edwin Markham reflect the condition of the downtrodden. After many long years of investigation, only in 2012, the Supreme Court has given an order to abandon manual scavenging in India.

The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back the burden of the world,
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes. (Markham)

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