
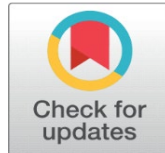
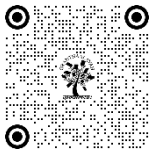


MAPPING THE UNMET NEEDS OF MIGRANT WOMEN IN BHURAKIGARHI VILLAGE, ALIGARH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

The ethnographic study of migrant women workers focuses on the challenges and difficulties they face at their workplace. These women are seasonal migrants who come to the study area for less than two months for sapling plantations. The study will utilize social well-being indicators to discover the neglected elements of unfulfilled demands. The author also attempts to provide recommendations for each unmet need.

This study is based on qualitative research methods utilizing focus group discussions. It has been found that these migrants lack sufficient housing, and their living conditions are extremely poor, resulting in an unhygienic environment. Women get dermatitis and fissures on their hands and feet as a result of exposure to fertilizers, as well as inadequate menstrual hygiene. Instead of functioning alone, they assert their claim over public space. The salaries initially allocated to the ladies throughout the recruitment process were not provided to them. The present article maps these migratory women workers' unmet basic requirements, including several facets of social well-being. The paper also suggests policy recommendations to create places of well-being with improved living circumstances, pay, recreational alternatives, etc., which can further help meet the unmet requirements of these migrant women workers.

Keywords: Rural Migrant women, Social well-being, Unmet needs, Gender, Qualitative data

1. INTRODUCTION

A decent living requires food, clothes, and shelter. However, certain persons and groups must work hard to meet these needs. To fulfil their necessities, migrant women workers risk their health, living conditions, and well-being. In the present paper, the author highlights the unmet needs of these migrant women workers, for which the concept of well-being is suitable. These rural women are vulnerable and marginalized, and how rural women are in a disadvantageous position and often excluded from bearing the benefits of economic development, largely because of patriarchal values that subordinate women and negate them from productive activity (Dixon, 1978). The subordination does not stop at the invisibility of women in the paid labour force; women have to bear the double burden; they are responsible for household work and earning livelihood for the family (Kishwar & Vanita, 1984). It is important to highlight these rural women's conditions and social well-being statuses.

The concept of well-being is complex and multi-dimensional (Diener, 2009; Michaelson et al., 2009; Stiglitz et al., 2009). Keyes (1998) defines social well-being as assessing one's role in society, while physical well-being is the absence of negative emotions. Knox (1975) argues that "*well-being involves meeting the needs and wants of the population.*" Knox highlighted three interrelated well-being: Physical/Material Well-being, Social well-being, and Emotional/Psychological Wellbeing. Well-being cannot be understood in isolation from needs.

To explore the unmet needs, one has to have a clear understanding of them. Maslow (1971) identified five self-actualization and acknowledgment needs. The first needs are food, beverages, clothing, and shelter. The second is security, which includes environmental protection and defense. The authorities and villagers of Bhurakigarhi negate the need for safety and security. Third is the need for love, satisfaction, social approval, etc. Self-achievement is last, followed by prestige, position, and dominance.

Quality of life is a key indicator of social well-being. "quality of life" encompasses social, environmental, and human well-being. Thus, social constructions better explain life quality than material ones. So, happiness and quality of life are linked. Some people have even been able to afford high living standards are not happy and vice-versa. The following sections briefly discuss various social well-being indicators. Measuring "quality of life" is a challenging task, and the author has adopted a qualitative research framework to examine the "quality of life" (social well-being).

There are two main ways to look at social well-being. First, Hedonic tradition constitutes happiness, positive affect, low negative affect, and life satisfaction (Bradburn, 1969; Diener, 1984; Kahneman et al., 1999; Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999; Roy, 2018). and Secondly, eudaimonic tradition consisting of healthy psychological functioning and human growth (Rogers, 1961; Ryff, 1989a; 1989b; Waterman, 1993; Roy, 2018). The author draws on Gabriel C. Alvarez and David Smith's understanding of social well-being. Both have used social well-being measurements to discuss "quality of life." Political decision-making, family stability, public safety, housing, work, education, health, and access to resources, services, and institutions can all improve a person's well-being and address their unmet needs (Alvarez, 1982). These signs boost human dignity and social inclusion. He postulated that "quality of life" is a sign of well-being. Gabriel stressed that cultural, perceptual, and attitudinal factors should be considered when assessing social well-being. After lengthy fieldwork and in-depth interviews with migrant women, the researcher organized the unmet needs into various indicators.

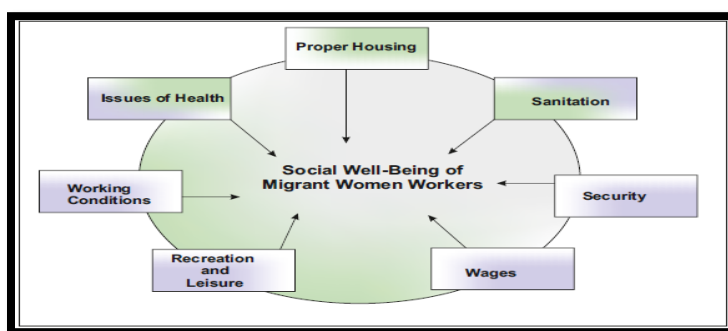


Figure 1.1: - Indicators of Social Well-being Used in the Study

Source: - Generated by the Researcher

1.2 THE STUDY AREA

The Aligarh district is located in the western section of Uttar Pradesh. The Aligarh district is situated within the geographical coordinates of 27° 34' and 28° 11' N latitude and 77° 26' and 78° 31' E longitude. The village "Bhurakigarhi" is located within the Maloi Panchayat, which falls under the jurisdiction of the Koil tehsil. The distance to the administrative centre of the Aligarh district is around 34 kilometres. Vijaigarh, the nearest town, is situated approximately 2 km from Bhurakigarhi. The settlement is surrounded by neighbouring towns such as Sasni, Gopi, and Akraabad. Bhurakigarhi spans an area of 138.7 hectares, which is comparable to the size of a medium-sized village within this panchayat. The community is connected to the district administrative centre, other towns, and the train station by roads made of metal. The railway station "Sasni" is the most suitable option for reaching Bhurakigarhi.

1.3 THE PARTICIPANTS

The Bhurakigarhi migrant women journey to Bhurakigarhi, specifically during the monsoon season, to cultivate paddy. They hail from several regions of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Seasonal migration significantly impacts the agriculture sector

as workers are employed for a limited period of 45 days and reside in the hamlet of Bhurakigarhi. Based on their respective villages and the commission brokers, they arrive in diverse formations. Most of these ladies originate from disadvantaged and lower-caste backgrounds. The husbands and offspring of these women are consistently in attendance. These mothers receive assistance from their children in performing domestic tasks and caring for younger siblings. Furthermore, the husband and senior male migrant engage in other agricultural tasks alongside paddy plantation operations, including transporting plants to the farmland.

1.4 METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study employed an ethnographic theoretical framework due to the qualitative nature of the examination. This qualitative research method utilizes participant observation to assess the significance of social interactions and fieldwork incidents. This strategy necessitates the researcher to focus on extracting the precise meaning that others attribute to their circumstances (Smith, 2005). The study utilized focus groups to collect information. Each focus group discussion for this study involves five to six women. Two migrant women wanted to talk more specifics about their circumstances, which was very informative. Therefore, two in-depth interviews were conducted with them. Using a recorder, these focus group discussions and interviews focused on the public environment (the employment) and private space (the house) created by these immigrant women in the research region. The local dialect used in all focus groups and interviews was initially recorded and translated into Hindi and English. The focus group conversations and interviews were analyzed and recorded using weft-QDA software. Ultimately, the respondents' identities were altered to guarantee their privacy during the study.

1.5 RESULTS

1.5.1 HOUSING NEED

Human beings possess three essential requirements: sustenance, protection, and adequate accommodation. This study aims to evaluate the state of housing and other essential facilities for these female migrant workers.

The initial cohort of female migrants lived within the premises of the Bhurakigarhi primary school. They used the veranda as their designated "house" for daily activities. Due to inclement weather, the school restricted access to the veranda exclusively. Consequently, migrant women relocated to safer areas when heavy rains occurred. Supporting narratives are :

The problem is that if it rains heavily, this chat (roof) has severe water leakage, which creates a mess in our room. (Kela Devi, 37age, FGD 3rd)

Because of this (rain), we must wake up all night. (Ram Devi, 24age, FGD 3rd)

Yes, we used to sit the whole night. (Ram Devi, 24age, FGD 4th)

The second and third sets of interviewees consisted of individuals residing at a poultry farm, namely a hen farm known as *Murgi Farm*. The hen farm offered these women a dilapidated room as a shelter. Externally, the hen farm seemed pleasant, but it had a history of leaking after rainfall, damaging their possessions. The accommodation was near the hen farm, which served as a breeding ground for mosquitoes and other insects, posing potential health risks. Due to the scarcity of hand pumps in the vicinity, the residents frequently faced water shortages. Consequently, the ladies were compelled to utilize alternative hand pumps or bathe by the roadside. Amidst intense rainfall, the fourth individual had to relocate to the tractor garage. A garage is unsuitable for habitation because of the presence of insects and rodents, which might pose health risks to the occupants. Supporting narratives are :

Yes, it leaks severely, and all our products and things get wet because of this rain. (Kela Devi, 37age, FGD 3rd)

(Speak sarcastically) Here, everything is okay. These farms are also good. It is so good that if it rains heavily, we all have to sit in the shade where the roof leaks. We all look at each other's faces throughout the night, and our nights go by without sleeping. (Roop Devi, 31age, FGD 2nd)

When rainwater leaks, it also damages our food. Our whole wheat flour and rice get wet, which affects our financial budget and health. (Kamala Devi, 29age, FDG 2nd)

The commission agents (thekedars) should provide us with adequate shelter because this is the month of rain, making it very difficult to stay here. (Satyabati, 42age, FGD 2nd)

As discussed earlier, the fifth group faced a similar issue. The living conditions and lodgings provided for these women workers were far from satisfactory. These women were compelled to accept their living conditions because they feared losing their employment prospects. Supporting narratives are:

Yes, we can say that the condition should be good. (These women do not want to say anything, but their expressions suggest they do not want to talk about the bad residential conditions. (Rekha, 32age, FGD 5th)

When it rains, we have to wake up all night, and then we have to go to the agricultural field for work the next day, which becomes very hectic for us; if it rains continuously for a long time, we have to resettle ourselves to some other place. (Methlesh, 20age, FGD 5th)

1.5.2 SANITATION

Sanitation is a fundamental requirement for women as it is closely linked to their dignity and safety. In the workplace, no toilets were available for women, forcing them to use open fields. However, male and female workers already occupied these fields during the day, so migrant women had to either travel a long distance or hold their urine, which had adverse effects on their bladder and kidney health. The third and fourth groups of migrant women and the second group would go to the fields early in the morning, while groups one and five would go to an irrigation canal for relief. Instead of carrying their water, the women would use either canal water or water stored in pits in the fields. Supporting narratives are:

"What else is there to say? We will not experience any issues if the government works to make these services available to us. Walking outside to find restrooms, we must deal with many difficulties". (Raaj Kumari, 23age, FGD 5th)

Didi, we must spend one month here and return to our village (Desh) after this. That is why what kind of problem everyone is living like this. (Santra Devi, 42age, FGD 3rd)

Okay, the house is (a suitable room), but the toilet should be there. (Santra Devi, 42age, FGD 3rd)

There should be a room with the necessary facilities; we should have a toilet for females, hand pumps for drinking water, and clean roads. I wouldn't say I like the roads of this village at all. (Pinky, 16age, ITV 1st)

The roads are filled with water, which creates a muddy layer, and this "kichad" dirties our clothes. (Pinky, 16age, ITV 1st)

1.5.3 HEALTH SERVICES

Health is a state of high-level physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual wellness (Shank & Coyle, 2002). Due to their poor living conditions and compromised immune systems, migrant women frequently experience illnesses such as colds and fevers, particularly during the monsoon season. Farmers in Bhurakigarhi apply fertilizers before planting rice fields, which poses a significant health hazard. Supporting narratives are :

"Yes, all farmers apply namak (fertilizer) to the soil, which is why we frequently have foot ailments." (Kamala Devi, 29age, FGD 2nd)

"I experience excruciating pain in my legs as an effect of fertilizer." (Satyabati, 42age, FGD 2nd)

Due to the rainy seasons, we all catch fever frequently and experience body pain. We remain in pain for the whole month until we arrive in this village! (Raaj Kumari, 23age, FGD 5th)

I have one problem: Farmers use fertilizer before the plantation work. It is not good. I have wounds in my hands and feet, and they hurt a lot. (Pinky, 16age, ITV 1st)

Due to the extended duration of working in the fields, migrant women experience skin issues on their hands and legs as a result of exposure to water and fertilizers. Studies have shown that migrant women work possess a greater risk of being infected by viral, bacterial, fungal, and parasitic infections (Hansen & Donohoe, 2003).

These women frequently suffered headaches due to the repetitive bending required to plant paddy saplings on sunny days. Heatstroke and headaches can be caused by bad posture and excessive sun exposure. These migrants had to independently handle several aspects, including the accessibility of medical professionals and medications. They do not receive any aid from the Thekedars regarding medication or medical treatment. Even the residents do not assist with their health concerns till they reach a crisis state. A migrant female worker revealed that she often exhausts her whole earnings in Bhurakigarhi on medical costs due to the lack of support from thekedars and the excessive fees charged by local doctors, who discriminate against non-locals.

The researcher encounters challenges when discussing sanitary conditions, particularly menstruation. Obtaining a response from them proved challenging due to the reticence of migrant women to discuss menstruation since it is regarded as a taboo subject. A female migrant provided a comprehensive account of her menstrual cycle. She refrained from using sanitary napkins or rags because she believed in their potential danger. They change their attire four to five times daily and abstain from using products during their menstrual cycle. They experience difficulty in ambulation and frequently manifest dermatological issues such as rashes and other cutaneous problems on their thighs and legs. Menstruation heightens the susceptibility to infection when engaging in agricultural activities. Supporting narratives are:

Many people get sick, for example, with fever. If we all work in agricultural fields and at the same time rain occurs, then we have to continue our work in the rain... Our clothes get wet, and finally, we get a fever. (Pooja, 31age, FGD 5th)

I never find myself satisfied with the medicine of this place.

(Keshe Bati, 19age, FGD 5th)

Whatever we earn here, the real money is expended on purchasing medicine. (Rekha, 32age, FGD 5th)

Whatever we earn here and invest here, we invest here only without profit. (Raaj kumari, 23age, FGD 5th)

Nothing happens; I retake a bath. During "periods," I usually bath four to five times..... Moreover, I change my clothes at least three to four times. We do not use "clothes" and "pads" during periods.....yes, I do not use "pad" and "cloth" during my period..... I live like this only usually. One of my friends in Biharshe also remains like this only..... It pains a lot between the legs, and minor cuts and rashes occur, which is painful. (Pinky, 16age, ITV 1st)

1.5.4 SECURITY

Physical safety is paramount to these women, mainly when they must travel long distances to work on remote farms. Supporting narrative is:

"We always go in groups. If something happens to us, we will blame our commission agent." (Pooja, 31age, FGD 5th)

The villagers and the commission agents have assisted in protecting migratory women. For example, they are given a temporary place of stay before they start working and a permanent residence immediately outside the plantation areas to ensure minimal commute time. The female dependents of the male plantation workers often experience apprehension for their safety.

1.5.5: INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

The study documented the systematic exploitation of female workers in terms of their receipt of regular remuneration. To prevent workers from leaving during the middle of the season, their salary is withheld until the season concludes. Female employees have demonstrated a predilection for the daily remuneration structure due to its increased adaptability. Furthermore, the thekedars practice exploitation through two distinct methods regarding equitable remuneration. To reduce the total cost, the representation of cultivated land is deliberately underestimated. Additionally, thekedars require local farmers to pay a premium when they hire migrant women workers who work fewer hours. Supporting narrative is :

"The agricultural land you see is around eight bighas; however, the thekedar claim it is not eight bighas. We plant 7 to 8 bigha of paddy fields every day. They consistently claim that it is less. "Eke tukadi dena kya chaar tukadai lena" is what we say. What we state... Unfortunately, I have only come here for work and feel extremely "abshush" here. No, I will not return here. They are all bad and give more "bigha" to plants. (Rekha, 32age, ITV2nd)

Furthermore, female workers frequently lack autonomy over their income and are obligated to surrender all of it to their moms, spouses, or other senior family members. Supporting narratives are:

She does not save that money. Her mother takes the wages and saves them money in her account. (Pinky, 18age, FGD 1st)

We want her (Gita, the young girl) to get married as soon as possible, so we are saving money. (Pinky, 18age, FGD 1st)

He is not cheating, but his old grandmother is not listening to us. If we all do the work together, we all get the money together, but this grandmother went to the thekedar and told him to please give me money separately and not give it to them. She also said they all took my money and never gave it to me, but "I also work....so please give my money separately ... My Babaji went to thekedar for "hisab" (settling the account). The thekedar said I could not do "hisab" for her(grandmother) ... Everyone came with me. I will give money to all of you separately and individually and this is the

problem which groups are facing If we all get money/payment together. I will be good for us, and then Babaji distributed that money equally between all....and at this time we will leave for our home.” (Pinky, 16age, ITV 1st)

1.5.6: LEISURE AND RECREATION ACTIVITIES

The demanding and monotonous work schedule necessitates leisure and a brief period of relaxation. These women are constantly occupied as they toil on the plantations from dawn to dusk. The migrant ladies asserted that they utilize their leisure time by engaging in casual conversation, performing traditional melodies, and unwinding. As peacocks are not commonly found in their home countries, most migrant women enjoy observing the peacock's dance. One of the most ancient communities also enjoys "*Mahila sangeet*."

Yes, we like peacocks a lot, but there is no peacock where we stay in Bihar. (Keshebat, 19age, FGD 5th)

Lali, we do not have time to go shopping. We are always busy with domestic and agricultural fieldwork. (Pinky, 18age, FGD 1st)

1.5.7: INTEGRATION AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

During interviews, migrant women often discussed their wretched living conditions and the conditions in the field. Consequently, their living conditions are unclean due to their collective inhabitation of an inadequate dwelling area. Farmers refrain from excessively irrigating agricultural land during field operations, whereas numerous migrant women labourers express dissatisfaction with the feeling of uncleanness when planting young paddy saplings in the field. Immigrant women in Bhurakigarhi experience little social integration. Due to the exclusion of migrant women from local festivities, they often suffer from homesickness. There is a limited amount of time and financial resources for leisure activities. Moreover, they believe that the residents of Bhurakigarhi exhibit unfair treatment towards them. These migrating women often face linguistic and cultural obstacles, increasing frustration.

*“No, we exclusively communicate using our native tongue. I know we are not flawless, but if we do not understand, we will them to repeat if necessary”.
(Santra Devi, 42age, FGD 3rd).*

1.6. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

These workers are categorized as seasonal migrants; henceforth, the government and other NGOs disregard them from availing benefits. Most of the time, "gender-blind" policies that solely consider male migrants are developed for migrant workers. There are very few agricultural policies for migrant women labourers. Thus, while progress has been slow, there remains space for improvement. The following proposals cover registration, shelter and sanitation, safety and health, income and wages, and leisure and recreation.

1.6.1: REGISTRATION

Any external "agency" or "agent" in charge of migrant women workers increases their risk of exploitation. Therefore, registration is needed to address exploitation. Commission agents should receive licensing numbers like Aadhaar cards to have their unique number. Migrant women recommend renewing these licenses every two years. Government inspectors should review these thekedars' actions to assess the ground situation. This may reduce migrant women's labour exploitation. Female migrant workers may need to register. Migrant women labourers should be classified as seasonal out-migrants in state agriculture records. The state government must coordinate commission agents' numbers with migrating women workers to ensure smooth work exchange.

1.6.2: HOUSING AND SANITATION

Decent housing is essential. The weather in Bhurakigarhi is hot and muggy. Thus, migrant women workers should be given rooms with ventilation, light (electricity), and at least a fan. The study also addresses overpopulation, which cannot be ignored. In garages and verandas, migrant women labourers lived unsanitary. The researcher suggested a huge hall with a capacity of 1.10. The survey found 85 migrant women labourers during this season. Thus, 8 to 9 apartments or halls should be created and readied for them during paddy cultivation.

The residential facility's floor should be cement to help inhabitants sleep flat. The survey found leaky roofs in commission broker-given homes. The ladies are powerless when it rains since their accommodations lack roof leak prevention. The roof should be Pacca, or leak-proof, to withstand rain. Migrant women workers should also have a covered restroom since they take public showers on the main road. Therefore, a separate bathing room should be provided for privacy. Bathrooms, soap, and water are scarce, increasing the risk of parasite, dysentery, and other infections. Migrant women workers' health is also affected by lavatory shortages. Women sometimes wait until dusk to relieve their bladders when they lack privacy and lavatory facilities. A urinary tract infection is possible. Renal failure or bladder infection may ensue. Thus, this population needs clean, well-maintained restrooms with reliable water.

1.6.3: HEALTH AND SAFETY

The study also worried about the health of migrant women workers. Migrant women labourers lack essential medical treatments. These suggestions are for the same: Local authorities may provide temporary medical cards to migrants. Commission agents will provide free medicine for fever, colds, and pain during their stay. Migrant women workers often have hand and leg cracks and rashes. To prevent these skin concerns, migrant workers should be given boots and gloves. These women labour hard in the field and don't have time to cook in the morning rush. Make a nutrient-dense eating plan available. At least one hearty lunch should be available. Mess and Langer should be available. Offering breaks during peak hours can help commission salespeople avoid headaches and heat stroke. Their shaded hats may be constructed of recycled paper.

Everyone needs security, particularly migrant women workers. These include financial security, health, social acceptance, and independence. The local police should register these migrant women workers to safeguard them and allow them to file an FIR immediately in the event of an incident. Additionally, Bhurakigarhi residents must be educated about migrant workers. Volunteering to help in an emergency or poor situation is humanitarian.

1.6.4: INCOME AND WAGES

Money is a person's most important aspect since it allows them to fantasize and aspirationally fulfil their materialistic needs. While investigating, the researcher found a consistent wage disparity between men and women. They earn differentially for the same work. Commission brokers should pay migrant women "equal wages for equal work" (meaning workers should get paid equally for the same work). It should not be "gender blind" to migrant worker salaries. Implementing this notion reduces "social discrimination" connected to the "gender pay gap".

Commission agents shall record migrant women workers' daily labour in registered records with their signature and thumbprint to help them track their "bigha" unit work. If migrant women workers know their assignment is done, commission agents may or may not deceive them. Commission agents should allow migrant women workers to inspect or add up their accounts. This means that the migrant woman worker will use RTI. Since migrant women labourers are illiterate and easily misled, natives should help them calculate their salary. Commission agents' spouses or mothers should first contact migrant women workers. As women probe more than males and can relate to their agony, this will create a friendlier workplace.

1.6.5: LEISURE AND RECREATION

Leisure refreshes during hard work. Migrant women have little free time. These migrant women workers should take breaks during lengthy shifts. Locals should integrate these labourers into their cultural environment to make them feel welcome and included. Migrant lady workers should not be shunned. These women should enjoy folk music, dance, and other hobbies to relieve stress and anger. This cultural mix will boost local and migrant women's working community.

1.7 CONCLUSION

Finally, migrant women lack safe housing, sanitation, security, leisure activities, and, most critically, health. If simple policies and processes to help the next waves of migrating women in Bhurakigarhi were designed and proposed, these unfulfilled needs might be met and moved. Because migrant workers are seasonal, the government and other NGOs ignore their development needs and usually create "gender-blind" strategies for male migrants. There is little agricultural policy for migrant women labourers. Thus, while progress has been slow, there remains space for improvement. Through the study, the researcher highlighted several areas for reform that might directly and indirectly benefit migrant women workers. These development sectors are linked to migrant women workers' unmet needs, as

mentioned in the previous chapter. Examples include housing, sanitation, health, leisure, compensation, security, and commission agent managers' conduct. Registration of migrant women workers in their home country and destination is crucial before making policy recommendations. With these suggestions, migrant women workers' unfulfilled needs will be better supported. To meet the unmet requirements of these migratory women workers, the presented recommendations may assist in creating well-being places with improved living circumstances, pay, recreational alternatives, etc.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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None.

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