

CHAPTER - I
AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND
POLITICAL AWAKENING IN INDIA UPTO 1885.

India, a large country of old civilization, remained dormant in her history, partly because of her isolation and partly because of her socio-political system that was peculiar to her alone. Compared to the world nations of 19th century, India's military system was weak and more peace-loving because of the cultural factors rooted in India's past. Her economy of the pre-British period explained the system of hereditary village professions, which were caste-based lacking dynamism. Lack of dynamism contributed to the ever growing poverty of the Indian communities, but what was more important was that the India's social systems, whether of Hindus or of Muslims, explained her economic system too.

When the power of Great Britain represented by the East India Company began liquidating the Indian States from the beginning of the second half of the 18th century, India displayed her weakness in socio-economic and political spheres. It is this that explains India's total defeat in the hands of English commercial Company, which humbled India's centuries' pride by defeating almost all the native States.

After the successful establishment of her rule, the East India Company introduced three important changes which proved advantageous to the Indians in the long run. These were:

1. Uniform administrative system based on rule of law,
2. English education, and
3. Modern means of communication.

It is these changes that were regarded by the thinkers as the institutes of change which made India a nation. And it is these factors that made Indians conscious of the fact that all was not well with them. Yet the Indians' cultural pride and sense of hereditary political supremacy made them take arms against the British in 1857, their organised efforts failed and their failure taught them a lesson that her socio-political, economic institutions must change. There begins a period of real cultural renaissance in Indian history as their failure of armed uprising turned them towards a peaceful social, cultural and political reform of Western model. In fact, India's first awakening came in social fields. In Bengal, that India's multifarious cultural variety was her weakness, and, therefore, the unity must be proclaimed and taught was the new idea that had dawned quite early in the 19th century. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was the first leader of the indigenous renaissance movement preaching that brotherhood of man is an essential pre-condition in any religion. Perhaps he was influenced by the work of Christian missionaries, who preached the ideas of brotherhood of man and their relation to God. It is due to this influence that Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the 'Brahmo Samaj' to preach that Brahma of Upanishads proclaims the unity of men and brotherhood of man. He also attacked some of the heinous social practices of the Hindu society. He condemned the system of Sati, child marriages and such other practices. It is due to his urge that Lord Bentinck, the Governor of India abolished by law the system of Sati. It is this courageous step that awoke India to her religious drawbacks and cultural deficiencies

in the subsequent years of the 19th century.

The Indians were continuously defeated in every nook and corner of the country politically from 1757 to the annexation of Sindh in 1843. Why was India so miserably defeated at the hands of a numerically inferior army of the English East India Company was a matter that made rational-minded Indians to introspect into their past. As a result of this failure, there emerged social reform movement in Bengal and also in other parts of the country. The economic squeeze of the Indian people in the early phase of British rule was responsible for the rise of economic nationalism in India. Between the economic problems and social problems which were the more dominating ones, for making India a homogenous society was a problem that continued to trouble Indian nation for years together. Among the socio-economic and political problems was the problem of Indian unity towards formation of a national organization like the Indian National Congress founded in 1885. The factors responsible roughly for the formation of Indian National Congress would indicate that what has been traditionally stated as the causes of the formation of the Indian National Congress are not absolutely true. India's backwardness is represented in the socio-religious backwardness of the 19th century because of the inherent defects in the socio-religious and economic traditions of the past; her economic miseries were partly the socio-religious aspects of her life. In French Revolution of 1789, it was the economic middle class that brought about the revolution; but in India, such a middle class based on classlessness did

not exist. The English East India Company squeezed the Indians by its commercial policy of exploiting the Indians.

English rule in India exhibited cultural superiority of England. Political unity of India brought about by the English necessitated them to introduce modern means of communication and a uniform pattern of education. Indians' failure earlier in mutiny against British convinced Indians that everything was not well with them and with their tradition and hence, a movement for reform began in India. East India Company was a trading body that emerged sovereign in India and controlled trade and sources of income by making suitable laws. Indians were exploited economically. This awoke India to her economic consciousness. Indians formed associations to demand political right. This happened in the last quarter of the 19th century. The social, economic and political factors together paved the way for the formation of the Indian National Congress.

The establishment of British rule in India brought about extensive and basic political, administrative and legal unification of the country for the first time in Indian history. Such a State structure became necessary to the new type of economy which came into existence in India under the British rule. The capitalist economic transformation in India broke up the village traditional industries. The British government created a new land system on a private property basis and introduced money-economy extensively. A uniform system of law had to be evolved to maintain and regulate the new land relations and contractual transactions, such as purchase,

sale and mortgage of land, resulting inevitably from the new system. All these factors produced a new dimension in India's socio-economic life and new emerging Indian elite began thinking in terms of nation and national problems related to socio-economic and political needs.

Another great institute of change was the introduction of Railways in India. In this discussion, it is not only the general factors, particularly those cited earlier that have been traced out as important ones in the matters of the formation of Indian National Congress, but the factors enumerated below also are significant to be recorded here:

- 1) English education, a means to help the English rule for administration and promotion of commerce was a beneficial institute;
- 2) Charter Act of 1813 provided that the Christian proselytization is permitted. This helped in introducing western culture in India;
- 3) It is the total English view of life that helped Indians to revise their thinking on their cultural past;
- 4) Awakening came in every aspect of life when the west came to the doors of Indians;
- 5) In spite of the economic evils produced by the introduction of the English rule, one important result that emerged out of it was that it was realised that India is a nation with her cultural unity. It is a nation of one of the socio-political and economic purpose.

It is these factors that helped India in revitalizing its national spirit inspite of her divergence in unity.

The interests of the British industries urged the Government of the East India Company to establish railways and construct roads in India. Lord Dalhousie, who initiated a programme of wide railway construction in India, in his famous Minute on Railways, unambiguously defined the economic reason behind this construction.

If the Indian Government were to adopt a programme of railway construction, it would require capital. A part of surplus capital accumulated in Britain could be loaned to the Indian Government and thus find an outlet. In addition to these economic reasons, there were political, administrative and military strategic reasons for establishing railways in India.

The lines directly constructed by the State agency between 1869 and 1880 were the Indus valley, Punjab, Northern Rajputana, Malwa and North Bengal. The total length of state railway lines opened by the 31st December, 1880, was 2932 miles.

Thus, the British evolved in India a colossal administrative apparatus, penetrating even the remotest village. The necessity to erect and efficiently operate such an apparatus also prompted them to establish and extend railways to construct modern roads, to establish the Post and Telegraph systems. This necessity of assembling villages, towns, districts and provinces increasingly brought the places under the British rule into a single

political-administrative system, which also stimulated railway construction in India.

The railways were directly under the Governor-General and the Legislative would have no control over it.

Railways helped the historically progressive new economic forces to destroy the economic foundations of the old Indian society. They helped the penetration of India by the industrial products of the modern society, thereby breaking the economic autarchy of the village. They helped to weld India into a single economic unit and also linked India with the world market. Railways helped to create a national economy, the material framework of the Indian nation.

The railways were of outstanding potency. By creating the conditions necessary for specialization, they revolutionised production and trade, enabled the establishment of large-scale modern industries and led to the development of great ports and industrial centres. In short, railways made India a nation, a concept which was alien to the Hindus in their cultural and philosophical amalgamation.

Roads : With the growth of the railways, it became more necessary to construct feeder roads at right angles to them. But the trunk roads running parallel to the railways were neglected.¹ The extension of local self government during the rule of Lord Mayo and Lord Rippon by investing the local authorities with the responsibility for maintenance of roads, afforded stimulus to the development of

roads. By the beginning of the present century, roads were classed as (1) metalled, (2) unmetalled, (3) banked and surfaced but not drained, (4) Banked but not surfaced, partially bridged and drained; (5) cleared only.

Telegraphs: The first telgraph line which ran from Calcutta to Agra, a distance of 800 miles, was opened in 1854 and next year, lines were working over 3000 miles, from Calcutta to Attock, from Agra to Bombay, and from Bombay to Madras. The system has since been expanded rapidly and India is now girdled with lines extending over more than 1,00,000 lines and dealing with seventeen million telegrams a year. The effect of the postal and telegraph system on commercial and social life requires no exegesis. Even though the majority of people can neither read nor write, they can get letters and telegrams written for them and read out to them so that illiteracy is no bar to their use. The cheapness and certainty of the post in particular have not been without a psychological effect on the people, whose reaction to it has been one of admiring wonder.²

The development of modern means of transport and communications in India prevented the full unfolding of the potential power of these means to accomplish a still closer social and economic integration and more rapid cultural advance of the Indian people. The problem of extensive and adequate expansion of those means was closely bound up with the problem of the political power



in the hands of the Indian people, as also with that of a rapid development of the productive forces of the Indian society through a scientific plan of economic reconstruction which would have been fully possible if society, as a whole, owned all means of production. This is the impersonal modern scientific force that helped awake man to his higher thinking.

Social Reform : A Total Awakening. The first of our reformers was Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833), who attempted to preserve

continuity with the past and yet assimilate the new social values derived from the west. He made it clear that he had complete sympathy with the imperishable treasures of the past, the central truths of Hinduism, but fought against popular idolatry and other pernicious customs.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was intensely interested in social reforms in the Hindu community. He declared, "The distinction of castes, introducing divisions and sub-divisions among them (Hindus), has entirely deprived them of political feeling, multitude of religious rites and ceremonies and the laws of purification have totally disqualified them from undertaking any difficult enterprise".³

Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj on 20th August 1828 with a view to establish monolatrous worship of the Supreme Being, a worship of the heart and not of the hand, a sacrifice of the Self. He aimed to advocate the worship of one Supreme Being and the brotherhood of man. It was open to all men,

irrespective of their caste, religion or other distinctions. "The establishment of the Brahmo Samaj made the orthodox Hindus more hostile to Ram Mohan and they organized the Dharma Sabha, under Raja Radhakantha Deb of Shobhabazar, with the objecting Hinduism from the impending danger of a non-idolatrous monotheistic religion".⁴

Raja Ram Mohan Roy was responsible for many reforms in religion, politics, philosophy, society, education, literature and law. His Brahmo Samaj advocated remarriage of widows and condemned child marriages. It tried to remove all types of social inequalities of women. He also launched movement against untouchability and caste system.

His movement against 'Sati' was very much important. As N.C.Ganguli expressed, "Sati was not a religious rite but it was all sided murder".⁵ Crusade against Sati was launched by Ram Mohan Roy and by 1829, it was prohibited.

After Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore and Keshavchandra Sen continued the work of this Samaj. Keshavchandra Sen founded two papers, "The Hindu Patriot" and the "Indian Mirror", which took active part in the social and political reforms of the country. A split in the Brahmo Samaj decreased the popularity of the principles. Keshavchandra Sen's daughter's remarriage (she was less than 14) was against the Marriage Act of 1872. Sen died in 1884 and the Brahmo Samaj split into several branches.

It was rightly observed that "all modern reform movements - education, social, political have started from Raja Ram Mohan Roy and all Indian reformers of the present day are spiritually his children".⁶

Prarthana : Samaj The leader of Brahmo Samaj, Keshavchandra Sen, had visited Bombay in 1864. Prarthana Samaj was inaugurated in 1867 under the leadership of Dr. Atmaram Pandurang (1823-1898). The Prarthana Samaj was strongly inspired by Keshavchandra Sen. He visited Bombay again in 1868 and R.G. Bhandarkar and M.G. Ranade joined the Samaj, so it received new strength.

The philosophy of Prarthana Samaj was similar to that of Brahmo Samaj. Two principles of Prarthana Samaj were: (1) Theistic worship, (2) Social reforms. Ranade wrote, "the Samaj seemed to have been perfectly satisfied with a creed which consists of only one positive belief in the unity of God, accompanied by a special protest against the existing corruption of Hindu religion, the article which denounces the prevalent idolatry to be a sin, and an abomination".⁷ Ranade himself tried to give the Samaj a more comprehensive meaning and philosophic basis, and his essay entitled, "Theist's Confession of Faith".⁸

The Samaj laid special stress on the abandonment of caste, introduction of widow remarriage, encouragement of female education and the abolition of purdah and child marriage. The Prarthana Samaj started night-schools for working people and formed

associations for the education of girls. It also started an orphanage and a lunatic asylum at Pandharpur. Sir R.G.Bhandarkar and Justice Ranade were the prominent leaders. Ranade founded Deccan Education Society and worked hard for the propagation of education among the people. He also established "widow marriage society". Prarthana Samaj contributed very well in respect of social reforms.

Arya Samaj : The Arya Samaj was founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. After having received education and learning as a disciple of Swami Virajanand, he wrote a book named "Satyarth Prakash" in which was clearly expressed his religious viewpoint. According to his opinion, Vedas alone are independently and absolutely authoritative, two years later, in 1877, modified his ideas, i.e. Vedas are the books of true knowledge .⁹

Further, B.C.Pal states, "Dayanand Saraswati, as organised in the Arya Samaj, has contributed more than the rational movement of the Raja's Brahmo Samaj to the development of a new national consciousness in the modern Hindu, particularly in Punjab. This was really the beginning of that religious and social revival among the Hindus of India to which we owe so largely the birth of our present national consciousness".¹⁰ Programmes and activities of the Samaj Principles : (1) Fatherhood of God and Brotherhood of Man, (2) Equality of Sex, (3) Absolute Justice and Fair Play between man and man, and nation and nation; equal opportunities to all according to their nature, Karma and merit, (4) Love and Charity towards all.¹¹

The Arya Samaj had a programme of social reforms. It opposed the hereditary caste system and preached that division of society should be determined by merit and not by birth. On such a platform, Arya Samaj made social development. Swami Dayanand founded Anglo-Vedic College at Lahore in 1886. After the death of Dayanand, Mahatma Hansraj, Gurudatta Vidyarthi, Lala Lajpat Rai and Swami Shraddhanand were the prominent leaders of Arya Samaj. All the activities of the Arya Samaj were inspired with the spirit of nationalism and democracy. It spread education among the people, proclaimed the principle of equality, irrespective of the distinction of caste, creed, community, race or sex. It tried to destroy their inferiority complex. Such work is counted as a social reform in India.

Ramakrishna : Mission : The national awakening of the Indian people found

expression in the movement inspired by Ramakrishna, a great saint, in direct line of such saints as Chandidas and Chaitanya. It primarily based itself on the principle of Devotion or Bhakti. Its principal propagandist was Swami Vivekanand, a disciple of Rama Krishna and an intellectual of a very high calibre, who, after the death of the saint, founded the Ramakrishna Mission to propagate his teachings.

The Ramakrishna Mission aimed at protecting India from 'the materialist' influences of the western civilization. It idealised Hinduism including its practice of idol worship and polytheism. It aimed at the spiritual conquest of the world for revived Hinduism.¹²

The Hindu community had not yet faced the educational problem presented by the unclean or external castes. It seemed indeed almost insoluble except by escape from Hinduism to the freedom of Islam or to the Christian fold. The higher castes were too much concerned with their own ambitions and difficulties. "The Ramkrishna Mission, for instance, distinguished itself by opening schools for untouchables".¹³

Theosophical : Theosophy introduced in India by Madame Blavatsky Society

& H.Olcott in 1875 and mainly popularised by Mrs.Annie Besant was another religio-reform movement started in India under the impact of the new Indian and International conditions. The uniqueness of this movement consisted in the fact that it was inaugurated by a non-Indian who was a great admirer of Hinduism. Theosophy subscribed to the spiritual philosophy of ancient Hinduism and recognized its doctrine of the transmigration of the soul. It preached universal brotherhood of man, irrespective of distinction of caste, creed, race or sex. It stood for the development of a national spirit among the Indians. Theosophy stood for making a comparative study of all oriental religions. However, it considered ancient Hinduism as the most profoundly spiritual religion in the world. Though theosophy outside India proclaimed that there is no religion higher than truth and tried to discover truth in all religions, its development in India under Madam Blavatsky and Mrs.Besant was a protest against any exotic religion, such as Christianity, and fervent patronage of the religion into which Hindus were born. Mrs.Besant's manifold activities

embraced the most useful social and educational work on western lines, sympathetic treatment of out-castes and systematic provision for Hindu religious instruction. It stimulated a study of the Hindu classics, especially the Upanishadas and the Gita. Its contribution to the national, social and religious awakening of India is considerable and its social work is also appreciated.

Mahatma Phule Mahatma Phule was born in 1827. He occupies a **and Social Reforms** unique position among the social reformers of Maharashtra in the 19th century. While other reformers concentrated more on reforming the social institutions of family and marriage with special emphasis on the status and rights of women, Jotirao Phule revolted against the unjust caste system under which millions of people had suffered for centuries. In particular, he courageously upheld the cause of the untouchables and took up the cudgels for the poorer peasants. The story of his stormy life is an inspiring saga of a continuous struggle which he waged relentlessly against the forces of a reaction.

The incident of marriage ceremony of Joti's friend who belonged to Brahmin caste turned the life of Mahatma Phule, who was insulted by the Brahmin community. After this incident, Jotirao made up his mind to defy the caste-system and serve the Sudras and women who were deprived of all their rights as human beings under the caste-system.

Education of women and the lower castes, deserved

priority. Hence, at home, he began educating his wife Savitribai, Keshav Shivram Bhavalkar, who was appointed from 1st November, 1848.¹⁴ The teacher at the Government Marathi School in Poona, took upon himself¹⁵ the responsibility of teaching Savitribai. Bhavalkar laboured sincerely in preparing a class of women for the posts of teachers in 1848. Jotiba opened a girls' school in August, 1848. The orthodox opponents of Jotirao were furious and they started a vicious campaign against him, but Jotiba did not care. The school had to be closed for sometime due to the lack of funds. Jotirao re-opened it with the help of his Brahmin friends, Govande and Valvekar. on 3rd July, 1851. He opened two more girls' schools during 1851-52.

Mahatma Phule boldly attacked the stranglehold of the Brahmins, who prevented others from having access to all the avenues of knowledge and influence. He asked the masses to resist the tyranny of the Brahmins. Jotirao resolved to launch a movement in Maharashtra for their liberation from Brahmin thralldom. A revolutionary leader like Jotirao required an institution, as authoritative credo and a platform for the propagation of his ideas.

Satya Shodhak: Jotirao wanted to organise his followers and work-Samaj.

ers so that they might assimilate his rational ideas and bring them into effect. It was his aim also to show the Government how the peasants were being exploited and how they were suffering from a desperate, grinding poverty and glaring social inequality. Accordingly, Jotirao convened on September 24, 1873, a

meeting of all his admirers and disciples at Poona. About 60 men from many important centres of Maharashtra assembled, "Jotirao named this institution Satya Shodhak Samaj -"Truth Seeking Society".¹⁶ The main objectives of the organization were to liberate the Sudras and Ati-Sudras and to prevent their exploitation by the Brahmins. All the members of the Satya Shodhak Samaj were expected to treat all human beings as children of God and worship Creator without the help of any mediator. The membership was open to all and the available evidence proves that some Jews were admitted as members. In 1876, there were 316 members of the Satya Shodhak Samaj.

In 1876, Jotirao was nominated as a member of the Poona Municipality. He tried to help the people in the famine-stricken areas of Maharashtra when a severe famine in 1877 forced people in the rural areas to leave their villages. Some of them had to leave their children behind and an appeal issued on 17th May, 1877, by Jotirao indicates that Victoria Orphanage was founded under the auspices of the Satya Shodhak Samaj to look after these unfortunate children.

The members of the Satya Shodhak Samaj behaved as per the rules of the Samaj, which were (1) all men are the children of One God, who is thus their parent, (2) as there is no necessity of an intermediary to approach the mother or to please the father, there is no need of an intermediary such as a priest to God, (3) anyone accepting that principle is qualified to be a member of the Satya Shodhak Samaj.¹⁷

Leaders of this Samaj concluded that for the improvement of the condition of human beings, education is essential. Those who were not able to take education, for example, Ati-Sudras and Sudras, Samaj initiated schools for them. Poor labourers, farmers received much help from Samaj.

Female education was stimulated by Samaj. Jotirao started his newspaper named 'Dinbandhu' in 1877 for the propagation of new formative ideas. Through this newspaper, he tried to propagate against superstitions and the caste-system.

Jotirao Phule, a staunch leader of this Samaj, died in 1889. He contributed much to the social reform and awakening towards reformers. Phule also raised the problems of the peasants and workers. In fact, his book on peasants voices the peasant miseries in the changed environment. The Deccan Riots of 1877 were largely the result of his movement of the peasants in Maharashtra.

POLITICAL ASSOCIATIONS.

Bengal : The idea of a representative Government was not, however, a new thing in Bengal politics. A demand for it was included in the position of the British India Association, Calcutta, to the British Parliament in 1852.

British India Association was founded on October 31, 1851. The Association brought to notice of the local Government,

the manifold grievances of the people and suggested various measures of reform. It established local branches and tried to rouse the interest of the masses in political questions. For this purpose, it translated various bills into Bengali and circulated them extensively all over the province for eliciting public opinion. It also framed a questionnaire on important current topics like Indigo-planting and similarly circulated them. The ideas of the British India Association were preached by distinguished Bengalis, Peary Chand Mitra and Ramgopal Ghosh urged upon the necessary of throwing all offices, including civil service, without any reservation, to Indians on the ground of equity, economy and the good of India.

Bombay Presidency : Similar developments were taking place in other parts of India. For instance, in Bombay, 'Lokhita-wadi' Deshmukh (Gopal Hari) pleaded for a Parliament in India as early as in where every town and district would be represented. In August 1852, Jagannath Shankar Shet, Dadabhai Naoroji, Naoroji Furdunjee, Bhau Daji and others founded the 'Bombay Association'. Its aims were 'to ascertain the wants of the people, to suggest to the authorities measures to advance public welfare, to memorialise the authorities in India and England for the removal of the existing evils and the introduction of measures of general interest'. In 1853, the Association petitioned Parliament preferring specific charges of maladministration and suggesting practical reforms. These included re-organization of the Legislative Councils, administration of Indians in higher services and establishment of universities.

Poona Sarvajanik Sabha. : Another important political association of Bombay Presidency was the 'Poona Sarvajanik Sabha'.

Actually, it was under the name 'Poona Association' in 1867. The new name was adopted three years later. The Sabha issued a quarterly journal since 1878. Its object, to use its own words, was to represent the wants and wishes of the inhabitants of the Deccan. "The members of the Sabha consisted of Sardars, Jahagirdars, Inamdars, Sawakars and the gentry, representing the people of Maharashtra".¹⁸ "It published a journal from 1878 onwards and did much for awakening the political consciousness of the people of Maharashtra".¹⁹

Madras Presidency : In the Madras Presidency, a similar organization calling itself, the 'Madras Association' came into existence on the even of the renewal of the Charter in 1853. It petitioned to the Parliament bringing to its notice "the grievances and wants of the inhabitants of the Presidency". The first place among the grievances was given to taxation. The petitioners expressed "their greatest repugnance to the innovations of both the Zamindari and Ryotwari systems, the more so as they were both the instruments of injustice and oppression but especially, the Ryotwari which had reduced the agricultural classes to the deepest poverty and destitution".²⁰ The petitioners complained of the "insufficiency delay and expense of the Company's courts of law, their chief needs were the construction of roads, bridges, irrigation works and a better provision for the education of the people. They also desired a reduction of

of the public expenditure and a form of local government more conducive to the happiness of the subjects and the prosperity of the country".²¹

Thus, even before the Government of India had passed into the hands of the Crown, the educated class had begun to organise public opinion and to formulate complaints against the mistakes and shortcomings of the administration. They had begun to use the western methods of political agitation and they already knew that for the removal of their grievances, they had to draw the attention of the government, both in India and in England.

The confrontation of the British Rulers and the Indian middle-class during the second half of the 19th century may be considered as a process with two phases. The first phase lasted till 1885 when the Indian National Congress was established. During this phase, the Indian Political movement was unorganised, spasmodic and lacking in initiative. It responded to provocations when excitements rose high, but come to a halt as soon as the urgency of the immediate cause of grievance became dissipated. In this period, the middle class was weak and its political activity naturally lacked plan and unity. But after 1885, it grew in strength and self-confidence. During the second phase, the Congress became the rallying centre of the political movement, agitation acquired momentum and the attainment of responsible self-government became the principal target.

This would show that with economic and political

reforms the movements of social reforms which many times raised the question of economic exploitation of the Indians also played their role in political awakening of the masses. The next pages would show that many of the founder-members of the Indian National Congress were themselves the social reformers, yet politicians in them changed them to be the anti-social reformers, particularly from the Congress platform.

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