

Weaving the Voices of Pakistan: A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis of Mohsin Hamid’s *Moth Smoke*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze Mohsin Hamid’s novel “Moth Smoke” by using semiotics theory of five codes which Ronald Barthes has proposed for textual analysis. By keeping in view, the Five Codes of Barthes’ Theory, the concealed meanings and voices are also interpreted. The qualitative descriptive method is used for textual analysis and quantitative method is used to make frequency list of cultural codes. This study is based on the textual analysis of the novel, “Moth Smoke” by Mohsin Hamid by using Ronald Barthes Narrative Model as analytical framework while Pierre Bourdieu Cultural Capital Theory is used as theoretical framework in order to find out Barthes’ codes in the text. By applying Barthes’ Narrative Model, the results of the current study show that this novel is consist of all the five codes such as the hermeneutic code, the proairetic code, the semantic code, the symbolic code and the cultural code which have enigmatic, suspensive elements, hidden meaning and voiced which needed to be interpreted for better understanding. The selected novel is full of enigmatic, suspensive elements, connotative meanings, binary oppositions and cultural references. Almost thirty-six cultural codes are found in the text. In short, the novel contains all the five codes.

Keywords: Ronald Barthes, textual analysis, five narrative codes, Mohsin Hamid, *Moth Smoke*

Introduction

Language is a method through which people use symbols in order to express their emotions and beliefs within the community. Language is considered as a powerful process of communication and a way to transmit the culture to the next generation. Human beings enable themselves to understand and generate new

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meanings with the help of signs and symbols. Unlike itself, a symbol is a notion or thing. Signs perform various functions in the life of human beings and these different functions enable human beings to understand various patterns of objects and ideas and those ideas can be abstract which are being referred by signs and symbols. Semiotics perform as a function of science which enables human beings to reveal hidden meanings in the text either in the form of images and objects.

According to Umberto Eco (2007), Anything which can be considered as signs and symbols is Semiotics. (cited in Chandler, 2007). Daniel Chandler (2007) stated that in our daily conversation, Semiotics is above all consists of signs and symbols. This study includes anything that “stands for” something else because it is such a broad idea. Signs in Semiotics can be represented through images, objects, sounds, and movements. (Chandler, 2007)

This research semiotic analysis of Mohsin Hamid’s novel “Moth Smoke” contains step by step text-based analysis. After this analysis, novel can be deeply understood by the readers because the researcher will analyze the novel keeping in view Barthes’ Semiotic Theory of Five Codes. In this way the text of the novel can be understood in five different narrative structures which Barthes has proposed for any literary analysis. Through the application of Barthes’ codes, this study would prove fruitful in understanding the hidden meanings and voices present in the novel. After analysis, learners would be able to comprehend novel properly.

Theoretical Framework

In this research, the researcher uses Ronald Barthes’ narrative model as analytical framework. He has proposed this model for literary analysis. He gave the concept of five narrative codes in his book “Structural Analysis of Sarasin” (1970) the short story by Honoré de Balzac after the analysis of Sarasin, a short story published in 1970. According to this narrative model, a text can be unveiled into five basic codes. These five basic codes include: the hermeneutic code or enigmatic code, proairetic code, the semantic code, the symbolic code and the cultural code.

Review of the Literature

Diana and Lestari (2018), conducted a study titled “The Universal Lover in Maulana Rumi’s poems (Semiotic Theory by Ronald Barthes)”. The major goal of this study

was to understand the meanings of Maulana Rumi's poems using Ronald Barthes' Semiotic Theory. To examine the data from the provided poems, the researcher employed a qualitative research methodology. The findings of the study based on Ronald Barthes' five codes. According to the study's findings, each of the 10 poems has a complex significance.

Simbolon, Ambarita and Hadi (2019), conducted a study by using the title "The Study of Semiotics in "Cinta di Dalman Gela's" (2019) novel by Andrea Hirata as Literature Reading Material in Senior High Schools". Qualitative descriptive method was used for data analysis. Librarian studies, teachers, interviews, and student answers were all used to gather the data. They conducted their research using Charles Sanders Pierce's Semiotics Model. They learn the symbols, icons, and indexes from the assigned novel. 22 icons, 21 indices, and symbols from Andrea Hirata's book were examined as part of their semiotics study.

As the result of this study, the verbal signs in this advertisement are appeared as the texts and sentences that written in big font texts, while the visual signs appeared as a picture and also supported by some colors which could attract the audience's attention when they watch the advertisement video. Both of verbal and visual signs convey denotative and connotative meaning.

Data Analysis

In this research qualitative method is being used for textual analysis. In this process of analysis, first of all, the target text is examined to identify Barthes' elements of five codes such as; the element of suspense, enigmatic elements, symbols, binary polarity and cultural references. After examining the target text through Barthesian lens, it is obvious that the text has several words and dialogues which may be interpreted through Barthesian lens. After findings and discussion, frequency list is made to count the cultural references used in this particular text.

Theory of Five Codes

Barthes' stated that all the text has all the five codes which work as "weaving of voice" (1974, p.20) of that narrative (Lashari,2013, p.118). These five codes are hermeneutic code, proairetic code, the semic code, the symbolic code and the cultural code (Barry, 2002, p. 151).

❖ Hermeneutic Code in *Moth Smoke* (2000)

Hermeneutic codes refer to the enigmatic elements of the selected novel for this study. So, it is also called as the code of “enigma” (Selden, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005). Barthes has used some unique terms for the element of suspense, curiosity and mystery. These terms are “Snare”, “equivocations” and “jammings”. The term Equivocation refers mixture of truth and jamming refer to the acknowledgement of insolubility and the term snare refers deliberate evasion of truth. (Felluga, n.d.). First of all, the title of this novel “Moth Smoke” seems enigmatic for the readers. It has some mystery in it and it also makes the reader curious to know about why the author of this novel has given this title to this novel and for whom this title is used and why? But at the last, this mysteriousness of the readers is resolved because this title is used for the main character of this novel, Daru.

Though his actions in the novel, the readers can examine that this title is used for the main character of this novel, Daru. As the story of novel moves on, it is cleared that Daru, the main character of the novel seems to fly like a moth moves around a candle without taking care of his life. “I am about to follow them” (Hamid, 2000, p. 26). Daru blindly follow Ozi and his wife Mumtaz. According to cultural capital theory, social status and capital works like a power. Its human nature to be attracted willingly or unwillingly towards these two powers. When Daru follows Ozi and his wife, it creates suspense among readers that what is going to be next. What will happen next.

Another enigmatic element arises in the reader’s regarding Mumtaz when she flies like a moth around Daru. “She has drawn to me just as I’m drawn to her” (Hamid, 2000, P. 203). This element in the story is puzzling for the readers because the narrator of this story narrates his story having more focus on two characters Daru and Mumtaz. The whole story revolves around these two characters. Neither Mumtaz lives without him nor Daru. Both flies around one another like a moth which flies around candles light without taking care of its life.

“I am about to follow them when someone grabs my arm” (Hamid, 2000, p.26) Daru has followed his friend Ozi and his wife Mumtaz but why he did follow them. This is the question which is raised by readers. Whether he wanted to know about them or he wanted to join a party with them or he was invited to a grand party. At the same time, another question arises in the mind of readers that why someone grabs

his arms? Whether someone wanted to tell him a secret or he was asked to went away from gathering. Such type of questions arises till the end of the novel.

“Then I run to my car and...onto” (Hamid, 2000, p.143) Here, there is an enigmatic element for the reader because the reader is puzzled because if he had some problem or he had an urgent piece of work at least he could make a call to another person then why he chased a person who seemed to be a thief or killer. “Whether he has heard a siren of ...is it?” (ibid, p.157). The readers are unable to understand the actual matter because they are puzzled and are unable to think about the actual reason. But in this situation readers background knowledge, critical thinking and skills can help readers to generate ideas but it varies from person to person, cultural to culture because readers have different experiences related to their academic profile and academic skills. Educational institutions matter a lot to differentiate readers mental capabilities. A reader having good educational background, alumni of reputable institution have strong way of critical thinking than a reader having a normal educational profile.

Another enigmatic element in the text which created more curiosity in the minds of readers that what about the belongingness of Ro and Lain. It has been written in the text that they both were friends but their parents name and belongingness was not told. “Let’s call them Hero and Villain... for short”. Information about their friendship is being provided by the narrator but their family background has not been told about which readers are curious to know. As they were school fellows, close friends but on the other hand, they get separated because Ro got admission in Government college Lahore while Lain could not. Ro was talented and brilliant boy having skills as compared to Lain. Here institutions and academic profile plays vital role polish to physical and mental abilities.

❖ **Proairetic Code in Moth Smoke (2000)**

The proairetic code is also called as code of action (Hawkes, 2003: 95) It is also called as the “narrative code” (Eagleton,1993, p. 120). Proairetic code refers to the element of a narrative which create tension in the plot. Each action of the major character can be compiled into five sequences of the plot in flashback and flash forward structure.

❖ Exposition

In the story, it is the starting point to which the author of the story introduces main character of the story Darashikoh Shezad, a banker in Lahore, Pakistan, who belongs to a middle- class family. He loses his job, falls in love with his best friend's wife, and plunges into a life of drugs and crime. The accused: Darashikoh Shezad who is a courageous man. "A person who can do... and dangerous". (Hamid, 2000, p. 8). Other important characters of the story are Aurangzeb Shah, or Ozi belongs to an upper class, wealthy and successful person who have studied in America. He has also married Mumtaz Kashmiri, and the couple has an infant son, Moazzam. "I pull up to a...security guards". (Hamid, 2000, p.11). When Daru reached at a house which was surrounded by high quality walls, he thought that it was the house of my friend Ozi, his old house was small, congested. At that moment, he started to compare his house with that of Ozi house. But Ozi house was a Royal palace. The next thing, he has seen over there was rearview and a pair of security guards were standing near the main entrance of his house.

❖ Suspense

Suspense in the story develops the interest of the reader who wants to get advance knowledge about the story and he wants to know that how the narrator has alarmed the person whom he is talking sir. "No, sir, I didn't say that". (Hamid, 2000, p.22). Through this line readers can think that why he disagrees to him. May be there are some personal reasons or maybe he is senior to him. Readers can curious about what would be happened next. "There is a story...girl in Defense" (Hamid, 2000, p.14). Mumtaz, wife of Ozi asked Daru that he has read a news in today's newspaper or not. There is a news about a missing girl in Defense. A common perception is that police is thinking that her family killed her when they came to know he had a lover. On the other hand, her lover thought that police did something to her after being arrested by mobile unit. And her family claims that she had no lover. It is a strange situation when it is difficult to know about the real cause of the event. After reading this text, reader can get curious to know about the real cause of death. Who did this? What would be happened next? Whether the killer would be arrested or not? Her family could get justice or not? But a well- educated reader would be able to think the answers of the questions arises in his mind.

Another suspensive element in the story was "A flash shines... the road" (Hamid, 2000, p.16). The mustache said bring your car to the side of the road and come out of the car. Daru did this and asked why he said this? Then mustache asked him

about registration means License. Daru give it to him and tried to give him bribe to get rid of him. Then they checked his car and asked where are you coming from? When Daru said I am coming back from my parents' home. They did not believe him. Then the last question which they asked him was about drinking. Are you drunkard? Daru replied no but again they said he was liar. At that time Daru throw them a bribe. After reading the text, readers can think that whether Daru was coming from his parents' home or from anywhere else? Besides, this text can create suspense into readers mind that what would be happened next? Daru would be able to get rid of or not? But according to Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory, Daru had intellectual properties. So, he would be able to come out of the present situation.

Suspense in the story increases when the narrator says that "You have always...compliment to me". (Hamid, 2000, p.169). There is discussion going on between Daru and his uncle about Daru's performance at bank. His uncle appreciated him for his achievements. As Daru got education from prestigious school so, he was multi-talented guy who can fix any problem in his life. Furthermore, Daru had friends from educated families. At that point, Daru wanted to laugh but could not. Another question which his uncle asked him was about money making. Whether Daru made money more than me or not? Daru again become silent at that point. But his uncle emphasized to speak. Then, Daru replied that he had never made much money as compared to his friends. He called himself a low-level banker. At that point, Daru's uncle thought it is more insult for him to give such remarks for himself. These lines create suspense in the story and the reader is curious to know that if Daru is educated from prestigious institutions and he had experience relevant to his job then why he was unable to compete in the job market? Why he was unable to meet his expenses. A reader having strong educational background and good decision- making power can understand the situation of Daru. Indeed, Daru had relevant experience but he could not use it in right direction.

Another element in the story which creates suspense among the reader's mind; "I pull into the Punjab Club... familiar" (Hamid, 2000, p.175). The main character of the story, Daru reached Punjab Club to enjoy tennis. He saw Suzuki Khyber was parked next to his car. He felt good to see that because he was not only a single person having Suzuki brand car. Except these two cars, all others were huge monsters e.g., Range Rover, Land lexis, SSR, Mercedes and Honda Civic etc. As Daru entered a uniformed bearer greets him and directed him back to the swimming pool area, where he met with many familiar people. Those people were seemed to be old

because face is a reflection of someone's age. After reading these lines, readers get more interested to know the upcoming happenings. First, readers thought that if Daru was penniless why he was going to Punjab Club? Because this requires money. Another thought which arises in the mind of reader was that why Daru prevailed to be inferiority complex? And who were the people familiar to Daru? At this point, narrator has not told about those familiar faces because he wanted to create suspense among the minds of readers. The interest of the readers is built and they are curious to know about those familiar faces. Their curiosity ends if they have ability to think critically but it comes with knowledge and skills.

❖ **Complication**

In this part, the conflict is introduced to the reader. The conflict happens between characters. "Raider's talking about my client...can take time" (Hamid, 2000, p.20). First, the conflict is happened between Daru and Malik Jiwan, who was a rural landlord. He has half a million U.S. in his account, he has secured a seat in the Provincial Assembly. He was not much in favor of primary education of girls. At present the same person is sitting behind my desk, in my chair. As i entered into the bank he said you are late Mr. But i could not reply because i had no time to discuss it. Then he said, my check has cleared or not? Daru has forgotten about that and asked him about check. Malik Jiwan replied the check for thirty thousand U.S. which I deposited with you. Daru tried to find out but could not. Malik Jiwan get angered. Daru was enjoying his discomfort because Malik Jiwan was very proud and aggressive and short-tempered person. Daru said that international checks can take some time. There is a conflict between a banker and a landlord. Due to his negligence Daru was fired from the job. After reading it, a reader could have confusion in his mind related to Daru and Malik Jiwan but it could be resolved if he had ability to read a text through multiple angles. This ability comes with skills, experience and knowledge which is directly linked to institutionalized state.

Second, the conflict has happened between Daru and Ozi, when Ozi came to know about the affair of his wife Mumtaz and his friend Daru. "And I was thrilled that my wife Mumtaz and Daru, my best friend were having an affair" (Hamid, 2000, p. 192). Ozi said that he could not bring himself to confront Mumtaz because he did not want to lose her. Although there are some problems like distrust, anger but it would resolve in coming days. The reason is that he still loves her and he did not want to lose her at any cost. But on the other hand, Mumtaz left him. She left me for Daru.

After reading this text, a reader could get confused in case of Daru, Mumtaz and Ozzi but he could get rid of this confusion on the basis of previous knowledge.

Third, the conflict has happened between Daru and his servant Mannucci. "One day I catch Mannucci taking a hundred...cries out" (Hamid, 2000, p. 174). Conflict happened between Daru and his servant Ozi when one day Daru caught Mannucci washed hundred rupee and made lame excuses after being asked by Daru. He put a note on his jeans and go away by saying that he was going to take groceries for home. At that moment Daru take hold of him and squeeze him. It is common in Pakistani society to treat his servant rudely. The reason may be communication gap between masters and servants. Indeed, there are servants who are too young and have never worked before it. They face problems like Mannucci because they grew up in a lower class where they could not learn moral values. Mannerism comes through socialization and education. es.

❖ **The Semantic code in Moth Smoke (2000)**

Connotative code is also called the semantic code. (Barry,2002, p.151). Suggestive and connotative meanings are implied in semantic codes. Semantic code help readers to understand themes in a new dimension. As Barthes stated that all the text has some characters, places and objects which connotatively help the reader to understand text properly. (Eagleton, 1993, p. 120). Besides, the connotation can be sticking on the themes, characters and places.

❖ **The Symbolic Code in Moth Smoke (2000)**

The symbolic code also connects with themes of the narrative. The symbolic code is also known as antithetical code (Barthes, 1974, p. 19). It gives meaning in the availability of binary oppositions. The symbolic code refers to the binary oppositions of the text through which the reader tries to find out the reality (Barry, 2002, p. 151; & Seldon, et al., 2005, p. 152). So, the function of symbolic code is deeper than the semantic code. Moreover, it has been discussed in connotative code. The close relationship between upper, middle and lower class can be explained through themes of the novel. Therefore, the theme of the novel "Moth Smoke" is the binary opposition between upper class and middle class. In the text, first persona and second persona of Mujahid Alam is an example of the symbolic code. There is conflict between Mujahid's "first persona" and "second persona". Mujahid's appearance in shaved beard and in college uniform refers to Mujahid's first persona while his appearance in beard and in kurta signifies his second persona. His

appearance in dress pant and shirt signifies his first persona while his appearance in kurta shalwar and beard signifies his second persona. These opposite personalities of Mujahid Alam represents Eastern and Western fashions.

❖ **Heroin as a Symbol of Deterioration of Health**

It is a drug which is dangerous for life. The writer has tried to explain the symbol of drug through the character of Daru. He has become its addicted and ruined his life even he has lost his identity. As jobless people do, Daru tries it in order to know its taste or to enjoy it but soon he quits because he has an idea what would be the results of its usage. But again, he started to take it because he was beaten due to starting drug dealing business. Whenever he takes it in more quantity, he becomes anxious and gets frustrated by his life. This drug has totally changed his life. He was a man with high hopes who always thought about his family that he would never be the source of tension for his family but now he thinks about his marriage to Mumtaz. Apart from this, when Mumtaz came to know about his drug addiction, she got in a fight with Daru and Daru thought that all is that she took care of him. He thought that it would never occur that she would have left him. Then, he decided to feel better by taking more heroine joints. This led towards climax of the story when Daru helps Murad Badshah to rob a jewelry store in order to get money. All was fine until Daru has not seen a boy who was more similar to Mumtaz's son Moazzam. As Daru was in search of a chance to break up between Ozi and Mumtaz, he decided to kill that boy. He thought it would be the reason for Mumtaz to leave Ozi. Thus, Daru has lost his sense and he has become a hollow man. He has become insane, the way he treats to other people. His personality was highly affected by heroin. The major reason of his such condition was joblessness. As Bourdieu states that cultural capital play vital role to attain power and status in a society through political influence or other means. Social, cultural and economic capital is the major reason of inequality in the world. Social, cultural and economic capital has divided Pakistani society into two groups which are have and have not.

❖ **The Cultural Code in *Moth Smoke* (2000)**

Common knowledge of the world is shared by those elements which refers to cultural codes. It includes all those references which share 'knowledge', medical, physical, psychological and literary knowledge produced by the society. (Seldon, Widdowson & Brooker, 2005, p.153). In other words, it is the code that everyone knows what the author means of authoritative cultural forms. Therefore, it is the

code which is taken from authoritative cultures which are familiar to everyone. (Hawkes,2003:96).

❖ **Stereotypes**

It is an idea which people have about a single group but which is applicable to all other groups. (Suryani, 2013: 66). These stereotypes may be true or not. Moreover, it is a common perception that servants are thieves. Yet, it may not be true. It can be noted through the character of Mannucci. "One day I catch Mannucci ...my wallet" (Hamid, 2000, p. 174). One day Daru catch his servant when he was taking a hundred rupee note from his wallet. When Daru asked him about it he simply threw a note, wallet and ran away. One may say that servants are thieves and corrupt but it is not applicable to all.

❖ **Social Divide**

In this world, human beings are divided into a binary opposition weak concerning possession, caste, creed, color, geographical boundaries. Through this divide, some become masters and the other becomes slaves to the so-called masters. In this novel, Mohsin Hamid has beautifully discussed this divide. He says, there are two group of people. One having "air-conditioning" Those who have, they can rest in air-conditioned T.V lounges, can take lunch in air-conditioned restaurants, can drive in air-condition cars etc. The other group who has no such facilities cannot take rest in air-condition rooms, cannot drive air-conditioned cars. Even they have to sleep on roofs in hot summer days when load shedding is on its peak. "On a midsummer night...temperature spiked" (Hamid,2000, p. 107). In this novel Daru can understand this situation in a better way when his power supply was cut-off due to non - payment of bills. At that time, he had lost his job and he could not pay his servant for two months. Difference lies here that how people are divided into groups. Apart from this, air-conditioning and other luxuries proved a standard to prove the elite class of society without which the status of working class was not ensured.

Conclusion

To conclude, it can be understood that Ronald Barthes analysis of the target novel provides deep insight to understand the themes, structures and binary opposition present in the text. Text can be understood properly through the application of Ronald Barthes Theory of Five Code. The novel "Moth Smoke" is tangled with all the five Barthes narrative codes. After this research, one can have understood properly

the words, phrases, hidden meaning and voices present in the text. These codes enable readers to understand themes in new perspective. The story of the novel contains enigmatic and suspensive elements along with other codes of Ronald Barthes Codes Narrative Theory which creates interest among readers while reading the text. The reader tries to unfold mysterious elements, suspensive and enigmatic elements present in the target novel. There are some mysterious elements present in the text which are unveiled for the readers but there are some other elements which are still veiled. For example, the identity of Mannucci remains mysterious throughout the text as well as Mumtaz's reason of leaving house is still mysterious. The readers are still curious to know about Mumtaz whether she went to Daru's home or came back to her husband Ozzi and her son Moazzam. Furthermore, hermeneutic and the proairetic elements work together in order to develop the plot. Apart from this, the reader can understand properly by implying connotative meaning rather than denotative meaning of words and phrases present in the text. One word and phrase have multiple and concealed meanings and voices rather than its literal meanings and voices. There is symbolic code in the text which provides meaning in the availability of the binary oppositions. Mujahid Alam's first and second persona is the example of symbolic code in the text. The word "Jeans" and "tradition" are two different words but are interlinked with one another. The semantic meaning of these two words provides deep understanding to the ironic representation of Mujahid Alam's modern dress and his outlook. To understand the psyche of the characters, the antithetical code helps a lot. It provides clue to understand that how culture is the representation of identity of man.

Furthermore, the example of the binary opposition in the text is hidden in major characters of the novel. These characters have different narrative voices and comparatively contrasting personalities. The writer has tried to discuss two different cultures through the characterization of Mumtaz and Daru. Both have different personality traits but both have also love affair. The target text is consisted of references which represents the traditions and cultural values of different societies. The cultural code provides reflection of embodied Eastern and Western cultures more specific to Pakistan and Indian marriage systems along with their typical mindset of male-dominant society. The theme of cultural clash is developed with the help of plot and character in the story. It is true that Pakistani people love their culture and Islamic values but those who move towards Western countries for higher studies and business purposes. They become modern. Although, they come back but they incorporate Western values into Eastern values. In the text, there is

an example of Aurangzeb and Mumtaz. Both are Pakistani Muslims but they have adopted some Western values. A reader can observe that how they wore jeans, track pants, dress pants and T-shirts etc. throughout the text. Their living standards are true reflection of their minds.

Besides, cultural code throws light to show Eastern culture, corruption culture, nepotism, social injustice, unequal distribution of wealth and resources, moral corruption, unfaithfulness of characters, social divide etc. It is more specific to the target novel. The present research has found that Barthes' codes provided right direction to understand the theme of the novel in new dimension. The current study has evaluated that although Hamid's text has been tangled with the hermeneutic code mostly to reveal suspense, mystery and curiosity yet, the cultural code has been the most important weapon of Hanif to which the writer has explored in "Moth Smoke" as characters and events more specific to Pakistani society have mutually expand the themes and culture.

Moreover, this study is an attempt to bring up with an idea of aesthetic pleasure originated by Roman Jakobson. He proposed six functions of language as phatic, metalingual, referential, conative, poetic and emotive function. So, this study has concluded that Hamid (2000) has used poetic function as its fundamental tool to provide aesthetic pleasure to his readers. As language is a way of communication so, language which is used for poetic purposes is not only used in verse but it the process in which it is used. It can be used in different ways. Finally, the present study narrates that narrative is always explicative, and Ronald Barthes' codes are not layered upon the text but it depends on the researcher and the reader how he understands the text.

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