

# “Victims become Victorians”: A Sociological Connotation

S. Rajalakshmi

**Abstract**--- Violence against women has received growing global attention in recent months following high profile and service incidents in India and South Africa. The widespread and sustained public protests that have followed in both countries and beyond indicate that violence against women is an issue that have been invisible on the agenda of decision makers for too long and more efforts are needed. The status of women in India is not equal to the status of men in terms of access, participation and reward. It owes this situation to the patriarchal feudalistic structure in the society. Although there are ethical and humanitarian reasons for censoring violence against women in the mass media, we have no evidence that such a move will necessarily lead to reduction in violence. Establishment of cheaper and less formal courts could also be a measure to help women who are victims of exploitation.

**Keywords**--- Violence, Exploitation, Status of Women, Decision Makers

## I. INTRODUCTION

The problem of violence against women is not new. Women in the Indian society have been victims of humiliation, torture and exploitation for as long as we have written records of social organization and family life. Today, women are being gradually recognised as important, powerful and meaningful contributors to the life of men; but till a few decades back, their condition was pitiable. Domenach (1981) has described it as “ an act of a person which encroaches upon the freedom of another”. The issue of gender discrimination manifests itself as violence in the family, community and society. It takes the form of female foeticide, female infanticide, abuse of the girl child, social

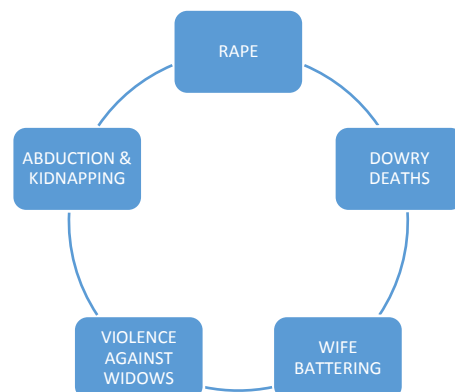
harassment, mental torture, physical violence and cruelty affecting the body and mind of the women.

### *Violence among Vulnerable Groups*

- Evidence suggests that certain characteristics of women, such as sexual orientation, disability status or ethnicity, and some contextual factors, such as humanitarian crises, including conflict and post-conflict situations, may increase women’s vulnerability to violence.
- In 2014, 23 per cent of non-heterosexual women (those who identified their sexual orientation as lesbian, bisexual or other) interviewed in the European Union indicated having experienced physical and/or sexual violence by both male and female non-partner perpetrators, compared with five per cent of heterosexual women .
- Also, 34 per cent of women with a health problem or disability reported having experienced any physical or sexual violence by a partner in their lifetime, compared to 19 per cent of women without a health problem or disability

*We can Analyse Five Types of Violence against Women.*

*They are*



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The Police Research Bureau, Delhi has referred to “crime against women” under two categories: i) crimes under the Indian Penal Code, and ii) crimes under the local and special laws.

### ***Violence against Women may be Categorised as***

- 1) Criminal Violence – rape, abduction, murder.
- 2) Domestic Violence – dowry- deaths, wife battering, sexual abuse, maltreatment of
- 3) Widows and / or elderly women.
- 4) Social violence –forcing the wife or daughter in law to go for female foeticide, eve- teasing, refusing to give a share to women in property, forcing a young widow to commit sati, harassing the daughter – in – law to bring more dowry

Violence occurring within the family, which is referred as Domestic violence, cuts across lines of race, nationality, language, culture, economics, sexual orientation, physical ability and religion to affect people from all walks of life. It is the most pervasive form of gender violence. Domestic violence though means violence in the family refers to violence against women in particular, as almost always the victims are women. Domestic violence means physical or mental assault of women by their male partners. The term wife abuse is also often used to mean the same. Masculine behaviour – aggression, risk taking, and the consumption of drugs and alcohol – is often believed to underlie male violence against women. Domestic violence is not only on the increase, but is also assuming subtler forms every day. Very often, women used to endure the violence towards them in silence for fear of repercussions.

### ***Rape***

Rape is one of the most common crimes against women in India. Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 defines rape as penile and non-penile penetration in bodily orifices of a woman by a man, without the consent of the woman. In India, a woman is raped every 29 minutes. Incidents of reported rape have increased 3% from 2011 to 2012. Incidents of reported incest rape have increased 46.8% from

268 cases in 2011 to 392 cases in 2012. Victims of rape are increasingly reporting their rapes and confronting the perpetrators. Although women are increasing their exposure to sexual harassment by leaving the home more often, they are becoming more independent. Women are becoming more independent and educated, which is increasing their likelihood to report their rape. Although rapes are becoming more frequently reported, many go unreported or have the complaint files withdrawn due to the perception of family honour being compromised. Women frequently do not receive justice for their rapes, because police often do not give a fair hearing, and/or medical evidence is often unrecorded which makes it easy for offenders to get away with their crimes under the current laws.

Increased attention in the media and awareness among both Indians and the outside world is both bringing attention to the issue of rape in India and helping empower women to report the crime. After international news reported the gang rape of a 23-year-old student on a moving bus that occurred in Delhi, in December 2012, Delhi experienced a significant increase in reported rapes. The number of reported rapes nearly doubled from 143 reported in January–March 2012 to 359 during the three months after the rape. After the Delhi rape case, Indian media has committed to report each and every rape case.

### ***Marital Rape***

In India, marital rape is not a criminal offense. 20% of Indian men admit to forcing their wives or partners to have sex.

Marital rape can be classified into one of three types:

- Battering rape: This includes both physical and sexual violence. The majority of marital rape victims experience battering rape.
- Force-only rape: Husbands use the minimum amount of force necessary to coerce his wife.
- Compulsive/Obsessive rape: Torture and/or "perverse" sexual acts occur and are often physically violent.

### **Gang Rape**

Gang rape is defined as the rape of an individual by two or more perpetrators. The 2012 Delhi gang rape brought a lot of international attention to the issue of gang rape in India. On 16 December 2012, in Munirka, New Delhi, a 23-year-old was beaten and gang raped on a private bus. She died 13 days later. Following the rape, there was widespread national and international coverage of the incident as well as public protests against the government of India and the government of Delhi.

### **Acid Throwing**

Acid throwing, also called an acid attack, a vitriol attack or vitriol age, is a form of violent assault used against women in India. Acid throwing is the act of throwing acid or an alternative corrosive substance onto a person's body "with the intention to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill." Acid attacks are usually directed at a victim's face which burns the skin causing damage and often exposing or dissolving bone. Sulfuric acid and nitric acid are most commonly used for acid attacks. Hydrochloric acid is also used, but is less damaging. Acid attacks can lead to permanent scarring, blindness, as well as social, psychological and economic difficulties.

The Indian legislature has now regulated the sale of acid. Compared to women throughout the world, women in India are at a higher risk of being victims of acid attacks. At least 72% of reported acid attacks in India have involved women. India has been experiencing an increasing trend of acid attacks over the past decade.

In 2010, there was a high of 27 reported cases of chemical assaults. Scholars believe that acid attacks in India are being under-reported. 34% of acid attacks in India have been determined to be related to rejection of marriage or refusal by a women of sexual advances. 20% of acid attacks have been determined to be related to land, property, and/or business disputes. Acid attacks related to marriage are often spurred by dowry disagreements.

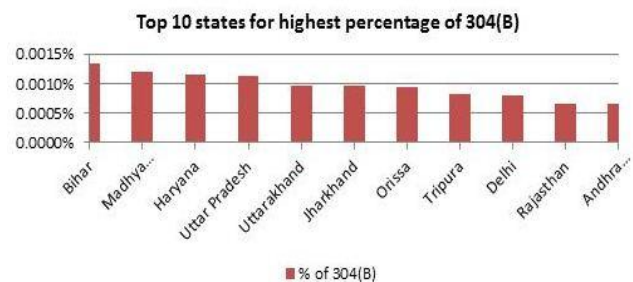
### **Dowry Deaths**

A dowry deaths is a murder or suicide of a married woman caused by a dispute over her dowry. In some cases, husbands and in-laws will attempt to extort a greater dowry through continuous harassment and torture which sometimes results in the wife committing suicide. The majority of these suicides are done through hanging poisoning or self-immolation. When a dowry death is done by setting the woman on fire, it is called bride burning. Bride burning murder is often set up to appear to be a suicide or accident. Dowry is illegal in India, but it is still common practice to give expensive gifts to the groom and his relatives at weddings which are hosted by the family of the bride.

### **Rates of Dowry and Rates of Domestic Violence in Police Records**

According to the 2009 NCRB figures, the states with the highest rates of dowry deaths per 100,000 people are: Bihar (1.4), Haryana and MP (1.2 each) and UP (1.1). Despite the fact that dowry deaths should be read with 498(A) since there are provisions within 498(A) to prosecute violence inflicted in order to extract money, durables and other valuables, it is surprising to find that the states with some of the highest reported dowry deaths, have some of the lowest reported rates of domestic violence, and only Rajasthan Delhi and Haryana feature in the top 10 for both. Dowry deaths are often preceded by a period of sustained physical and emotional abuse of victims.

### **Top 10 States for Highest Percentage of Dowry Deaths**



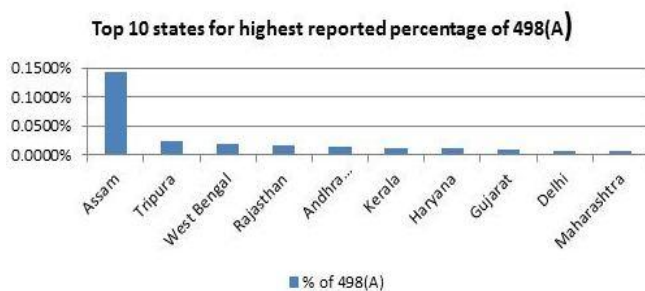
### ***Honour Killings***

An honour killing is a murder of a family member who has been considered to have brought dishonor and shame upon the family. Examples of reasons for honor killings include the refusal to enter an arranged marriage, committing adultery, choosing a partner that the family disapproves of, and becoming a victim of rape. Honour killings are rooted to tradition and cannot be justified by any major world religion, because none of the major world religions condone honour-related crimes. The most prominent areas where honour killings occur in India are northern regions. Honor killings are especially seen in Punjab, Haryana, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh. Honour killings have notably increased in some Indian states which has led to the Supreme Court of India, in June 2010, issuing notices to both the Indian central government and six states to take preventative measures against honour killings.

### ***Human Right Violations Faced by Old Age Women***

Inalienable fundamental rights are very essential for human beings so human rights get much significance. Every stage of human lifespan is important but during old age, they facing much more discriminations than the other stages due to health and other related issues. The official records reveal women's life expectancy is higher than men. Women are living with a secondary social status in our present society.

### ***Top 10 States for Highest Reported Percentage of Domestic Violence Deaths***



### ***Female Infanticide***

Female infanticide is the elected killing of a newborn female child or the termination of a female fetus through sex-selective abortion. In India, there is incentive to have a son, because they offer security to the family in old age and are able to conduct rituals for deceased parents and ancestors. In contrast, daughters are considered to be a social and economic burden. An example of this is dowry. The fear of not being able to pay an acceptable dowry and becoming socially ostracized can lead to female infanticide for poorer.

### ***Female Foeticide***

Female foeticide is the elected abortion of a fetus, because it is female. Female foeticide occurs when a family has a strong preference for sons over daughters, which is a common cultural theme in India. Modern medical technology has allowed for the gender of a child to be determined while the child is still a fetus. Once these modern prenatal diagnostic techniques determine the gender of the fetus, families then are able to decide if they would like to abort based on gender. If they decide to abort the fetus after discovering it is female, they are committing female foeticide. The foetal sex determination and sex-selective abortion by medical professionals is now a R.s 1,000 crore (US\$ 244 million) industry.

## **II. MOTIVATION IN VIOLENCE**

### ***Violence against Women may be Explained on the Basis of Three Factors***

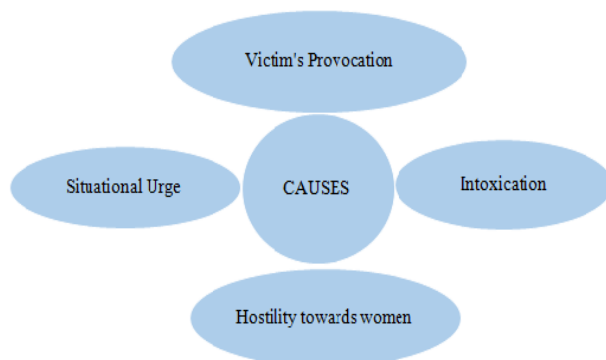
- i) Situations which bring about violent behaviour
- ii) Characteristics of Victims
- iii) Characteristics of victimizers



### III. VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

- Who feel helpless, depressed, have a poor self - image and suffer from self – devaluation, or those who are ‘emotionally consumed’ by the perpetrators of violence, or who suffer from ‘altruistic powerlessness’.
- Who live in stressful family situations, or who live in families, that is, families which are structurally complete ( both parents being alive and living together), economically secure ( satisfying basic and subsidiary needs of members, functionally adequate ( have rare quarrels) and morally conformists;
- Who lack social maturity or social interpersonal skills because of which they face behavioural problems;
- Whose husbands/in –laws have pathological personalities; and
- Whose husbands are alcoholic.

### IV. CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



#### *Victim's Provocation*

The victim either generates or triggers off the violent behaviour of the offender. Her actions transform him into an assaulter/aggressor making him direct his criminal intentions against her. A large number did not suffer from any emotional turmoil or from what psychologists call the problem of ‘troubled masculinity’. The assaulters in wife battering cases instead accused their wives of back- biting, talking to person(s) they disliked, ill- treating their sisters or parents or brothers, neglecting their home, talking rudely to relatives, having illicit relations with some person, refusing to obey their in- laws, irritating them with their quarrelsome or nagging nature, or interfering too much in their affairs. At least two kinds of victims create a situation in which the ‘offender’ becomes ‘victim’ of the situation and / or compulsion and behaves with the ‘ victim’ (female) in such a way that he comes to be labelled as the ‘ assaulter’ or ‘ victimizer’.

#### *Intoxication*

Some cases of violence occur when the aggressors are intoxicated and in a wildly excited and belligerent state of mind, scarcely comprehending the likely fallout of their actions. For example, in a few cases of rape, the offenders assaulted the victims when they had taken so much alcohol that they were in a state of inebriation and emotional excitement. Their normal restraints had disappeared and their aggressive fantasies were in timately intermingled with sexual lust which then took the shape of irresponsible actions. In fact, it is the blood alcohol concentration (BAC) which ought to be basis of associating battering with the influence of alcohol. A very high BAC reduces the capability of the subject to cause bodily harm to others. However, we assume that the level of BAC must be such that the offender loses control over himself only to the extent that he fails to think of the consequences of his actions. It is only in this state of mind that he becomes violent.

### ***Hostility towards Women***

Some of the reported cases of violence against women are of a nature that no amount of rationalization could convert the aggressors into doing anything other than hostile acts of a cruel kind. A few of them had deeply entrenched feelings of hate and hostility for women that their violent act could be said to be primarily directed towards the humiliation of the victim. If the mere situation had been the motivating factor, it is hard to see why a violent act should have been necessary considering the fact that most of the ‘offenders’ are described as ‘normal’ persons. Perhaps a desire to gloat over the victim’s humiliation was far stronger.

### ***Situational Urge***

In this category, those cases may be included where the crime is committed neither because of the victim’s behaviour nor because of the offender’s psychopathological personality but rather than because of the chance factors which create such situations which lead to violence. For example, in a wife – battering case, it may be that conflict over money matters or on the ill-treatment of husband’s parent(s) may provoke the husband to assault his wife; or in rape case, a man accidentally meets a female acquaintance from his neighbouring village in a field and begins a conversation, ultimately attempting to have his way with her; or the male employer taking advantage of his young female employee finding her alone in his office / factory in the late hours of the evening; or a young girl runs away from her father’s house and accepts a lift in a truck and the truck driver takes advantage of the situation and criminally assaults her. In all these cases, the ‘offenders’ had not planned the violent acts but when they found the situation conducive or provocative, they used violence.

### ***The Important Sociological Facts Pointed out about the Female Victims of Violence and Exploitation***

- 1) Structures as source of problems: The problems of females who are victims of violence arise from the functioning of social structures in which they live

and work, and the stresses caused by family interactions and support systems.

- 2) Tradition of barriers to assertion: The involvement of victims in social roles and relationships after being victimized is dependent less on their own initiative and self-confidence and more on the will of heads of families (of procreation and orientation) and social pressures, i.e., traditional culture discourages female victims from taking up assertive social engagements outside the home.
- 3) Resource deprivation and suffering of self: Resources like higher education and work with wages increase victim’s self-image and self-esteem which considerably change her relations with others, and also enable her to face the strain of transition to life and ‘recovery’ and adjust herself in family and society.
- 4) Attachment: A large number of victims of violence overcome their feelings of being isolated and condemned by attaching themselves to some love object, social service, religious commitments, etc.
- 5) Structural suffocation: Factors which prevent victims of violence from renewing, redeeming, restoring, reviving and revitalising their lives lie more in social structures than in their personalities.
- 6) Negation of revolt: A few young and independent victims have a secret desire of rebelling and adopting modern methods of adjustment but they fail to rebel for the fear that their husbands, in-laws and parents might sever ties with them. They are also scared of being shunned and ostracized by their kin friends.
- 7) Self-esteem situation: Victims with sappy emotions lead a suppressed life but victims with courage of conviction, character and consciousness chart their own course in their (working) life.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

### *Mental Illness*

Psychiatric illness should be identified and treated promptly. Patients with active symptoms should be kept in a protected environment till substantial improvement takes place. Many patients may need life-long protection e.g. those suffering from mental retardation or chronic schizophrenia.

Women with severe mental illness need special attention. Public awareness needs to be created with respect to the following:

- Women need protection but those with mental illness need more care and protection.
- The real problem is not mental illness, but the negative attitude toward it.
- Many medical illnesses create more problems in marriage, than mental illnesses.
- There should no double standard? If a woman can continue the marriage after her husband develops a mental illness, so can the husband. Similarly, people should be made to understand that if it is right to marry a son or daughter with mental illness, then the reverse is also true. A daughter in-law with mental illness should also be accepted.
- Good family support greatly improves the prognosis.
- Many women with mental illness prove to be better marriage partners and daughter-in-laws than those without mental illness.
- If the husband's family accepts the woman with mental illness, the society will also follow
- Woman with mental illness should be accepted with her illness.
- Violence is not the solution. Mental illness in the victim (e.g. depression) or perpetrator (e.g. alcoholism or schizophrenia) should be promptly treated.

### *Restriction on Use of Alcohol*

There should be prohibition of alcohol use in mass gatherings in institutions, public places like trains and buses. The number of alcohol outlets should be decreased. The age for purchasing alcohol may be raised to 30 years. Special checks on festive occasions are recommended with the help of breath analyzers. Involuntary treatment of persons with alcohol dependence should be carried out.

### *Control on Media*

Sexual material should be censored. Good themes, which condemn violence and glorify rehabilitation of the victim, should be projected. Ban on pornography should be strictly implemented. The sites may be blocked.

### *Marriages*

Marriage of boys and girls should preferably be in early 20s, as soon as feasible, so that sexual needs could be satisfied in a socially appropriate manner.

### *Strengthening the Institution of Marriage*

Strong marital bond would act as a deterrent. The "Shiv-Parvati" model should be promoted for Hindus.

### *Law Enforcement*

Efficient and accountable law enforcement machinery at all levels (administration, government, police and judiciary) is needed.

### *Legislation*

#### *Change in Mind Set of the Judiciary*

This is the need of the day. Indira Jai Singh, Additional Solicitor General of India, aptly stated "It's time for India's courts to gaze inward and throw out deeply embedded patriarchal notions that stop judgments from being fair to women. Sexism within the system has to go before it does more damage in the country." A High Court judge in Orissa in his judgment once famously held "It was not possible for a man, acting alone, to rape a woman in good health."



### ***Amendments in Existing legislations***

The Hindu Marriage Act (1955): Mental illness may be removed from conditions of Hindu marriage. Not informing about past illness of mental illness should not be a ground for nullity of marriage. PWDVA, 2005 and DPA, 1961: Assessment for mental illness may be incorporated in the code civil procedure so that the mental illness is identified in the victim (woman) and/or perpetrator (male relative) and promptly treated. This way violence can be prevented.

### ***New Legislations***

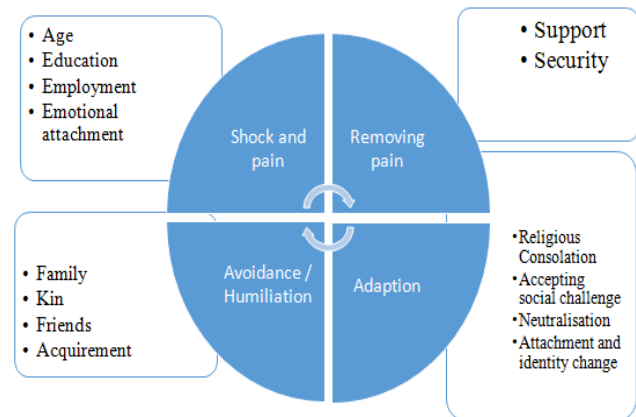
New legislation is needed to provide for granting "Interim Relief" (A big sum of money that is paid by the perpetrator) to a victim of severe sexual assault. The money may be utilized for rehabilitation of the victim. Rehabilitation of the victims of brutal sexual assaults should be the State's responsibility. The legislation should provide for enhanced punishment for violence perpetrated against women with mental illness.

## **VI. ADJUSTMENT PHASES**

The adjustment of victims after being stigmatized (i.e., raped, molested, kidnapped, beaten) to new life and their taking up new roles involves several phases, although there is much intermeshing of these phases. Bowlby and Mukesh Ahuja identify the following four phases in female victim's adjustment to life after stigmatization:

- i) Shock and pain
- ii) Removing pain
- iii) Avoidance and humiliation, and
- iv) Adaptation

### ***Phases of Adjustment to New Life by Female Victims of Violence***



## **VII. PREVENTIVE AND REMEDIAL MEASURES**

Social measures can help in reducing violence against women. The suggestion that improving the general status of women through education, effective, legislative measures, providing training and employment opportunities will reduce violence against women may be valid and logical to some extent but all the same it is too broad suggestion. Although there are ethical and humanitarian reasons for censoring violence against women in the mass media, we have no evidence that such a move will necessarily lead to reduction in violence.

1. Receiving attention from many women's organisation as well as government and private/public institutions. This is to meet the needs of protection, support and advice of the victims.
2. Voluntary organizations providing such accommodation to women have to publicize their schemes.
3. Providing short – term accommodation to women, particularly married women who are in distress, or victims of violence like rape, abduction, attempt to murder and ultimately helping them find a permanent place by the women's organizations will contribute to the alleviation of the distress suffered by many women.



4. There is an urgent need to evaluate and compare the different types of short – term accommodation that could be provided to the victimized women, including widows.
5. Assistance in finding employment and child – care facilities and immediate financial support is also the need of the suffering women.
6. Advisory centres for this purpose could be located centrally but away from the Women Homes so that they can be well advertised without affecting the safety of the residents in the Homes.
7. Establishment of cheaper and less formal courts could also be a measure to help women who are victims of exploitation. It is not being suggested that these courts will handle only the female cases. Their scope has to be wider. The establishment of courts with judges, magistrates and lawyers chosen for their knowledge and interest in female matters would be an improvement and it will increase the number of women entering the legal profession.
8. Strengthening and increasing voluntary organizations which could take up individual women's problems with their in- laws or the police or the courts or the concerned individuals is equally necessary. This is because the voice of an individual woman carries no weight. But if a group of women join together and raise their voice against woman's suffering they can assert their views and make an impact.
9. Publicity has to be given to those organizations which provide free legal aid to women so that the needy women could approach them and seek their help.
10. A change in parents' attitudes is also necessary in women's cases. Parents force their daughters – married or widowed who are frequently beaten by their husbands or ill- treated by their in- laws to live in their husbands' house against their own wishes. Parents come to know of their daughter's

harassment; they should permit their daughters to live with them for a short time till they are able to fend for themselves.

11. Women have to learn to be assertive and accept new roles for themselves.
12. They have to develop an optimistic and hopeful approach to life.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on secondary data. The secondary data required for the study was collected from various books, magazines, journals, newspapers etc.

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