THE DYNAMICS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION AND THE STATUS AND CHALLENGES:THE EXPERIENCE OF INDIA DURING 2000-2020

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Abstract: It can unequivocally be said that the education of girls is a prime issue for the socio-economic development of Indian society. It is an acceptable argument that girls' education would ensure immense contribution in the field of their profession which would ultimately yield positive impact in the society. But, Girls have commonly been considered as the weaker section in terms of intellect, especially in the countries where gender disparity is a grievous concern. It is a plain fact that India has a patriarchal society in which most of the girls are unaware of the causes of unequal treatment because of the stereotype engraved prevailing psyche retained by the society. However, they are deprived of their rightful position in the society.

In the present study an attempt has been made to reveal out the trends of girls' education during the period, 2000-2020 at the national level. The objective is to diagnose the present status and the challenges towards their improvements. It is concluded with the fact that gender gaps in education cause a serious threat to the social development of the country. However, the present study is thoughtfully characterized on which an attempt has been explored for academic scrutiny.

Keywords: **Immense contribution, positive impact, gender disparity, unequal treatment, rightful position.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Education of girls is vital for the social, political and economic development of a country. A successful democracy is one where both boys and girls enjoy equal opportunities and are provided with an unbiased education. In fact, education is one of the milestones for women empowerment because it enables them to respond to the challenges and change their lifestyle (Bhat, 2015, p.188). However, girls' education is a global issue as girls are often neglected from the equality of opportunities in education.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report of the UNESCO in 2015, an estimated 481 million women (15 years and above) lack basic literacy skills, 64% of the total number of these are illiterate and the percentage is virtually unchanged since 2000 (EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2015, p.1).

Strikingly, education inequality is an issue that plagues most of the developing world. In the countries with gender disparity, the girls are the first to be left out of educational opportunities (Murphy, 2018, p.15). Countries in Africa, Middle East and South Asia are home to the widest gender gaps in enrollment. "In South Asia, the average net enrollment rate for girls at the primary level is about the same as for boys reflecting progress in primary education toward gender equality but in secondary education the average girls' enrollment is 86.5 percent of boys' net enrollment rate"(King and Winthrop, 2015, p. ix). India is a country in South Asia where gender gap in education is a prime issue.

The CABE Committee[1]in its Report on "Girls' Education and the Common School System" recorded a serious note of the shortage of schools for girls and it is further revealed that the number of boys' schools including co-educational schools are far outnumbered than girls' schools especially at the middle school level (CABE Committee, 2005, pp. 20-28). Mira Seth in her book "Women and Development - The Indian Experience", observed that education to girls is sometimes denied because she is needed to work and contribute to the family income. She has also pointed out that "if we add up programmes of literacy for females under formal elementary education, non-formal education and adult education, there still remains not only a big gender gap but also a big vacuum in girls' literacy"(Seth, 2001, pp.134-145).

The Human Development Report - 2009 recorded that during 1999-2007 in India, the adult literacy rate for female was 54.5% while males were at 76.9% (Human Development Report - 2009, p. 183). In the study on "Girls' Education in India: Status and Challenges", Sanjukta Sahoo put forward that education system in India, like many other social institutions, has long been discriminatory towards the women. She asserted that rural residence, low caste, low economic standing combined with traditional attitude towards girls' education are the factors that tended to deny opportunities of education to the girls (Sahoo, 2016, p.132). In a study on "Higher Education for Women in India---Choices

and Challenges", Nandita Singh asserted that the expansion of the educational system has been uneven and inadequate. There is a gender gap in the educational status of boys and girls and more so amongst the disadvantaged castes and tribes (Singh, 2008, p. 5).Looking ahead, in an article entitled, "Educational Disparities Among Girls in India", Jenna Cook has raised her concern about the educational disparities becoming a cyclical, intergenerational issue due to the low education of mothers (Cook, 2020, para.1).

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1. The Central Advisory Board of Education - the oldest and the most important advisory board of the Government of India in education, was first constituted in 1920 and dissolved in 1923 as a measure of economy. It was revived in 1935 and has been in existence ever since.

3.   OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It appears from the above that girls in the 21st century India still lag behind the boys in terms of education due to the lack of equal opportunities which is itself is a major setback for the country. In the present study, an attempt has been made to diagnose the present status and the challenges of girls in respect of their education. However, the objective is to reveal out the trends of girls' education during the period, 2000-2020. Hence, the research questions are: What is the present scenario of girls' education at the national level of India? And, what are the major challenges towards girls' education and gender equality?

4.   DATA ANALYSIS

The records at the national level depict that the school education system in India "is one of the largest in the world with more than 15 lakh schools, nearly 97 lakh teachers and nearly 26.5 crore students of pre-primary to higher secondary level from varied socio-economic backgrounds" (Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) - 2019-20, p. 9). In the present study, the data have been duly tabulated for boys and girls separately, so as to estimate the enrolment of both categories.

The Table 1.1 depicts the enrolment in school education and it displays clearly the gender gap in the enrolments over the years. Even though girls' enrolment rate at the different levels shows a growing trend during the years under reference, it is found comparatively lower than that of the boys. The Table (Table 1.1) demonstrates that girls' enrolment at the Primary Level was 44.2% in 1999-2000 and it is found 48.03% in 2011-12 with 3.83% growth over the years – in case of Upper Primary (Class VI-VIII), it is found 6.3% over the years. Strikingly, the rate of girl child enrolment at Secondary and Higher Secondary levels as it is demonstrated in the Table (1.1), is found remarkably low in 1999-2000 (39.24% and 37.50 respectively) when compared to the enrolment of boys (60.75% at Secondary level and 62.50% at Higher Secondary level). Notwithstanding the incremental trend of girls' enrolment, a wide ranging gender gap is found in 2011-12.

Table 1.1: Enrolment of School Education by Gender in India *(in million)*

Year	Class – I-V			Class – VI-VIII			Class – IX-X			Class – XI-XII		
	Boys	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**	**Boys**	**Girls**	**Total**
1999-2000	63.6 (55.98)	50.0 (44.2)	113.6 (100)	24.3 (58.83)	17.0 (41.16)	41.3 (100)	11.3 (60.75)	7.3 (39.24)	18.6 (100)	6.9 (62.50)	3.7 (37.50)	9.6 (100)
2000-01	64.0 (56.24)	49.8 (43.8)	113.8 (100)	25.3 (59.11)	17.5 (40.88)	42.8 (100)	11.6 (61.05)	7.4 (38.94)	19.0 (100)	6.1 (61.61)	3.8 (38.38)	9.9 (100)
2001-02	63.6 (55.83)	50.3 (44.16)	113.9 (100)	26.1 (58.25)	18.7 (41.74)	44.8 (100)	12.1 (60.50)	7.9 (39.50)	20 (100)	6.3 (60.00)	4.2 (40.00)	10.5 (100)
2002-03	65.1 (53.18)	57.3 (46.81)	122.4 (100)	26.3 (56.07)	20.6 (43.92)	46.9 (100)	12.8 (58.71)	9.0 (41.28)	21.8 (100)	6.7 (58.77)	4.7 (41.22)	11.4 (100)
2003-04	68.4 (53.31)	59.9 (46.68)	128.3 (100)	27.3 (55.94)	21.5 (44.05)	48.8 (100)	13.7 (58.79(	9.6 (41.20)	23.3 (100)	6.9 (58.97)	4.8 (41.02)	11.7 (100)
2004-05	69.7 (53.28)	61.1 (46.71)	130.8 (100)	28.5 (55.66)	22.7 (44.33)	51.2 (100)	14.2 (58.43)	10.1 (41.56)	24.3 (100)	7.5 (58.59)	5.3 (41.40)	12.8 (100)
2005-06	70.5 (53.36)	61.6 (46.63)	132.1 (100)	28.9 (55.36)	23.3 (44.63)	52.2 (100)	14.5 (58.00)	10.5 (42.00)	25.0 (100)	7.8 (58.20)	5.6 (41.79)	13.4 (100)
2006-07	71.1 (53.17	62.6 (46.82)	133.7 (100)	29.9 (54.86)	24.6 (45.13	54.5 (100)	14.9 (57.52)	11.0 (42.47)	25.9 (100)	8.1 (57.44)	6.0 (42.55)	14.1 (100)
2007-08	71.1 (52.47)	64.4 (47.52)	135.5 (100)	31.1 (54.27)	26.2 (45.72)	57.3 (100)	15.9 (56.38)	12.3 (43.61)	28.2 (100)	9.3 (57.05)	7.0 (42.94)	16.3 (100)
2008-09	70.6 (52.18)	64.7 (47.81)	135.3 (100)	31.4 (53.76)	27.0 (46.23)	58.4 (100)	16.5 (55.93)	13.0 (44.06)	29.5 (100)	9.5 (56.21)	7.4 (43.78)	16.9 (100)
2009-10	69.7 (52.17)	63.9 (47.82)	133.6 (100)	31.7 (53.27)	27.8 (46.72)	59.5 (100)	16.9 (55.04)	13.8 (44.95)	30.7 (100)	9.9 (55.61)	7.9 (44.38)	17.8 (100)
2010-11	70.1 (52.04)	64.6 (47.95)	134.7 (100)	32.7 (52.82)	29.2 (47.17)	61.9 (100)	17.5 (54.85)	14.3 (44.82)	31.9 (100)	10.9 (55.89)	8.6 (44.10)	19.5 (100)
2011-12	72.64 (51.92)	67.2 (48.03)	139.9 (100)	33.1 (52.53)	29.9 (47.46)	63.0 (100)	18.6 (54.54)	15.5 (45.45)	34.1 (100)	11.6 (55.23)	9.4 (44.76)	21.0 (100)

Note: Figures in the parentheses show percentage of enrolment.
Source: Statistics of School Education, 2011-12 (As on 30th September, 2011), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Bureau of Planning, Monitoring and Statistics, Government of India, 2014.

Table 1.2: Gross Enrolment Ratios of School Education by Gender in India: *(in per cent)*

Year	Primary			Upper Primary			Secondary		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
2013-14	106.5	107.9	107.2	85.0	88.6	86.7	74.2	73.5	73.8
2019-20	101.9	103.7	102.7	88.9	90.5	89.7	78.0	77.8	77.9
2020-21	102.2	104.5	103.3	91.6	92.7	92.2	80.1	79.5	79.8
2021-22	102.1	104.8	103.4	94.5	94.9	94.7	79.7	79.4	79.6

Source: Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) cited in **75-Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav,** Ministry of Finance, and Government of India.

But, the Table 1.2 shows improvements in Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) in schools which has reversed the overall trends of girls' enrolment in the preceding years under reference (Table 1.1). However, it correspondingly also recorded the improvements with regard to gender parity. It is observed that during the period, 2015-16 to 2019-20, the growth of female enrolment is recorded more when compared to boys - the number of female students has increased from 86% in 2015-16 to 96% in 2019-20 (AISHE, 2019-20, p.44).

However, the records of last few decades have experienced a sharp transformation of rate of literacy in the educational landscape of India. The statistical records have made it clear that in 2005, 79 per cent of males and 58 per cent of females aged seven and above 'could read and write a sentence.' (Desai, Dubey, Joshi, Sen, Sharif and Vanneman, 2010, p. 76). Even though the overall literacy rate has been increasing, girls' literacy is still less than that of the boys' rate of literacy (Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Literacy Rate of Male, Female and Persons at the National Level: *(in per cent)*

Years	Male	Female	Persons (Average)
1951	27.16%	8.86%	18.01%
1961	40.4%	15.30%	27.85%
1971	46.0%	22.00%	34.00%
1981	56.50%	29.85%	43.17%
1991	64.20%	39.19%	51.69%
2001	75.85%	54.16%	65.01%
2011	82.14%	65.46%	73.80%
2017	84.70%	70.30%	77.50%

Source: Registrar of Census, Provisional Population Table, and MHRD, Census 2011, and National Statistics Office Survey, 2017.

The Table 2.1 demonstrates that India's literacy rate has significantly improved over the past decades (1951-2017). The literacy rate of the country in 1951 was 18.01%, in 2017 it has escalated by 59.49 percentage points with the average literacy rate of 77.50% (males 84.70% and females 70.30% respectively). A striking feature is that the literacy rate registered an increment of 13.32% between 1991 and 2001 - remarkably the highest increment in any one decade. Another noteworthy feature is the increase of the female literacy rate by 14.97% in the 1991-2001 decadal periods which is the highest increase in the literacy rate of females till now. The above Table (No. 2.1) also suggests that the growth of female literacy rate was considerably faster than that of the males during 1991-2017. When compared with Pakistan in respect of educational landscape, it is calculated that Pakistan's rate of progress has stagnated by 2011-2012 - the literacy rate had reached only 58%. This means 42% of the population was illiterate. There were significant gender disparities in the literacy rate of Pakistan - 48% male and 21% female in 1990-1991 which increased to 70% male and 47% female in 2011-2012. However, the records show similar gender disparities (Azeem and Ismat, 2016, p. 651). However, it is observed that India's female literacy rate is increasing substantially faster than the neighbor country. Notwithstanding, the female literacy rate is recorded the lowest increase during 2011-2017 (4.84%).

Table 2.2: State/UT Wise Literacy Rate in India (All categories) during 2001-2017

States/UTs	2001			2011			2017		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	86.33%	75.24%	81.30%	90..01%	81.80%	86.30%	NA	NA	NA
Andhra Pradesh	70.32%	50.43%	60.47%	74.08%	60.00%	67.40%	73.40%	59.50%	66.40%
Arunachal Pradesh	63.83%	43.53%	54.34%	73.07%	59.60%	67.00%	NA	NA	NA
Assam	71.28%	54.61%	63.25%	78.80%	67.30%	73.20%	90.10%	81.20%	85.90%
Bihar	59.68%	33.12%	47.00%	73.50%	53.30%	63.80%	79.70%	60.50%	70.90%
Chandigarh	86.14%	76.47%	81.94%	90.05%	81.40%	86.40%	NA	NA	NA
Chhattisgarh	75.70%	55.73%	64.66%	81.50%	60.60%	71.00%	85.40%	68.80%	77.30%
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	71.18%	40.23%	57.63%	86.50%	65.90%	77.70%	NA	NA	NA
Daman & Diu	86.76%	65.61%	78.18%	91.50%	79.60%	87.10%	NA	NA	NA
Delhi	87.33%	74.71%	81.67%	91.00%	80.90%	86.30%	93.70%	82.40%	88.05%
Goa	88.42%	75.37%	82.01%	92.80%	81.80%	87.40%	NA	NA	NA
Gujarat	79.66%	57.80%	69.14%	87.20%	70.70%	79.30%	89.50%	74.80%	82.40%
Haryana	78.49%	55.73%	67.91%	85.40%	66.80%	76.60%	88.80%	71.30%	80.40%
Himachal Pradesh	85.35%	65.61%	76.48%	90.80%	76.60%	83.80%	92.90%	80.50%	86.60%
Jammu & Kashmir	66.60%	43.00%	55.52%	78.30%	58.00%	68.70%	85.70%	68.00%	77.30%
Jharkhand	67.30%	38.87%	53.56%	78.50%	56.20%	6760%	83.00%	64.70%	74.30%
Karnataka	76.10%	56.87%	66.64%	82.80%	68.10%	75.60%	83.40%	70.50%	77.20%
Kerala	94.20%	87.86%	90.92%	96.00%	92.00%	93.90%	97.50%	95.20%	96.20%
Lakshadweep	92.53%	80.47%	86.66%	96.10%	88.20%	92.30%	NA	NA	NA
Madhya Pradesh	76.06%	50.29%	63.74%	80.50%	60.00%	70.60%	81.20%	65.50%	73.70%
Maharashtra	85.97%	67.03%	76.88%	89.80%	75..50%	82.90%	90.70%	78.40%	84.80%
Manipur	75.71%	57.29%	66.61%	86.50%	73.20%	79.80%	NA	NA	NA
Meghalaya	65.43%	59.61%	62.56%	77.20%	73.80%	75.50%	NA	NA	NA
Mizoram	90.72%	86.75%	88.80%	93.70%	89.40%	91.60%	NA	NA	NA
Nagaland	71.16%	61.46%	66.59%	83.30%	76.70%	80.10%	NA	NA	NA
Odisha	75.35%	50.51%	63.08%	82.40%	64.40%	73.50%	84.00%	70.30%	77.30%
Puducherry	88.62%	73.90%	81.24%	92.10%	81.20%	86.50%	NA	NA	NA
Punjab	75.23%	63.36%	69.65%	81.50%	71.30%	76.70%	88.50%	78.50%	83.70%
Rajasthan	75.70%	43.84%	60.41%	80.50%	52.70%	67.10%	80.80%	57.60%	69.70%
Sikkim	76.04%	60.41%	68.81%	87.30%	76.40%	82.20%	NA	NA	NA

Tamil Nadu	82.42%	64.43%	73.45%	86.80%	73.90%	80..30%	87.90%	77.90%	82.90%
Tripura	81.02%	64.91%	73.19%	92.20%	83.10%	87.80%	NA	NA	NA
Uttar Pradesh	68.82%	42.22%	56.27%	79.20%	59.30%	69.70%	81.80%	63.40%	73.00%
Uttarakhand	83.28%	59.63%	71.62%	88.30%	70.70%	79.60%	94.30%	80.70%	87.60%
West Bengal	77.02	59.61%	68.64%	82.70%	71.20%	77.10%	84.80%	76.10%	80.50%
Telangana	—	—	—	74.90%	57.93%	66.46%	80.50%	65.10%	72.80%
India	**75.85%**	**54.16%**	**65.38%**	**82.14%**	**65.46%**	**74.04%**	**84.70%**	**70.30%**	**77.70%**

Source: Office of the Registrar General, India, and Census 2011 and *National Statistics Office Survey 2017* (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Indian_states_and_union_territories_by_literacy_rate).

It is worth noting that the literacy level and the attainment of the goal of education are the vital indicators of human development as well as social development. In case of India, the rate of literary is recorded uneven. Hence, there are differences in literacy rates in different states and Union Territories of India. Besides, it is also a serious concern that female literacy rate is much lower than that of males in many states and Union Territories.

Table 2.2 under reference exhibits the State/UT wise literacy rates of India based on 2001 and 2011 Census. In 2001, Kerala had the highest literacy rates of 90.92% occupying top rank in both Male and Female literacy - 94.20% and 87.86% respectively. Surprisingly, as per the 2011 Census, Kerala was at the top with a total literacy rate of 93.90% along with the highest Male and Female literacy - 96.00% and 92.00% respectively. Whereas Bihar in 2001, recorded the lowest literacy rate of 47.00%, along with the lowest literacy rates for Male and Female - 59.68% and 33.12% respectively. As per the available data of 2017 furnished in the Table 2.2, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana and Madhya Pradesh are the bottom seven states in terms of Female literacy (57.60%, 59.50%, 60.50%, 63.40%, 64.70%, 65.10% and 65.50% respectively). On the contrary, as per NSS records of 2017, Kerala has the highest literacy rate of 96.20% with 97.50% Male literacy rate and 95.20% Female literacy rate.

As it is exhibited in the Table (2.2), it is evident that the Union Territory of Lakshadweep had the highest literacy rate of 86.66% with highest literacy rates for Male and Female at 92.53% and 80.47% in 2001. As per the 2011 Census, it again recorded the highest literacy rate of 92.30%, with Male and Female at the top slot among the Union Territories, i.e. 96.10% and 88.20% respectively.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the previous analyses, it is evident that the status of girls' education in the past two decades have shown significant improvement. It appears from the official data that the Gender Parity Index[2] increased from 0.41 in 1950-51 to 1.01 in 2011-12 in case of Primary Level (Classes I to V) and from 0.22 in 1950-51 to 0.99 in 2011-12 in case of Upper Primary Level (Classes VI to VIII). Moreover, for the classes IX to X, GPI was found 0.93 and for the classes XI to XII, it was 0.92 in 2011-12 (Statistics of School Education, 2011-12, pp. 3-4 & 60). The official records of 2019-20 also show that the Gender Parity Index has significantly increased to 1 and more at all levels of school education. The records show that the GPI has specially increased at both Secondary and Higher Secondary level when compared to the records of 2011-12. As per the records of Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) - 2019-20, the GPIs of Gross Enrolment Ratio at the Elementary (1-8), Secondary (9-10) and Higher Secondary (11-12) are 1.02, 1.00 and 1.04 respectively (Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) - 2019-20, op. cit. pp. 20 & 93). However, the Government of India has taken multiple measures for the improvement of girls' education. The Government has regulated Acts like 'Prohibition of Child Marriage Act', 'Child Labour Act', 'Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005' and the Schemes like *'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao'*, 'Mahila Samakhya Programme', 'Swami Vivekananda Scholarship for Single Girl Child', *'Saakshar Bharat'[3]*, *'Udaan'*[4], and manifold of other programmes.

Notwithstanding, the issue of gender gap in education in India does not end. According to the Global Gender Gap Report - 2022, India ranks 135 out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2022. (World Economic Forum, 2022, p.10).The report says "it will now take 132 years to reach gender parity, with the gap reducing only by four years since 2021 and the gender gap closed by 68.1%. But this does not compensate for the generational loss between 2020 and 2021 as the trends leading up to 2020 showed that the gender gap was set to close within 100 years (The Hindu, 14th July, 2022). The girls in India have to face great challenges towards their education in their day-to-day life. SanjuktaSahoo identified the factors, like low caste, poor economic condition, negative parental attitude, rural residence etc. (Sahoo, op. cit. 132). Moreover, superstitions and backdated opinions about girls' education only add up more to the issue. In our present study it is revealed that a wide ranging gender gap is found in 2011-12 in terms of the enrolment of School Education. Likewise, the rate of girls' literacy is still less than that of the boys' rate of literacy. Alongside, in 2017, it is demonstrated that the girls are lagging behind boys with 14.4 % with wide ranging gender disparity (Table 2.1).Further, more strikingly, the records of Table 2.2 demonstrate that quite a large number of states are still the bottom states in terms of Female literacy.

To conclude, while the school enrolment and the rate of literacy have increased rapidly and caused for jubilation in India, the status of girls' education even during the period 2000-2020 has shown almost an irreversible scenario with wide ranging gender disparity. In addition to this, some varied educational indicators with regional disparities are quite striking. While Kerala recorded 95.20% Female literacy rate, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar (57.60%, 59.50%, 60.50% respectively) remain far behind as per records of 2017. These prevailing issues in Indian society may ultimately pose a serious threat for the country's development and overall global standing. Hence, it is

imperative to level up girls' education for building up an unbiased structure of society which will lead to mutual understanding and the growth of the country. However, 'much more needs to be done' with an unbiased policy measures "ushered in first by the committed leaderships with very special qualities" (Mia, Yasin and Yasmin, 2007, p.747).

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2. Gender Parity Index (GPI) is the ratio of the female GER to male GER. GPI denotes that a GPI of 1 indicates parity between sexes.
3. *Saakshar Bharat* is a Government of India initiative launched by Dr. Manmohan Singh, former Prime Minister of India to create a literate society through a variety of teaching-learning programmes for the non-literate and neo-literate of 15 years and above. It was launched on 8th September, 2009 as a centrally sponsored scheme.
4. *Udaan* is a project launched by Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) under the guidance of the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India to address the low enrolment of girl students in prestigious engineering institutions and the teaching gap between the school education and engineering entrance examination.

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