

Identity Crises And Perceptions of Regional Disparity: A Study of Rajouri and Poonch Districts (J&K)

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Abstract

The paper examines the Identity crisis and perception of regional disparity which has been developed among the inhabitants of Rajouri and Poonch Districts. The Paper accommodates the historical background of the Region (Rajouri-Poonch), socio cultural and economic condition of the inhabitants, perceptions of prevailing disparity with the region in multifarious developmental aspects of social life and certain implications which have been constructed to bridge the developmental gape.

The whole Region is populated with different religious and caste communities. The State has four types of unique cultural blend comprised distinct parts namely Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Rajouri-Poonch. First three parts have been constitutionally recognized and designated as three provinces of the State; the region under study is a part of Jammu province. These four regions of the State are different from each other in socio-cultural, ethnic, linguistic and demographical background with tradition of unity in diversity.

Regional development needs socio-cultural and economic development to its fullest potential so that the fruits of development can be shared by all the regions. Regional disparity of the area under study is associated with the prevailing developmental process and regional share in the same. Socio-cultural and economic condition of the region is relatively backward than other three regions of the State. Governmental efforts and limited opportunities could not change the attitude of the people of the area.

The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has tried to mitigate the regional disparity by certain provisions that created intra regional conflict between ignored and reserved sections, as the whole region is socially, educationally and economically backward. Regional equality can be maintained if the autonomous hill development council is established for the region in the ambit of Rajouri-Poonch autonomous Hill development council, on Ladakh Pattern, along with the other developmental opportunities. It would be most effective approach for the development of the whole region.

The paper is based on the information collected from historical literature, census of India 2011, economic survey of the State, some project reports of different organizations on the developmental aspects, and field work conducted during 2009 - 10.

Keywords: Regional Disparity, Developmental Aspects, Demographical Background, Cultural Blend, Constitutionally Recognized

Introduction

The Jammu and Kashmir State of North India having area of 222,200 sq. km. including area occupied by China and Pakistan with 10,069,900 population (census 2011), The State has four types of unique cultural blend that differentiate it from the rest of the Country. The Socio-cultural and demographic structure of the State is comprised of four distinct parts namely Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and Rajouri-Poonch. First three parts have been constitutionally recognized and designated as three provinces of the State, but on account of the erstwhile backwardness the fourth region couldn't get its due space in the State. Kashmir has been the highest learning point of Sanskrit and Persian, Ladakh on the other side has been the highest living centre of Tantrayan Buddhism, and Jammu has been the axis of Rajas and Maharajas. On the other hand Rajouri-Poonch has been the principalities, ruled by Muslim Rajputs for centuries representing the actual Indian traditional system.

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These four regions have their own separate linguistic identity, Kashmir is represented by Kashmiri language, Jammu is represented by Dogri language Ladakh is represented by Ladakhi comprised of Balti, Dardi and Shina and Rajouri-Poonch is represented by Phari comprised of Gojri and Poonchi languages. For interregional interaction Urdu or Hindi is used as Communicative language. Though the four region of the State are different from each other in socio-cultural, ethnic, linguistic and demographical background but they have maintained the Indian tradition of unity in diversity.

Identity crisis And Social Structure Of The People:-

The term identity crisis refers to the situation where a period of uncertainty and confusion in which a person's sense of identity becomes insecure, typically due to a change in their expected aims or role in society. In case of the identity crisis of the area under study the expectations of the people are some what reciting a similar story.

The whole region is populated with different religious and caste communities with deeply rooted customs and traditional system. The whole population of the region is comprised of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians (*Fouk 1941*).

Socio-Cultural and Economic pattern of inhabitants of the region are similar to each other, Hindu community is divided into four caste groups as practised in Indian traditional caste system. On the other hand Muslim community has been rigidly stratified in to four Caste groups, as, Rajputs, Gujars, Kashmiries and 'others'. They never practise exogamous pattern of marriage and are the staunch believer of caste system and allied practices.

Rajputs: - The majority of Rajputs in Rajouri-Poonch Districts is Muslim Rajputs their origin is claimed from Rajisthan, Gujrat, Punjab, Haryana and H.P. Though the Muslim faith is against belief of a person being born from Sun, Moon, and Fire, but even Muslim Rajputs feel proud of being belonging to Rajput Clan. They often reference the bravery of their ancestors in the battle fields of the past and they extend equal status to the parallel clan that is Hindu Rajputs. At the time of any conflict with non Rajput communities, the Hindu and Muslim Rajputs communities emotionally unite to protect their prestige. Still they like to serve in armed forces.

Rajputs of Rajouri-Poonch have been divided into two religious communities, i.e, Hindu Rajputs and Muslim Rajputs. Hindu Rajputs have been classified into various sub castes like Thakers, Manhas, Chauhan Thakyal, Chandial, Charrak, Kamlak, and Chib, Muslim Rajputs have been further divided in to various sub castes such as, Jarral, Malik, Domal, Thakyal, Khokhar, Janjua, Salahria, Bhatti, Feerozal Gakhar, Manhas, Manial, Chib, Thakkar, and Kamlak etc. As such there are more than 54 sub-castes of Muslim Rajputs exist in the area.

Gujars: - The Gujjar is an ethnic group in India and Pakistan. In India, the Gujjars follow Hinduism, Sikhism and Islam. The Hindu Gujjars belong to the traditional Kishatriya Varna in Hinduism, while the

Muslim Gujjars are considered to be a Potwari tribe in India and Pakistan. The historical background of the community is associated with the Rajputs clan of Rajasthan and Gujarat. In India Gujjar population found in Dehli, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Punjab, northern Madhya Pradesh, Uttera Khand, Rajisthan, Gujrat and Maharashtra. The Bakarwals is the Parallel ethnic group to the Gujjars, inter section marriage takes place freely among Gujjars and Bakarwals. 100% Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir are the followers of Islam. While considering the sentimental attitude, physical features, racial and genealogical background of the Gujjars and Bakarwals, it is observed that the clan is purely a Rajput clan. But on account of the regional variation their recognition is different from that of the fact; they do not perceive themselves as Rajputs. Majority of the Gujjars are illiterate due to which they can be exploited easily by their political leaders. The Major economy of the Gujjars community is comprised of Agriculture, government jobs, cattle rearing and few among them are rearing Sheep and goats and leading semi nomadic life, during winter they migrate with their herds to the foot hills of Peer Panchal, and in summer season in search of pasture they migrate to high up in the mountains.

The Gujjars of Rajouri-Poonch are divided into innumerable sub-castes but major among them are, Khatana, Badana Sood, Paswal, Kalas, Benth, Bijran, Chauhan, Chechee, Sango, Rana etc. associated with the Rajputs clan of Rajasthan and Gujarat. (*Shamsi 1989*)

Kashmiries: - The term refers to the people who are inhabitants of the valley of Kashmir, but generally the term is used in its boarder concept for the people of Jammu and Kashmir by the people of rest of the states of India. But in Rajouri and Poonch District, Kashmiries are the people who speak Kashmiri language with Paharie language. A small section of the people in Rajouri district is speaking Kashmiri language They have been migrated from valley of Kashmir to Rajouri and Poonch districts since the time immemorial, their major concentration of the community is observed in Thannamandi Tehsil of District Rajouri and other areas like, Buffliaz, Chandhimarh and Loranmandi in District Pooch, as these are the adjoining mountainous areas of Kashmir Valley. The old persons of the community are claiming themselves as traditional manual labourer working in the areas for centuries, majority of the community members leading miserable life in extreme poverty. Their historical background is similar to that of other Kashmiri Muslim in the valley of Kashmir as they had been converted to Islam from Kashmiri Pandhits. Caste stratification among the Kashmiries is not as rigid as among other Muslim communities of the areas. They have matrimonial relations with all the Muslims irrespective of the caste. They are liberal like Kashmiri Muslims and Kashmiri Pandhits. As such Kashmiri Hindus (Pandhits) are different from elsewhere. (*Subash Kak, 1996*). Major castes among Kashmiries are Bhat, Mir, Khawaja, Bhanday,

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Maghray, Khans Kandru, Itto, Muttoo and Sheikh. There are more than 130 caste titles of Kashmiries of the Valley of Kashmir but few among them are existing in the area under study.

Other Communities: - These communities are comprised of Sayeed, Qureshi, Mughal, Pathan and Sheikh (Muslim Banghies) and they are claiming their origin in golf countries. The caste structure of these communities is not similar to that of the whole Indian Muslims. In all the studies of caste among Muslims the term 'Ashraf' (Arabic words meaning honourable) is used for the Muslim of foreign origin and converts from Hindus of higher birth. And Risely (1908) in Bengal used the term 'Ajlaf' for the Muslims engaged in clean occupational group like, barber, carpenter, laundrymen, potter, tailor, and Rangrez. 'Arzal' for the Muslims engaged in unclean occupational groups like, Bhangi (scavenger), Cobbler (Mochi).

In Rajouri and Poonch Districts except Sayeeds, 35% of the total population of these communities are originally belong to the Ashraf category of the Muslims, majority of the Ajlaf claiming themselves as Ashraf are the Muslim Doods (drum beater) Mouchies (Cobbler) and Banghies (scavenger) using the title of Sheikhs with their names. The historical accounts refer that this section has been converted from untouchable Hindus due to the suppression of rigid caste system of Hindus and social disability. During the process of Islamization they changed their caste and claim themselves as Sheikh which is higher caste among Muslims in the whole of the country. Clean occupational group in Rajouri District claim themselves as Qureshi, Mughals and Thakkers, such as Barbars, Carpenters, Black smiths, Weavers, Muslim jewelers, etc, but in the real sense they have been converted from clean occupational Hindu castes. Their economic activities are confined to their traditional occupational system, still they use the out dated techniques in their activities due to which they are poor and lead miserable life.

It is taken into consideration that four Muslim caste categories and Hindus as well as Sikhs are dwellers of the remote and hilly Districts, whose socio-cultural affinity and language is binding strength of their cultural heritage. Which have been nourishing their age old secular out look, extending common culture, speaking common language, residing on the foothills of Peer Panchal Range starting from Budhal to Muzaffarabad. They extend very peculiar familial pattern, marriage customs and rituals which are not observed in other parts of the State.

Family And Marriage Pattern: - The family as primary institution performs the same functions every where. But pattern of the family in one society is different from the other. The family pattern in Rajouri-Poonch is purely joint, male dominated, traditional and orthodox. Modern urbanization and industrialization has hardly impacted the family structure and values. The study of the region indicates among 651 respondents

1. Majority of respondent (74%) practices joint family system, because (83%) of the population is

comprised of Paharies and Gujars and their means of subsistence is agriculture, cattle rearing some among them are semi nomadic, this type of setup requires manual force.

2. The parental property is inherited only by the male members of the society. Majority of the respondents (93%) elicited that female members are not given importance in the familial or matrimonial decisions.
3. Majority of the respondents (89%) expressed their views that they give preference to the male child birth instead of female child.

In the process of marriage the study indicates that

1. majority of the respondents (72%) prefer early marriage of their sons and daughters due to mass illiteracy, orthodoxy, outcaste threat and prevailing insecurity caused by militancy and allied factors
2. Majority of the respondents (97%) observe caste endogamous marriage, 02% to 05% of the marriages are performed by love or elopement. In the past polygamous pattern was also performed but major change has taken place in this custom, as only 2% to 3% of the people prefer more than one wife.
3. Dowry system is very simple, majority of the respondents (91%) expressed that they give buffaloes, cows, goats, sheep, spinning wheel and other domestic materials, where as, 09% of the population, imitate the modern practices of dowry system and spend major amount according to their income structure, Marriage bonds are maintained in accordance with the religious citations and social sanctions. They generally wear silver ornaments like jumka. Kangan, Sierie(necklace), laung, Challa, Payal, but among some people the gold jewelry is considered as the status symbol.

Economic Condition: - The Economic condition of the people of the District Rajouri and Poonch is miserable and inadequate, according to census 2011, the major occupation is agriculture and allied activities due to the Geographical disadvantage, mass poverty and illiteracy the people are economically backward, the small farmers have little pieces of land holdings, kacha houses, most of the agricultural area is located on the hill slopes where irrigation and tractor facilities can not be availed. On the other hand due to snow fall only Kharief crop is possible in their fields, in addition to that there is lack of employment, and manual workers go outside the state in search of job. Major economy of the people is agriculture but it can be expected that a single source of income which cannot fulfill the basic amenities of a particular community does not deserve to be recognized as the economy of the community. On the basis of study, the whole economic structure of the districts is divided into four categories: (i) Population with Agricultural activities, (ii) Population with Government services. (iii) Population with cattle rearing, (iv) Manual labourer.

1. 48% of the total working population is engaged in agriculture economy while, 13% of the working Population is engaged in government services, where as, 23% of the total population depend upon cattle rearing, 16% of the total population is

working as manual labourer. Among them 09% of the labourers are working outside the state, as, in Mumbai, Punjab, and H.P., on account of non availability of work avenues in the State. The major portion of the youth is unemployed

2. The economy of the districts is not satisfactory and more than 60% of the population is living below the poverty line. The youths of the area is badly effected by the prevailing limited economic resources⁷. Due to extreme poverty and unemployment some people even indulge in illegitimate sources of earning, either they smuggle forest wood, make local wine (in Khawas, Doungi Grarti and some other areas) or join militancy in the State for their means of subsistence.

Educational Condition:- Educational condition of the Districts is not good though census figures of 2011 indicates the 68.54% and 68.69 literacy rate in Rajouri and Poonch respectively, but it is expected less than this, and further decline is expected in the higher reaches. The major problem in the region is that the people have not been encouraged to send their children to the school. Majority of the students cannot complete even their school education up to the 10th level, so dropped out from the school due to the financial constraints of the parents and uncertainty of future career. The data indicates that, 45% to 55% of the children's population of the Districts goes to school. Among them 48% of the children dropped-out from the school from first to middle class level, and female dropped out children constitute majority among them at the same level. The major causes of educational backwardness are their rigid Caste system, traditional beliefs, orthodoxy, extreme poverty and mass illiteracy and non availability of educational facilities. They prefer the children to graze the cattle in the field or (male children) to work as labourer and earn money to fulfill the basic needs of the family, instead of sending them to the school. They are not aware of the legal restriction on the child labour.

Health Condition:- In the region majority of the people are suffering due to lack of health related facilities, the area has not been facilitated with the modern health care system. Out of the total more than 80% of the sub centers are without their own buildings, all the Medical sub centers are with out public utilities for male and female and also without the toilet, labour rooms, telephone facility; even the PHCs are running in similar condition. The Districts Hospitals are also ill equipped. In the area more than 58% of the deaths cases are associated with Maternal- mortality (district Hospital record 2011-12). 84% of the deliveries in the hilly areas take place with out trained personnel (FMPHW), as in hilly areas Medical Termination of Pregnancy services are not available, due to which Infant Mortality rate is also very high. 81% of the women of the area are not aware of 'Woman and child' health care and the precautions, which are to be taken during pregnancy. Early marriage is also a cause which leads to increase in the maternal mortality rate. Some

migratory labourers are the HIVAIDS infected under treatment at ART Center Medical College Jammu.

Perception Of Regional Disparity:

The regional disparity is the term, which indicates the developmental imbalance among regions or it may be said that regional disparity is the result of common efforts for the development of all the regions with out systematic evaluation of level of backwardness. Balanced regional development does not mean equal development of all the regions of the state or nation but it needs socio-cultural and economic development to its fullest potential so that the fruits of development can be shared by all the regions. It is generally considered that the existence of any community is closely associated with its racial, ethnic, social and regional history. (*Sukhbir Tamang 2009*)

In so far as regional disparity of the area under study is concerned, it remained a battle field of various wars since the Paula Dynasty, it was more affected during the turmoil of 1947 and tribal raids. the prosperity of the region has taken its hugely turn witnessing heartrending episodes of genocide and mass exodus, moreover two wars of 1965 and 1971 have been fought in the region which effected socio-cultural and demographic structure of the region, besides wars majority of the population of the region has been the victim of cross boarder bullets, mines networking of the boarder areas, which lead to the loss of their lives, moveable and immoveable property. (*Hasham Ali 2007*)

The on going movement in the Kashmir valley has also caused much havoc to the region. Since 1947 the region has long history of dejection, plethora of untold miseries and chronicle disparity being a neglected part of the state. The successive Governments in the State, political parties and other organizations are unable to perform expected role for the rehabilitation of aggrieved and neglected masses due to their own limitations, but exploit them on the name of castes and enhance the inter caste distrust. During recent past political turmoil in 1989 over 700 families comprising 6300 persons migrated from their respective areas and settled in different towns like Jammu Rajouri and Nowshera, they have not been provided any relief including ration or cash for want of funds. The State Human Right Commission couldn't proved to be effective in the process of rehabilitation of the people of Rajouri and Poonch as more than 25 cases had been recommended by the SHRC to the State government to consider all the internal displaced persons of Rajouri-Poonch at par with the boarder migrants of the Jammu District as well as the migrants of Kashmir. Following directives of the Supreme Court government agreed to facilitate the displaced but due to deficiency of funds assurance could never transformed in to the practice. All the organizations and social activists have failed to provide justice to the victims of terrorism and State apathy. In any political issues the people of the region have no space, the aspirations and opinions of the people are not taken in to account. Violation of human

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rights and atrocities on these people remain unnoticed and are not reported anywhere. The true representatives of the people of Kashmir and Jammu have never visited this area and are completely unaware of the geographic, ethnic, linguistic and cultural composition of the State. Same is true with Government of India, in the process of maintenance of peace between India and Pakistan the interaction of youth of both the countries has been extended but youth of affected regions have not been involved in the process.

The administrative data, of different departments, particularly the economic survey of the State and primary survey of the investigators have indicated that Socio-cultural and economic condition of the region is relatively backward from other three regions of the State having mass illiteracy, outdated customs, traditions and rituals, majority of the population is leading tribal way of life with rigid caste system. Modern governmental efforts, limited opportunities and external impact could not change the attitude of the people of the area. While examining the ethnocentric attitudes of the people of other two regions of Jammu and Kashmir it has been observed that majority of the people about 85% to 90% use the term 'Gujjar' to identify the people of Rajouri-Poonch, the term 'Gujjar' in J&K State refers to the victim of extreme poverty and social backwardness. It is to be considered that when common man of the other regions has general perceptions of the regional backwardness of the area under study, so it does not require any technical rating scale to measure the regional disparity.

In developmental aspects disparity can be observed when the work performance has been evaluated in context of roads connectivity of the areas, the roads which have been initiated in 1974 still could not become motorable, one among them is a road to connect Rajouri-Poonch Highway with Thannamandi having only 21 Km distance. Whereas most of the roads and allied facilities have been provided in the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh areas. Rajouri-Poonch Mughal road leading to the Valley of Kashmir has some what similar history.

The regional disparity is also observed in employment opportunity as admitted by the former chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayyid in March 2005 in the assembly session indicating that total strength of the administrative officers is 3,032 out of which 1,23 were from Rajouri and Poonch, in other categories of Government jobs the region is lagging behind in comparison of other districts of the State. In University of Jammu only five faculties, (one each, Law, Urdu, Bio-Sciences, political Science and Economics Department) one Library Assistant and one computer Assistant (on contractual basis) representing 10,96,086 population of Rajouri and Poonch region.

At present political structure only one MOS for health is belonging to the region under study representing 10,96,086 population of Rajouri and Poonch region.

Major causes behind the fact is the mass illiteracy, unawareness, orthodoxy, traditional and rigid caste system which lead to the intra regional caste conflict, poverty and backwardness of the community and ineffective political approaches, irrelevant developmental programmes and policies, insincere efforts of the Government and political leaders.

Solution And Implications: - The Government of Jammu and Kashmir has tried to mitigate the regional disparity by providing scheduled tribe status in 1991, to a section of the society and also granted reservation for backward areas. The provisions have created intra regional crisis between ignored and reserved sections; it has created another problem which is threat to the unity of the region as well as the State. Thus pick and choose approach for a particular section for the developmental process has not proved to be successful, as the whole region is socially, educationally and economically backward.

Regional disparity along with the identity crisis is a major problem, it can take ugly turn until it is handled properly at the gross root level, as the Rajouri and Poonch Districts are more sensitive from defense perspectives; it is in the interest of the national security to bridge the gap that has been created since a long time. Observed Socio-cultural and economic backwardness caused by regional disparity can be solved by the diversified and demographically relevant approaches of the State and Central Government as well as the united efforts of the political leaders and educated youths of the region. Successful and progressive policies and implications related to the economic development are functional only when both the providers and the recipients of the facilities and opportunities have the empirical knowledge of the thrust areas. Facilities can be managed but the target group (Recipient) requires large scale counseling related to the general awareness to avail the overall developmental opportunities. Thus, the foremost duty of the local educated youth and political leaders is to enlighten the illiterate and poor people about the progressive way of life and utilization of their talent for the betterment. On the other hand the Government should provide loan facilities with reasonable rates and subsidies to the people of the region for the establishment of small scale as well as large scale industrial units. The whole region should be brought on the Map of national as well as international tourism on the pattern of valley of Kashmir, as these areas are also famous for their scenic beauty with the rich socio cultural heritage. The government of Jammu & Kashmir has provided subsidy to the poor for the improvement in Horticulture of the hilly areas but it should be further improved so that fruit industry particularly of Walnut, apple, apricot and almond etc, in the areas can be established that acquire the best market during the season. Training camps should be organized to impart technical training to the people related to the trades by seeking the help of NGOs and experts of the relevant departments. The youths of the region should be encouraged to generate avenues of self employment. The establishment of various

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industrial units, Tourism Industry and fruit industry will generate new types of diversified jobs in the areas to improve economic condition.

Regional equality can be maintained if the autonomous hill development council is provided for the region in the ambit of Rajouri-Poonch autonomous Hill development council, on Ladakh Pattern, it would be most effective approach for the development of the whole region.

In the developmental process of the Hilly areas Hon'ble Prime Minister remarked at the 54th meeting of NDC on 19th December 2007, as, "Many of the smaller hill States have raised problems unique to their geography. They have specific connectivity, transport and infrastructure problems. Norms applicable to the rest of the country are not easily relevant to them. I therefore propose to constitute a Task Force in the Planning Commission to specifically look into the problems of hill States and hill areas and suggest ways in which we can ensure that they do not suffer in any way because of their locational peculiarities."

In the light of the of above remarks the proposal for Autonomous Hill Development Council should be submitted for the consideration of the Government of India. The State government is well aware of the plight of the region it should make similar efforts that were made for District Kargil in 2003. More over political leaders should be sincere and active to achieve the target, the prevailing position is profoundly favourable as the J&k State has political influence in Union Cabinet with two Ministers having Strong political background.

The concept of Hill development council fructified for the development of Leh district of Ladakh in 1995, on the pattern of Darjeeling hill development council, it was established in Kargil district in July 2003, by the strong support of government of Jammu and Kashmir. Its aim is to register prompt monitoring of the developmental works, working plans made, taking public representative even at panches and surpanches level in to confidence by ensuring transparency and accountability in the focused areas, as it is going on in the Leh and Kargil districts of Ladakh region. Similar approach should be adopted for Rajouri and Poonch Districts of Jammu Region.

This opportunity for the region will change the perceptions of discrimination among the people with respect to employment and promotions of career prospects especially because of higher level of development. It will accommodate the diverted youth who have been exploited. This role of the Center and State Governments in influencing development and regional equality will gain the confidence of the people.

Conclusion:

At the end, it can thus be concluded that Rajouri and Poonch twin boarder Districts have their separate historical background with separate socio cultural identity and Muslim dominant caste ridden society, remain battle field of three Indo-Pak wars, different from any other area of the State in all aspects of social life. The region is the victim of

backwardness, poverty, unemployment and illiteracy. The Government efforts could not bring the region up to the mark of expected developmental equality with other regions of the State. The developmental balance is expected to be maintained by the provision of Rajouri-Poonch Autonomous Hill Development Council. This would be the most effective and democratic step for the eradication of all types of regional imbalance. And especially the opportunities will accommodate and ensure the rehabilitation of the diverted youth.

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