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# A Critical Analysis of Bhim Rao Ambedkar's The Annihilation of Caste

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**ABSTRACT:** This research critically examines Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's seminal works, 'The Annihilation of Caste' and 'Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development'. Ambedkar's writings offer a profound critique of the caste system in India, highlighting its deep-rooted socio-economic and psychological impacts. This study explores the historical context, underlying mechanisms, and the persistent challenges posed by caste-based discrimination. It also delves into Ambedkar's proposed reforms and their relevance in contemporary India. Through this analysis, the project aims to contribute to a better understanding of caste dynamics and the ongoing struggle for social justice. In 'Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development', he systematically dissects the origins and functioning of the caste system, providing a historical and sociological perspective that underscores the complexities involved. This project not only analyzes Ambedkar's works but also reflects on their enduring significance in modern India. The caste system, despite legal prohibitions, continues to affect millions of lives, making Ambedkar's insights and solutions as relevant today as they were during his lifetime. Ambedkar's 'The Annihilation of Caste' provides a scathing critique of the Hindu social order, challenging the very foundations of caste and advocating for its complete eradication.

## I. ABOUT THE AUTHOR

B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) was a prominent Indian jurist, social reformer, and political leader, best known for his role in drafting the Indian Constitution. Born into a marginalized caste, he faced discrimination from an early age, which fueled his lifelong commitment to fighting social injustice and advocating for the rights of Dalits (formerly known as "untouchables").

Ambedkar earned multiple degrees, including a D.Sc. from the London School of Economics, and became a legal scholar. He was instrumental in promoting social equality and was a fierce critic of the caste system, which he viewed as a major barrier to India's progress.

In 1956, he converted to Buddhism, symbolizing his rejection of Hindu orthodoxy and his commitment to social justice. His legacy includes the establishment of various educational institutions and social movements aimed at empowering marginalized communities. Ambedkar's writings, particularly "The Annihilation of Caste," remain influential in discussions about caste, social justice, and human rights in India and beyond.

### “The Annihilation of Caste”:

Originally written as a speech for the 1936 annual conference of the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal, a Hindu reformist group. The speech was never delivered because the organizers found Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism too radical. In this work, Ambedkar calls for the complete abolition of the caste system, arguing that it is fundamentally opposed to the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. He critiques Hindu religious texts and practices that uphold and perpetuate caste discrimination.

### “Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development”:

Presented as a paper in 1916 at an anthropology seminar at Columbia University. This work delves into the origins and development of the caste system in India. Ambedkar analyzes the mechanisms through which caste has been sustained over centuries, including endogamy (marriage within a specific group) and other social practices. He challenges existing theories on the caste system, providing a sociological and historical perspective on its entrenchment in Indian society.

### Significance of the Works

Both “The Annihilation of Caste” and “Castes in India” are seminal texts in understanding the deep-seated issues of caste in Indian society. They are significant for several reasons:

**Radical Critique:** Ambedkar's works provide a radical critique of the social and religious foundations of caste, challenging not only the system itself but also the broader societal norms that sustain it.



Call for Reform: In “The Annihilation of Caste,” Ambedkar advocates for drastic social reforms, including the rejection of Hinduism in its traditional form if it does not align with principles of equality and justice. This call for reform is both powerful and controversial.

Sociological Insights: “Castes in India” offers a detailed sociological analysis of the caste system, presenting an academic perspective that enriches our understanding of how caste functions and persists

## II. KEY THEMES

### Critique of Hindu Society and Religion

One of the central themes of “The Annihilation of Caste” is Ambedkar’s critique of Hindu society and religion. He argues that the caste system is inextricably linked to Hindu religious doctrines and cannot be reformed without fundamentally altering or abandoning these doctrines. Ambedkar highlights the ways in which religious texts like the Vedas and the Manusmriti legitimize and perpetuate caste-based discrimination and violence. He asserts that these texts are the root cause of social injustice in India and must be rejected to achieve true equality.

### Social Justice and Equality

Ambedkar’s work is a powerful call for social justice and equality. He emphasizes that the caste system is inherently unjust and violates the basic principles of human rights. Ambedkar argues that the caste system not only discriminates against lower castes but also dehumanizes and oppresses them. He calls for the establishment of a new social order based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity, where every individual has the opportunity to live a life of dignity and respect.

### Criticism of Reform Movements

Another key theme in “The Annihilation of Caste” is Ambedkar’s criticism of social and religious reform movements within Hinduism. He argues that these movements, including those led by Mahatma Gandhi, are insufficient because they do not address the root cause of the caste system – the religious doctrines that underpin it. Ambedkar contends that reformers are more interested in maintaining social harmony and preserving the Hindu religion than in achieving true social justice. He argues that piecemeal reforms will not lead to the abolition of caste and that a more radical approach is needed. Ambedkar scrutinizes the approaches taken by various reformers, pointing out their limitations.

### Call for Radical Change

Ambedkar’s solution to the problem of caste is radical: he calls for the complete annihilation of the caste system. He argues that this can only be achieved by rejecting Hinduism and embracing a new social order based on the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Ambedkar suggests that inter-caste marriages and dining together are essential steps towards breaking down caste barriers. He also emphasizes the need for political and social activism to achieve these goals.

This call for radical change is a central tenet of Ambedkar’s philosophy. He does not believe in half- measures or superficial changes; instead, he demands a complete overhaul of the societal structure to ensure genuine equality and justice.

### Importance of Education and Awareness

Throughout “The Annihilation of Caste,” Ambedkar underscores the importance of education and awareness in the fight against caste. He believes that educating the oppressed classes about their rights and the injustices they face is crucial for their empowerment. Ambedkar also stresses the need for the oppressed to develop a critical consciousness and to question the religious and social norms that perpetuate their subjugation. Ambedkar advocates for a revolution of the mind, where individuals critically engage with the social norms and religious doctrines that oppress them. Education, in his view, is a powerful tool for social change, enabling the oppressed to understand and challenge their circumstances.

### Role of the State and Law

Ambedkar highlights the role of the state and law in combating caste discrimination. He argues that legal measures are necessary to protect the rights of lower castes and to ensure their access to opportunities and resources. Ambedkar advocates for affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education and employment, to address historical injustices and to promote social mobility among the oppressed classes. Ambedkar believes that the state has a moral and legal obligation to intervene and correct the historical wrongs inflicted by the caste system. He stresses the importance of laws and policies that actively promote social justice and equality.



### III. SUMMARY AND KEY THEMES OF “CASTES IN INDIA: THEIR MECHANISM, GENESIS, AND DEVELOPMENT”

Summary of “Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development”

•“Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development” is a pioneering scholarly work by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, first presented as a paper at an anthropology seminar in 1916 at Columbia University. This essay represents one of Ambedkar’s earliest examinations of the caste system, providing a detailed analysis of its origins, structure, and perpetuation within Indian society. In this work, Ambedkar approaches the caste system from a sociological and anthropological perspective. He critiques the existing theories of caste, particularly those that try to justify its existence through racial or divine explanations. Instead, Ambedkar offers a historical and functional analysis of how caste operates and sustains itself in Indian society. The development of caste, according to Ambedkar, involved several mechanisms, including:

Social and religious sanctions: Caste rules were enforced through religious texts and social norms, ensuring compliance and discouraging inter-caste interactions. Economic factors: Occupational specialization and restrictions further entrenched caste divisions, with each caste typically associated with specific trades or professions. Marriage and kinship: Strict rules governing marriage and kinship relations prevented the mixing of castes, reinforcing social boundaries. Ambedkar concludes by critiquing the idea that caste is a natural or inevitable aspect of Indian society. Instead, he views it as a socially constructed system designed to benefit certain groups at the expense of others. He calls for the abolition of caste, arguing that true social progress and equality cannot be achieved as long as caste divisions persist.

#### Key Themes

##### The Essence of Caste: Endogamy

One of the central themes of “Castes in India” is the identification of endogamy as the defining feature of caste. Ambedkar argues that endogamy, or marriage within one’s own group, is the fundamental mechanism that maintains caste divisions. He explains that the practice of endogamy creates rigid social boundaries, preventing the intermixing of different social groups and perpetuating social stratification. Ambedkar’s focus on endogamy challenges previous theories that attributed caste to racial or religious factors. By highlighting the social and institutional nature of caste, Ambedkar provides a more nuanced understanding of how caste operates and sustains itself within Indian society.

##### Origins and Evolution of Caste

Ambedkar traces the origins of the caste system to the institution of gotra exogamy, where individuals were required to marry outside their clan. He argues that this practice, when combined with endogamy, led to the formation of caste. Ambedkar suggests that the Brahmins, the priestly class, played a crucial role in shaping the caste system to maintain their social dominance.

This theme underscores the historical and constructed nature of caste, challenging the notion that caste is a timeless or natural aspect of Indian society. Ambedkar’s analysis shows that caste evolved through specific social practices and power dynamics.

##### Role of the Brahmins

Ambedkar critically examines the role of the Brahmins in establishing and perpetuating the caste system. He argues that the Brahmins used their religious authority to create and enforce caste rules, ensuring their social and economic dominance. By monopolizing religious and social power, the Brahmins institutionalized caste divisions and justified them through religious texts and practices. This theme highlights the intersection of religion and social hierarchy in the caste system. Ambedkar’s critique of the Brahmins exposes the ways in which religious authority can be used to legitimize and perpetuate social inequalities.

##### Mechanisms of Caste Maintenance

Social and religious sanctions: Caste rules are enforced through religious texts and social norms, creating a moral and social imperative to comply with caste restrictions.

Economic factors: Occupational specialization and restrictions reinforce caste divisions, with each caste typically associated with specific trades or professions.

Marriage and kinship: Strict rules governing marriage and kinship relations prevent the mixing of castes, reinforcing social boundaries.



### Call for Abolition of Caste

Ambedkar concludes his work with a call for the abolition of caste. He argues that true social progress and equality cannot be achieved as long as caste divisions persist. Ambedkar's call for abolition is rooted in his belief that caste is Ambedkar critiques existing theories that attempt to explain caste through racial or divine justifications. He rejects the idea that caste is a natural or inevitable aspect of Indian society, instead viewing it as a socially constructed system designed to benefit certain groups. Ambedkar's critique challenges the legitimacy of caste and calls for a reexamination of the social and historical factors that have shaped it. This theme is significant because it questions the fundamental assumptions underlying the caste system. By exposing the flaws in existing theories, Ambedkar paves the way for a more critical and informed understanding of caste.

## IV. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF "THE ANNIHILATION OF CASTE" AND "CASTES IN INDIA: THEIR MECHANISM, GENESIS, AND DEVELOPMENT"

### Introduction

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's works, "The Annihilation of Caste" and "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development," offer a profound critique of the caste system in India. While both works address the same core issue of caste-based discrimination, they approach it from different angles, providing complementary insights. This comparative analysis will explore the key arguments and themes of both texts, highlighting their similarities and differences. "The Annihilation of Caste" is primarily a political and social critique. Written as a speech intended for a reformist Hindu group, Ambedkar's rhetoric is impassioned and confrontational. He directly attacks the religious and social underpinnings of the caste system, calling for its complete eradication. Ambedkar emphasizes the need for radical social reform and challenges the authority of Hindu religious texts that justify caste discrimination. In contrast, "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development" takes a more academic and analytical approach. Presented as a scholarly paper, it systematically examines the origins, structure, and perpetuation of the caste system from a sociological and anthropological perspective. Ambedkar focuses on the mechanisms that sustain caste divisions, such as endogamy and social sanctions, providing a detailed historical analysis of how the caste system developed.

### Critique of Hinduism

In "The Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar's critique of Hinduism is central to his argument. He argues that the caste system is deeply rooted in Hindu religious doctrines and practices. Ambedkar critiques the Vedas, the Manusmriti, and other Hindu scriptures for sanctioning caste-based discrimination. He contends that Hinduism, as it is practiced, cannot be reformed from within and must be discarded to achieve true social justice. This radical stance is exemplified by his famous declaration that he would not die a Hindu. "Castes in India," while also critical of Hinduism's role in perpetuating caste, takes a more measured approach. Ambedkar acknowledges the role of the Brahmins in establishing and maintaining caste divisions but focuses more on the social and institutional mechanisms of caste rather than directly attacking religious doctrines. His critique is more implicit, highlighting how social practices and norms rooted in religion have evolved to sustain caste.

### Social and Economic Dimensions

Ambedkar's analysis of the caste system includes a detailed examination of its social and economic dimensions. In "Castes in India," he explores how occupational specialization and economic restrictions reinforce caste divisions. Each caste is typically associated with specific trades or professions, and these economic roles are strictly regulated to prevent social mobility.

"The Annihilation of Caste" also addresses the economic aspects of caste, arguing that economic inequality is both a cause and a consequence of caste discrimination. Ambedkar contends that the caste system limits economic opportunities for lower castes, trapping them in a cycle of poverty and subjugation. He calls for economic as well as social reforms to address these disparities.

### Criticism of Reform Movements

Both texts critique contemporary reform movements for their failure to address the root causes of caste. In "The Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar is particularly critical of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, who, despite their efforts to reform Hindu society, do not challenge the fundamental religious basis of the caste system. Ambedkar argues that such reformers are more interested in preserving Hinduism than in achieving true social justice. In "Castes in India," Ambedkar's criticism is more focused on the limitations of existing theories and explanations of caste. He challenges the racial and divine justifications for caste, arguing instead for a sociological and historical understanding of its origins and perpetuation. While not directly addressing contemporary reformers, his analysis implicitly critiques the superficial approaches to caste reform.



### **Role of the State and Law**

Ambedkar's analysis of the role of the state and law in combating caste discrimination is evident in both works. In "The Annihilation of Caste," he argues that legal measures are necessary to protect the rights of lower castes and to ensure their access to opportunities and resources. Ambedkar advocates for affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education and employment, to address historical injustices and promote social mobility. In "Castes in India," Ambedkar also highlights the importance of state intervention in dismantling the caste system. He argues that legal and policy measures are necessary to address the social and economic factors that sustain caste. By implementing policies that promote equality and social justice, the state can play a crucial role in combating caste discrimination.

### **Ambedkar's Vision for Social Reform and Its Relevance Today**

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's writings, particularly "The Annihilation of Caste" and "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development," offer profound insights into the caste system and propose a radical vision for social reform. This week's focus is on examining Ambedkar's vision for social reform and its continued relevance in contemporary society. By exploring his ideas on education, legal measures, social equality, and economic upliftment, we can better understand how Ambedkar's work remains a guiding force in the fight against social injustice and caste discrimination.

### **Education and Awareness**

Ambedkar placed significant emphasis on education as a tool for social reform. He believed that education was essential for the empowerment of the oppressed castes and for fostering critical consciousness. Ambedkar argued that education would enable individuals to understand their rights and the structural injustices they faced. This understanding, in turn, would motivate them to challenge the social norms and religious doctrines that perpetuate caste discrimination. In "The Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar stressed the importance of educating the masses about the inherent inequalities in the caste system. He saw education as a means to liberate the oppressed from the mental shackles imposed by centuries of caste-based discrimination. Ambedkar himself exemplified this belief by pursuing higher education and using his knowledge to advocate for social change. Today, the emphasis on education as a means of empowerment remains relevant. Efforts to improve access to quality education for marginalized communities continue to be a critical aspect of social reform. Education equips individuals with the tools to challenge discriminatory practices and seek better opportunities, thus contributing to the dismantling of the caste system.

### **Legal Measures and Policy Interventions**

Ambedkar recognized the importance of legal measures and policy interventions in combating caste discrimination. He advocated for the enactment of laws that would protect the rights of lower castes and ensure their access to opportunities and resources, and employment, to address historical injustices and promote social mobility. These policies aimed to provide marginalized communities with opportunities that had been historically denied to them. In contemporary society, the relevance of legal measures and policy interventions cannot be overstated. While significant progress has been made, caste-based discrimination and social inequalities persist. Affirmative action policies continue to be a subject of debate, but they remain crucial in addressing systemic barriers and ensuring equal opportunities for all.

### **Economic Upliftment**

Economic upliftment was a central aspect of Ambedkar's vision for social reform. He argued that frameworks to promote social justice. One of Ambedkar's key contributions was the introduction of affirmative action policies, such as reservations in education. Ambedkar's role in drafting the Indian Constitution is a testament to his commitment to using legal address this, he called for measures that would Social Equality and Justice improve the economic status of lower castes. In "The Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar highlighted the economic disparities between different castes and argued for policies that would promote economic equality. He advocated for land reforms, access to credit, and opportunities for entrepreneurship as means to uplift marginalized communities.

Ambedkar's ultimate goal was to achieve social equality and justice. He envisioned a society where individuals were not discriminated against based on their caste and where everyone had equal opportunities to succeed. Ambedkar's vision was rooted in the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity. In "The Annihilation of Caste," Ambedkar argued that true social progress could only be achieved by eradicating caste divisions. He called for a new social order that would be based on the values of justice and human dignity. Ambedkar believed that social reform must go beyond superficial changes and address the structural foundations of caste-based discrimination. The pursuit of social equality and justice remains a fundamental goal in contemporary society. Efforts to promote inclusivity, address social biases, and create equal opportunities are ongoing. Ambedkar's vision serves as a powerful reminder of the need for comprehensive social reform to achieve true equality and justice.



Impact and Legacy of Ambedkar's Work on Contemporary Social Movements:

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's contributions to social justice and his relentless fight against the caste system have left an indelible mark on Indian society. His works, particularly "The Annihilation of Caste" and "Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development," continue to inspire and influence contemporary social movements. This week's focus is on examining the impact and legacy of Ambedkar's work on current social justice initiatives, exploring how his ideas have been integrated into modern efforts to combat caste-based discrimination and promote equality. Influence on Indian Constitution and Legal Framework Drafting of the Indian Constitution-One of Ambedkar's most significant contributions was his role in drafting the Indian Constitution. As the chairman of the Drafting Committee, Ambedkar ensured that the Constitution enshrined principles of equality, liberty, and fraternity. His influence is evident in the numerous provisions aimed at eradicating caste discrimination and towards creating a more inclusive, equitable, and just environment for all individuals, regardless of their caste or promoting social justice. The Constitution's Preamble, which speaks of justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity, reflects Ambedkar's vision. The Fundamental Rights section, particularly Articles 15, 17, and 46, prohibits discrimination based on caste, abolishes "untouchability," and mandates the promotion of educational and economic interests of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Legal Provisions and Affirmative Action Ambedkar's advocacy for affirmative action policies has had a lasting impact on India's legal framework. The reservation system in education and employment for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes is a direct outcome of his efforts. These measures aim to redress historical injustices and provide marginalized communities with opportunities for upward mobility. The implementation of these policies has been pivotal in creating a more inclusive society, although challenges remain. Debates over the scope and effectiveness of affirmative action continue, but Ambedkar's vision for social justice through legal provisions endures as a cornerstone of Indian policy.

- Impact on Social Movements
- Dalit Rights Movement

Ambedkar's work has been foundational for the Dalit rights movement in India. His call for the annihilation of caste and his advocacy for the rights and dignity of Dalits continue to inspire activists.

### **Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)**

The Bahujan Samaj Party, founded by Kanshi Ram and later led by Mayawati, is another example of Ambedkar's influence. The BSP's ideology is deeply rooted in Ambedkar's principles of social justice, focusing on the upliftment of Bahujans (a term encompassing Dalits, Adivasis, and other marginalized groups). The party's success in Indian politics, including Mayawati's tenure as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, showcases the political mobilization of marginalized communities inspired by Ambedkar's vision. The BSP's efforts to address caste-based inequalities through political power underscore the enduring relevance of Ambedkar's ideas. Civil rights movement have been explored by scholars and activists. Ambedkar's work provides a framework for understanding and combating structural inequalities in various contexts, making his legacy relevant beyond India.

### **Critical Reflection and Future Implications of Ambedkar's Work:**

As we reach the final week of this project, our focus shifts to a critical reflection on Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's work and its future implications. Ambedkar's profound impact on Indian society and his enduring legacy in the fight against caste-based discrimination provide a basis for considering the continued relevance of his ideas and strategies in contemporary and future contexts. This analysis will delve into the strengths and limitations of Ambedkar's work, the evolving nature of caste dynamics, and the potential pathways for achieving his vision of social justice and equality. Strengths of Ambedkar's Work

### **Limitations and Criticisms**

#### **Challenges in Implementation**

While Ambedkar's legal and policy reforms have been groundbreaking, their implementation has faced numerous challenges. The reservation system, for instance, has been subject to political manipulation and resistance from privileged groups. Despite legal protections, caste-based discrimination and violence persist in many parts of India. These challenges highlight the limitations of relying solely on legal and policy measures to achieve social change. Effective implementation requires sustained political will, social awareness, and grassroots activism.

### **Critique of Radical Approach**

Ambedkar's radical approach, particularly his call for the complete rejection of Hinduism, has been both a strength and a point of contention. While it underscored the need for a fundamental transformation of society, it also alienated some potential allies who believed in reforming Hinduism from within. This radical stance has sparked debates about the feasibility of achieving social change through confrontation versus engagement. While Ambedkar's approach was



necessary for challenging deeply entrenched social norms, it also posed practical challenges in building broad-based coalitions for social reform.

### **Evolving Nature of Caste Dynamics Urbanization and Economic Changes**

Urbanization and economic changes have transformed the dynamics of caste in India. While traditional caste boundaries have become less rigid in urban settings, new forms of discrimination and exclusion have emerged. Economic liberalization and the growth of the middle class have created new opportunities for upward mobility, but these benefits have not been evenly distributed. Ambedkar's insights into the economic dimensions of caste remain relevant as policymakers and activists seek to address these new challenges. Ensuring inclusive economic growth and equitable access to opportunities is essential for achieving social justice.

## **V. FINAL CONCLUSION**

This project examines Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar's seminal works, *\*The Annihilation of Caste\** and *\*Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development\**, focusing on their implications for Indian society and relevance to contemporary caste and social justice discourse.

In *\*The Annihilation of Caste\**, Ambedkar critiques the Hindu caste system, arguing it is an oppressive hierarchy that dehumanizes lower castes, especially Dalits. He opposes the religious sanction of caste and calls for its total abolition, advocating for a social revolution to dismantle systemic discrimination and reorganize Indian society fundamentally.

*\*In Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development\**, Ambedkar explores the historical and sociological origins of the caste system. He highlights endogamy and other social practices that maintain caste divisions, showing the system's adaptability and persistence despite social and economic changes. This work provides a comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms perpetuating caste and the complexities of addressing caste-based discrimination.

Ambedkar's vision for social reform includes advocating for affirmative action and reservations for marginalized communities in education and employment to redress historical injustices and promote upward mobility. Despite significant legal and policy measures, caste discrimination and violence persist in contemporary India, making Ambedkar's works profoundly relevant. They diagnose India's social ills and prescribe measures for achieving social justice, inspiring movements and policies aimed at social reform.

In conclusion, Ambedkar's *\*The Annihilation of Caste\** and *\*Caste in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development\** provide a profound critique of the caste system and a roadmap for social reform. Their enduring relevance underscores the need for continued efforts to address caste-based discrimination and achieve true social justice. Ambedkar's legacy remains a guiding light in the ongoing struggle for equality and human rights.

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