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Human–Nature Relationships and Ecological Crisis: An Ecocritical Analysis of Environmental Degradation in Literary Narratives

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Abstract

Subsequent study delves into specific ecocritical perspectives, including Deep Ecology, which advocates for a profound shift in human responsibility towards nature; Social Ecology, which connects social issues with environmental degradation; and Ecosophy, Ecocide, and Ecofeminism, which explore ecological philosophy and destruction. Ecological degradation, human separation from nature, bio-centric vs. anthropocentric values and ideals, and the consequences of unchecked industrialization are common topics covered in environmental literature.

Keywords: Eco-Criticism, Environmental, Ideals, Ethics, And Goals

Introduction

One of the major benefits of eco-criticism is that it encompasses a wide range of disciplines. Environmental literature is thoroughly examined via the lenses of anthropology, philosophy, and ecology. Environmentalists often discover hidden stories about the environment in works of literature that don't directly address the topic.

While environmental concerns may not have been front and center throughout human history, these readings show that they have always been there. There are several eco-critics who believe that literature may be an activist tool. They argue that literature may inspire empathy, change people's perspectives, and lead to environmental protection.

The field of eco-criticism and environmental literature collaborate to identify and address critical environmental challenges. As humanity faces enormous environmental challenges, these areas may inspire good change and alter our connection with the natural world. A harmonious relationship between humans and the natural world is emphasized in literary criticism that examines human interactions with the environment. This analysis sheds light

on societal ideals, ethics, and goals.

Ecocriticism emerged as a response to the environmental and social challenges posed by the socio-cultural study of imperialism and colonialism. Ecology and environment are intertwined in contemporary literature. When people talk about ecocriticism right now, it indicates the planet is in a bad place. It addresses the difficult things that people have gone through as a result of interacting with both society and environment. As shown in literary works addressing nature, it is associated with human sensations of joy, sorrow, hope, ambition, and tragedy. It is thought that the natural world and the atmosphere have the greatest impact on shaping human behavior and experiences. Both humans and environment have lost their pristine forms as a result. Nothing outdoors can be described as perfect, clean, and unadulterated. I don't know how they would cope if nature wasn't there while they were there. Things that are typical in a social setting will be experienced by him. In addition, the land and environment are being devastated as a result of man's insatiable need. Many experts and environmentalists have focused on the environmental harm in the last few

decades.

In Ecocriticism, one of the defining characteristics is the merging of human and natural cultural practices. Pramod Nayar states in his work on modern literary and cultural theory,

Ecocriticism is a critical approach that examines cultural texts through the lens of environment and landscape depiction, with a focus on attitudes towards and rhetorical devices used to describe these elements. It seeks to raise awareness about the environment and connect itself (and literary texts) with other ecological sciences and methods; it aligns with social theory and ecological activism on the premise that cultural texts' rhetoric influences and reflects material practices towards the environment.

In order to go beyond this dualism, practical ecocriticism must keep investigating the relationship between humans and the natural world. Observing cultural practices provides evidence of this. Natural forces, integral to human civilization, shape this culture. For whatever reason, modern humans have taken nature seriously enough to revere it. What this implies is that ecocritics recognize elements of nature in literature, and that nature plays a direct role in both society and nature. The idea that people are interdependent with the natural world and that they incorporate elements of the natural world into their civilization is something he attempts to grasp. His analysis focuses on passages that show humans observing and becoming one with nature.

Ecocriticism, an article published in *Beginning Theory* by Peter Barry, made a perceptive observation of these culturally and environmentally significant interfaces. He divided these places up into four distinct zones (246). Part of the first region consists of undeveloped land, such as deserts, seas, and desert continents. Area 2 is home to the breathtaking natural features, such as waterfalls, ponds, mountains, and rainforests. The third area is quite rural, including parks, hills, farmland, and forests. Parcels, gardens, and pathways make up Domestic Cultured Scenery in Area 4. Looking at these places, in his view, makes it crystal evident that he transitions from a more primitive to a more civilized and cultured culture of nature, which he also calls a pure and pristine form of nature. The ethics, beliefs, and values instilled in humans via it form the bedrock of any civilization. According to him, there are two main components to nature writing: the second and the third, which both include cultural aspects. He has come to terms with the fact that climate change and globalization pose a danger to the natural world. He is aware of the importance of ecocritics in this dire circumstance. *Beginning Theory* is his book in which he writes:

Among the many anthropocentric issues, including global warming and the spread of hazardous waste and nuclear fallout, ecocritics have long argued that, for the first time in Earth's history, there is no real wilderness. Although social ecologist and ecofeminists will rightfully strive to integrate such concerns with an ecologically-driven program and perspective, we must all agree that issues of gender, race, and class are no longer the only ones that literature and criticism should be concerned about (Barry 248).

There are no particular viewpoints within the Ecocriticism movement, as Peter Barry has pointed out in his work. This hypothesis has only just begun to take shape. According to what he has said, the movement has yet to establish a

commonly accepted set of principles, policies, or practices. "However, as previously mentioned, there isn't a one-size-fits-all model that we can just study and use" (Barry 248). "Ecocriticism is not a unitary theory" (02) is a brilliant statement made by Srilatha in her doctoral thesis. Her writings fall under the category of ecocritical literature. "Different strands of ecocriticism proliferate into various sub-fields of eco-conscious studies" (02), which she goes on to explain, maybe explains its theoretical origins. Writing by Srilatha

Not all works on nature are ecocritical, even if ecocritical texts often discuss the natural world. Ecocritical texts often center on the existence of a connection between humans and non-humans. Ecocriticism examines and portrays the natural environment while pleading for a deeper comprehension of it. Its stated goal is the defense of nature's ecological rights (02)

Finally, in "Ecocriticism: Containing Multitudes, Practicing Doctrine," the first president of ASLE, Scott Slovic, makes the astute observation that "eco-critical theory, such as it is, is being re-defined daily by the actual practice of thousands of literary scholars around the world" (161).

Literature Review

Said, Mohamed *et al.* (2024) ^[1]. Because of the enormous effects that humans are having on the planet's health and the welfare of subsequent generations, environmental sustainability has emerged as a critical concern in the contemporary period. Movements and legislation are being enacted with the goal of addressing resource exploitation and industrial pollution, which have occurred in the past. Conservation and the promotion of renewable energy sources are two of the many facets of environmental sustainability discussed in this study. In order to help solve environmental problems, it delves into theoretical frameworks such as Systems Theory and Political Ecology. This study seeks a more sustainable future by analyzing global policy, looking at case studies, and identifying new trends.

Husein, Sabarina *et al.* (2024) ^[2]. This study examines Alan Weisman's "The World Without Us" and how it deals with environmental ethics and the problems caused by human interference with nature. The research delves into the moral implications of environmental deterioration by using a qualitative literature review approach, analyzing both primary and secondary sources. The results highlight the need of taking good care of our natural resources and protecting biodiversity, and they also show how environmental ethics play a key role in directing sustainable development policies. In conclusion, the essay stresses the need of a responsibility framework that incorporates environmental factors into decision-making, which in turn promotes sustainable development methods that put an emphasis on social fairness, long-term well-being, and environmental health.

Joseph, Kurian *et al.* (2018) ^[3]. A procedure known as an environmental impact assessment (EIA) aims to show decision-makers what the probable outcomes of their actions will be. It is used all around the world as a preventative measure in environmental management to make sure that projects are sustainable, fair to society, and financially feasible. The four types of services provided by nature are

as follows: providing, which includes things like food, water, and fiber; regulating, which includes things like climate, water, and illness; cultural, which includes things like spirituality, aesthetics, leisure, and education; and supporting, which includes things like primary production and soil formation.

Islam, Md *et al.* (2024) ^[4]. This study delves into the roots of modern environmental issues and concludes that they stem from an anthropocentric viewpoint that sees nature just as a resource to be exploited by humans. Because of this way of thinking, natural resources have been depleted, biodiversity has been lost, and pollution has been rampant, leading to an ecological balance that cannot be sustained. To that end, the article proposes reestablishing peace between man and environment by using Arne Naess's "Deep Ecology" approach. All life has inherent worth, according to Deep Ecology, and people need to learn to live in harmony with the rest of the biosphere. In order to solve these problems, we must stop being so human-centered and start letting nature flourish without us.

Mishra, *et al.* (2016) ^[5]. An Examination of Environmental Concerns in Literature: Ecocriticism. Environmental issues have become more problematic in recent decades, endangering both human civilization and Mother Earth. Due to the massive depletion of natural resources, we are on the verge of disaster. Our ecosystem is in a precarious state due to the following: the rapid depletion of fossil fuels, the disruption of the seasonal cycle, the increasing frequency of ecological disasters on a global scale, and the clearance of rainforests. Ecocriticism, a new way of interpreting works about nature, emerged in the latter decade of the past century in response to these issues.

Ecological Degradation and Human Responsibility

One of the most important themes in environmental literature is the relationship between ecological deterioration and human responsibility. This topic captures the moral duties that come from human acts that affect natural ecosystems. The Drowned World, written by J. G. Ballard, eloquently tackles this issue head-on as its surviving human population faces the inevitable consequences of its technological and industrial excesses. As Ballard writes, "The solar disc was no longer a clear-cut spear but a small white hole lost in the changing spectra of light." This passage evokes a mix of wonder and subtle criticism as he portrays the bizarre, altered world. The world as it had been a few years before, so recent but already so far, was something he couldn't help but think about (The Drowned World, p. 32). In addition to highlighting the speed of ecological change, this remark alludes to the underlying remorse over the human actions that hastened these alterations.

Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* offers a different perspective on environmental deterioration; it follows a tiny Appalachian town as it deals with climate-related ecological disasters. The two narratives are compatible, however. Kingsolver delves into the intricate web of responsibility, spanning from personal deeds to society norms, via her heroine Dellarobia. "The familiar fantastic spectacle of November met her eyes," she writes. "Two million flying things taking off at once, illuminated by the sun from below, each one a brilliant, flickering star" (*Flight Behavior*, p. 28).

The changed migration route of the monarch butterfly is a symbol of the interrupted natural cycles that are a result of global warming. These repercussions are seen on a local and global scale.

In their stories, Ballard and Kingsolver both examine how people are contributing to environmental disasters. While Ballard presents a more resigned view of the consequences, Kingsolver offers a perspective that includes potential redemption through awareness and change. Each author, through his or her unique narrative lens, emphasizes the urgent need for human accountability in addressing ecological degradation, suggesting that survival may depend as much on cultural transformation as on scientific innovation.

Human Resilience and Adaptation to Nature's Transformations

Adaptation and human resilience in the face of environmental change is a common thread throughout the writings of those who study ecological narratives. In this version, nature goes through an enigmatic and permanent metamorphosis, transforming everything into crystalline formations; J. G. Ballard's *The Crystal World* offers a romantic but harsh view of this process. "The forest, instead of fading away into a dim tangle of trunks and underbrush, had come to a halt, each tree and vine fixed and rigid in a matrix of jeweled geometry" (*The Crystal World*, p. 23), writes Ballard, reflecting on human persistence in the face of such drastic changes. The protagonists face psychological and physical hurdles as they traverse a world where the familiar becomes unfamiliar due to this bizarre landscape transformation.

On the other hand, *Prodigal Summer* by Barbara Kingsolver presents adaptation in a more hopeful light, highlighting the possibility of people and their environment gaining from one another. In her work, Kingsolver paints a picture of a future where people learn from and work in harmony with nature, rather than fighting or giving in to it. An individual in the story reflects on the remarkable capacity of all living things to adapt: "Species co-evolve with the other species they eat, and very often a relationship of interdependence develops, leaving them not competitors but compatriots" (*Prodigal Summer*, p. 147). That includes humans. Kingsolver argues that in order for humans to be resilient, we need to learn from and become part of the ecological systems around us. This will create a mutually beneficial interaction between humans and the natural world.

Many facets of human adaptability to changing environments are shed light on by these viewpoints. Exploring the possibility of human survival in a world where nature itself undergoes radical change, Ballard's portrayal often takes an existential turn. Kingsolver, however, takes ecological resilience as her behavioral model of choice, arguing for a strategy that welcomes change by valuing and comprehending the natural world. Both writers provide insightful considerations of the ways in which humankind may respond to ecological shifts on a global scale.

Population

Global population growth has ecological consequences. Countries like India and Bangladesh will have a hard time

meeting their citizens' demands. The current state of affairs is being directly impacted by this need. Migrants and the high fertility rates in many developing countries are a major concern for environmentalists. The current rate of human migration is unprecedented. A large number of the migratory population sought better economic opportunities elsewhere. The ecology in every given area is negatively impacted by its population. Natural habitats are being encroached upon as a result of the exponential growth in human population. There are several issues that arise as a result of population increase, including land pressure, soil and land degradation, habitat destruction, air pollution, deforestation, and loss of biodiversity. Reducing human population, according to deep ecologists, would slow Earth's deterioration.

The impact of human migration and population growth on natural ecosystems is a recurring theme in Amitav Ghosh's fiction. When Kanai leisurely descended from Canning's perch in *The Hungry Tide*. He surveyed the whole station. The current state of affairs was like a scene from a thirty-year-old film, he said. The first time he had visited here, thirty years ago, he recalled the hanging. Looking around at all the people shocked him. The reaction that Nilima provides is crucial in this case. This indicates that the Canning population has grown. A habitat for animals was taken from them by humans. As a result, there were assaults on both people and animals. Tigers and crocodiles, for example, turned into man-eaters as a result of the jungle's population boom. The only way to know that forests are deserted is from movies, she said.

There are densely populated areas comparable to Kolkata Bazar in *The Hungry Tide*, and on some rivers, the number of boats exceeds that of the trucks on the Grand Trunk Road. The rising demands of meeting human needs are placing an ever-greater strain on the natural world. A monument to excess may be found on the banks of every big river, according to Nilima. "Port Canning is the mighty monument of Malta," she went on to say. The result was a shift in the way the Malta River flowed. Despite Basonti being the once simplest path to Lusibari, Nilima insisted that Kanai take the longer and more circuitous route via Canning. He recalled the Malta as an expansive river, one of the most intimidating stretches of water he had ever laid eyes on, until she said that the river had transformed. Now that the tide was out, the river out in the distance was little wider than a ditch as it wound its way down the middle of a bed that was a kilometer wide. As she introduces these items to Kanai, Nilima feels despondent. She feels strongly about the issue of population growth and its impact on the environment.

The Malta River, Canning, is home to this massive monument that is always bustling with visitors. He interprets it as a threat to the river and its ecosystem. He saw hundreds of commuters cross the river daily while standing on the bank and watching the boats. Nirmal, Kanai's uncle, was discovered in a state of madness just here, where Kanai is standing. The chant "Malta will rise! The Malta will rise" erupted from his lips as he stood there. This threat to the river was hinted to by Ghosh. The river's state may have been crystal clear to Nirmal. One or more of the following may be the cause: climate change, damage, or globalization. The message he was attempting to convey to the populace

was this. He had a better grasp of the situation than the other guys since he was a geology student.

The rising number of crabs has been well-mentioned by Ghosh. He expresses his fear that the environment of Tide Country is in jeopardy from the overcrowding of these species in a very courageous manner. Ghosh referred to them as the horrible hungers. The delicate boundaries of the Sunderban will be disturbed, according to Ghosh. Untold numbers of crabs are barrowing into our bandh, he says. Now consider: how much longer can these huge predators—the crabs, the tides, the winds, and the storms—withstand this flimsy barrier?

These issues were brought up by Ghosh in relation to the refugees. They are refugees from Bangladesh who have no place to call home in India. The events of Marichjhapi, in which the police opened fire on an island inhabited by thousands of civilians, followed immediately thereafter. The events of Marichjhapi are brought to light by Nilima, who is the widow of Nirmal. According to her,

In 1978 it happened that a great number of people suddenly appeared in Marichjhapi. In this place where there had been no inhabitants before there were now thousands, almost overnight. Within a matter of weeks, they had cleared the mangroves, built badhs and put up huts. It happened so quickly that in the beginning no one even knew who these people were. But in time it came to be learnt that they were refugees, originally from Bangladesh. Some had come to India after partition, while others had trickled over later. In Bangladesh they had been among the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes.

This tragedy had an impact on the life of animals and the Sunderban, and Ghosh discussed it throughout *The Hungry Tide*. This happened in the wake of the Indian subcontinent's division. India and East Pakistan were separated by this Sunderban forest. Muslims and Hindus alike were subjected to brutality by the ruling elite in East India, today known as Bangladesh. After taking refuge in India, they were subsequently sent to dandakanya in Madhya Pradesh. Amitav Ghosh's work is a fictionalization of the same scenario. In addition, the book discusses issues related to refugees, land, and animals. In order to rebuild society, he makes advantage of these occurrences. The Sunderban was never an option for these displaced people, who were forcibly removed from their homes and forced to live in a remote region of the Dandakanya forest as a result of partition. It was more like a jail at the resettlement camps where the government threw these people. Since they had grown up in the Sunderban, the land was very essential to them, and they had to live on Marichjhapi island in order to acquire it. Sheltered people on the islands construct houses, temples, schools, wells, pharmacies, salt pans, and more. It is clear that the migrants are capable and willing to keep fighting for their lives. The authorities then said that the refugee colony in Marichjhapi is unlawful and illegal. They are also informed that the settlement might disrupt natural balance and deplete forest resources.

According to Bookchin, social issues lead to environmental concerns. Sociologists like Ghosh have shown how society's hierarchical structure impacts the natural world. Ghosh uses the Marichjhapi event to try to show this point. According to Bookchin, gender, social status, and chronological age all

play a role in establishing social authority. People at the bottom of Ghosh's class structure are the ones who suffer the most from the torment he inflicts. The settlers are deprived of food and water by the police. They deliberately rebelled against nature and were brutally murdered and tortured by the police. They were slaughtered mercilessly. Ghosh, like Bookchin, stresses the concept of human dominance over nature.

Poverty and Environmental Racism

According to social ecologists, environmental racism is a social phenomenon that manifests itself in the form of environmental discrimination against economically and socially disadvantaged individuals. The appropriation of natural resources and the subjugation of vulnerable populations are intertwined in environmental racism. This prejudice disproportionately affects economically and politically disadvantaged communities. Their area's disposal of rubbish is directly related to their poverty. In several well-known cases, hazardous waste disproportionately affects already-vulnerable populations. Brnjamin Chavis created the phrase "environmental racism" first. The word is defined by him as

Racial discrimination in environmental policy making, the enforcement of regulations and laws, the deliberate targeting of communities of colour for toxic waste facilities, the official sanctioning of the life-threatening presence of poisons and pollutants in our communities and the history of excluding people of colour from leadership of the ecology movements (Environmental Racism).

Justice for the environment is advanced by environmental racism. Regional or state-level biases based on gender, ethnicity, caste, or socioeconomic status might give rise to such injustices. According to an alternative view, environmental racism stems from four places: low income, immobility, cheap land, and a lack of political influence. All of these elements are prominent in Amitav Ghosh's works.

The effects on community health are an essential facet of environmental racism. Chemical pollutants in waterways and landfills are just two of many potential sources of illness. The plight of the plantation coolies has been brought to light by Ghosh as well. The horrible working conditions they were subjected to have also been brought to our notice by him. The narrative of the dangerous working conditions brought environmental racism to light. These displaced workers are subjected to working circumstances that are harmful to the environment. For Sujatha, "Opium and India in Sea of Poppies: A Socio-Environmental Study" is all about ensuring a healthy and safe workplace. They shouldn't have to decide to work in such a dangerous setting. In a politicized setting, environmental injustice manifests as environmental racism. Locations of hazardous waste sites are strongly correlated with low-income minority neighborhoods.

Ghosh depicts the human condition in its most dreadful light in his writings. They have no incentive to do what they say they will do, so they are using power and force to make them do it. Both the mental and physical health of these imperial great forces are shown as poor. The coolies working on the plantation sites at The Glass Palace do not have access to food, housing, or other necessities. In order to satisfy their hunger, they put their lives on the line.

Food ran so short that the coolies had to forage in the jungle in order to fill their bellies. Nowhere was the forest richer than on the Morne, but rarely, if ever, did any one venture to climb those slopes-for the mountain was a place of sinister reputation, where hundreds, perhaps thousands of people were known to have died

Poverty forces humans into such a precarious ecological position. Environmental deterioration is a cause and result of poverty. People living in poverty sometimes have little choice but to rely on communal resources like forests, rivers, and meadows for their basic necessities.

Where Glass Meets Art As a means of subsistence, Raj Kumar, an orphan, works alongside Saya John. He began to consider his options for generating money from natural resources after learning about the hidden riches in teak woods from the British. For the rest of his life, he is occupied with class conflict as a result of his poverty. Soon after enlisting Saya John's assistance, Raj Kumar became the wealthiest man in Dhaka after cutting down thousands of trees and receiving a railway concession in his name. Class struggle describes this spiral into ever-deepening destitution.

The Glory of Bonbibi as an Ecological Philosophy

Here, eco-philosophy finds its application in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*. The tale of Bonbibi, which is widely believed in Sunderban, has been used by him. The Sunderbanese have faith that Bonbibi, goddess of the forest, would protect them from demons (tigers) and wipe out eco-haters. As long as she is among the forest's inhabitants, she will defend them. Despite her father Ibrahim's arrival to reunite with his family, she refused to leave Sunderban and has no plans to. Her parents want to return to the easy life they had left behind, having grown weary of the jungle's hardships. The bush remained a refuge for Bonbibi, nevertheless. She couldn't bring herself to leave her people since she felt betraying them. They were in dire need of her, as the brutality and torture visited upon them by Dakshin Ray and his henchmen had escalated. Her mother Gulab Bibi was finally leaving the woods, but she chooses to remain. While Shah Jongli was a twin, he had to choose between his sister and their family. Neither did he want for his parents to go without him, and he certainly did not wish to abandon her. At last he decided to remain behind, and the two of them made a solemn vow to shield everyone from Dakshin Ray's malicious schemes. Evil had befallen Dakshin Ray, a once-great emperor. He had a penchant for transforming into a tiger and consuming woodland dwellers who dared to harvest honey and lumber. For safety, the populace turned to Ma Bonbibi in prayer. Under a tree, under a stone, and even inside their dwellings, they erected little temples.

Bonbibi and her brother Shaha Jangoli are the heroes of this epic. Once upon a time, in the nation of eighteen tides, there lived a mighty demon king named Dokhin Rai. He had complete dominion over all the forest dwellers. He has an effect on every woodland creature. In the middle of the bush, he once heard a mysterious voice reciting the Muslim prayer, *azan*. At last he saw these two pious figures. Although he battled with them, Dokhin Rai was ultimately unsuccessful in his mission to drive these intruders from the bush. After her compassionate triumph, Bonbibi gave Dokhin Rai half of the tide land to keep as a wilderness.

Under her reign, this area was made safe for human habitation, and she took the remainder for herself. The country of eighteen tides was so served by the command. Prior to the intrusion of human avarice, everything was in order. This is the result of human avarice, a dark force that has upset the ecological equilibrium.

Amitav Ghosh illustrates the connection between humans and the natural world with an allegorical tale based on the famous Bonbibi fable. Dokhin Rai, a strong demon king, formerly ruled over the whole forest and all its inhabitants, including animals, grave robbers, ghosts, and evil spirits, in the jungle of eighteen tides. The inhabitants of the Sunderban, a region known as the tide country, have the belief that the goddess Bonbibi protects them from the tiger demon Dokhin Rai. According to, "...were he ever to find himself in trouble, he was to call on Bonbibi; she was the savior of the weak and a mother of mercy to the poor; she was sure to come to his aid." Because the concept of Dokhin Rai is so pervasive, many believe that leaving evidence of human invasion would bring about punishment from the demon. The peasants will refrain from gathering honey or firewood if they pee, defecate, or spit because of how strong it is. No amount of anti-littering legislation can quell the dread of a demon's wrath. Thus, did Bonbibi reveal the rule of the forest, according to Ghosh, "which was that the poor and righteous would be rewarded while the rich and greedy would be punished".

Conclusion

An extensive overview of Ecocritical theory's background and development is given in the first introductory study. Also included is a definition of "green study" and an overview of the development of ecocriticism in the United States and the United Kingdom. Following a thorough examination of the several definitions offered, the researcher has developed the idea of ecocriticism. It has also looked at the ways in which ecocriticism is different from other schools of thought. The researcher has also provided guidelines for using this method in literature reviews. To qualify as ecocritical work, one must meet certain criteria. The study concludes with a short biography of the author and details on the five books used in the research.

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