

The Advent of Dogras Rule in Kashmir and Initial Approach to Agriculture

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Abstract

Maharaja Gulab Singh built up the State of Jammu and Kashmir on the ruins of the Sikh Kingdom. The Kashmir valley came under Gulab Singh with the ominous terms of the treaty of Amritsar signed between the British and Maharajah Gulab Singh of Jammu in 16 March 1846. He worked very hard to acquire territory and he succeeded in consolidating his gains. He got handed down the system of the government from the Sikh governor, Sheikh-Imam-ud-din. Good or bad he taken the administrative system and he customized it here and there to safe his own ends. The few reforms that he introduced to recognize the shawl industry, He recognized the revenue and police administration of the valley into four wazarats or districts. Experienced and trusted law officials were placed incharge of key department like the Audits and Accounts, the Dagshawl, commissariate and police. The Maharaja in order to relieve the peasants of serious injustice undertook the reform of the beggar system. An officer was appointed to take charge of this work. Another important reform undertaken by the Maharaja was the rationing of rice in the valley (Kashmir). Owing to its extreme inaccessibility and the undoable difficulties of weighty transport, was always liable to sudden famines owing either to failure of the rice crops or the cornering of the grain market. In order to meet this situation the Maharaja established a rigid monopoly of rice and had it sold at a fixed price to the people.

Keywords: Kashmir; Gulab Singh; Forced labour; Shawl industry; Agriculture products

Introduction

The State of Jammu and Kashmir is composed of a number of ethnic and cultural regions viz., the Hindu majority province, the primary Buddhist Ladakh majority province, and the Muslim Majority Kashmir province. The Kashmir valley came under the Dogra rule with the ominous terms of the treaty of Amritsar signed between the British and Maharajah Gulab Singh of Jammu in 16 March 1846 [1], the British Government transferred and made over, forever in independent possession, to Maharaja Gulab Singh and the heirs male of his body, all the hilly and mountainous country, with its dependencies, situated to the eastward of the river Indus and westward of the river Ravi, including Chamba and excluding Lahore, being of the territories ceded to the British Government by the Lahore state. In consideration of this transfer, Maharaja was to pay 75,00,00 lacks of rupees and “to present annually to the British Government one horse, twelve perfect shawl goat of approved breed (six male and six female) and three pairs of Kashmir shawls [2].” According to the Article X of the treaty of Amritsar, Maharaja Gulab Singh was a vassal of the British and in acknowledge of their supremacy had to pay a token tribute of the British Empire. He had to join with the whole of his military force the British troops when employed within the hills or the territories adjoining his, possession and on their part British Government pledged to give help and give aid to Maharaja Gulab Singh in protecting his territories from the external enemies.” That was the treaty of Amritsar and that is how Kashmir came under its present Dogra rule [2]. The agreement between British and Maharaja Gulab Singh; the peoples interest was not at all taken into consideration. In the words of the Chrispother Thomas “the people never asked for it, never wanted it, and never loved it” [3].

Their fields, their crops, their streams

Even the peasants in the vale

They sold, they sold all, alas!

How cheap was the sale.

---Muhammad Iqbal [4].

Treaty of Amritsar gave Gulab Singh the title deeds to Kashmir, but the actual position had bet to be taken. As Huttenback observes, “the final act of the Drama was to be played in Kashmir itself; Gulab Singh still had to defeat the Sikh Governor, who was unwilling to surrender the province” [2]. With the help of a small force lent by the East India Company, defeated out the Sikh governor, Sheikh Imam-ud din from the province and took possession of it, after subduing the Sikh Governor Sheikh Imam-ud-din who opposes Gulab Singh’s take-over, with the help of British troops. Maharaja Gulab Singh was able to get the actual possession in the state only in November 9, 1846 [5].

In this way Kashmir came into the hands of Maharaja Gulab Singh. He was already the master of Jammu. Ladakh and Baltistan had also been earlier conquered for him by his General Zorawar Singh (1835-40). After taking the possession of Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh occupied Gilgit as well. Thus he founded the modern state of Jammu and Kashmir [6]. The valley of Kashmir, as it was officially designated now, different from other states, it was totally independent in its internal affairs. Gulab Sing consolidating his rule in Kashmir. But he had hardly any time left for sitting up an administration, though he makes a few changes. Gulab Singh’s first problem was to suppress local crime ruthlessly and ordering public execution to deter offenders, and to maintain law and order with a stern hand [7]. He was administering both finance and executive by his own scheme of things. He was attending court himself and by his wisdom and policy was deciding the matter in one session without discussion and witnesses. He believed in object lessons. He also firmly repulsed the invading Khakhas and Bombas tribe, who were professionally dacoits and looters (local hill

tribe) and installed strong garrisons in the forts guarding the passes into the valley. Order was restored every part of the country and every efforts were made to render trade and commerce safe for all. The result was immediately visible. Nicholson notes as follows in his Diary on the 19th November 1847.

Had some conversation with party of Kabul merchants taking tobacco and snuff to Kashmir whence they intend returned with pattoo and tosh, which last fetches a very high price in Kabul. They complained of the oppressive duties in their own and Maharaja Gulab Singh's territories but remarked that in the latter their goods were protected whereas they frequently ran great risk from the plundering tribes between Kabul and Peshawar.

The economy of the state was agrarian, land being the main source of employment and livelihood for the people. When the Maharaja Gulab Singh annexed the Kashmir he did not interfere with the system of land ownership and land-tenure in the state which prevailed during the Sikh rule. The ownership of land was in the hands of state. A large part of it was held in the form of jagir grants by the grantee known as jagirdars. During the later period of Sikh rule, large tracts of land were granted to jagirdars in the Kashmir province. The land which was not held under jagirdars was held by tenants from the state, which tilled the land for the state and paid rent in the form of revenue.

Maharaja Gulab Singh when he came to the thorn of Jammu and Kashmir in A.D 1848. He had to contend with evils which had taken a deep root by influx of time and had to deal with administrative problems which required gifts of statesmanship, organizing capacity, fore-sight and liberal attitude of mind. Fortunately, these qualities were present in an abundant measure in the new ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Gulab Singh. A careful enquiry succeeded in furnishing evidence which justified a restoration of the damage that had been done by the last two Sikh governors [8]. The civil administration of the state was assumed by the Gulab Singh himself, who exercised his administrative powers through a council of courtiers. Most of the courtiers were called Dewans and were Ministers who enjoyed varied importance at the court. The court was presided over by the Maharaja himself, but the council was headed by the minister who was chief Minister of the ruler [9].

Dogras Rule and Approach to Agriculture

Maharaja Gulab Singh spent most of his time in consolidating and expanding his political boundaries but at the same time he took some initiative to improve the land system. He could not succeed in his efforts mainly because illiteracy, arbitrariness and corrupt revenue staff. However, he was able to improve the conditions of peasants by regulating various processes of assessment and revenue collection.

The Maharaja Gulab Singh's period (A.D 1846-1857) the Sikh procedure was followed, but some slight relaxation were made in respect of the newly-broken land (Nau-tor) for large areas were laying waste which the ruler wanted speedily to be reclaimed [10]. His highness was found of horses and a number of grass-rakhs were reserved for cultivation [11]. Maharaja Gulab Singh improves the land department, because the modes of getting control of the revenue were

however not exhausted. A very simple method was hit upon in the institution of a "trakiyat" or land improvement department. This was supposed to be department that was to work waste lands that nobody would take up by means of hired labor. It was most useful in conferring the management of small estates upon numerous needy pundits. Any bit of land could be transferred to this convenient department and made over to a friend to cultivate. Another plan was breaking up of the grass preserves of Maharaja Gulab Singh. These were fine lands under the management of pundits and they pay very little revenue. The "trakiyat" as a ready instrument for absorbing revenue became too notorious and it had lately been abolished, and the patronage was directly to the tehsildars.

Maharaja Gulab Singh had directly or indirectly a complete monopoly of all the chief products of the county, such as saffron¹, wheat, shawl and iron manufactures, even walnuts did not escape him. He stores all the products at Gangungir on the Sindh River which was closed the Maharaja seal. News-writers, traders, travelers all unite in stigmatizing the maharaja conduct as avaricious and penurious in the extreme. The administration of Kashmir was continuing unfavorable picture.

Wheat was obtained in payment of revenue, and was informed that until the government stock was sold, the grain merchants throughout the country were prohibited from purchasing grains from anyone else. To prevent any infringement of this order, the government grains was sold out in small quantities to the grain dealers, and it was consequently impossible to obtain so much as one rupees worth of wheat in the city of Kashmir. Not more than five or six seers can be purchased at one time, and this was considered a great hardship by the middle classes, who had been accustomed to buy wheat sufficient for a month's consumption at one time. The government retains the right of fixing arbitrary markets rates. It seldom happens that the rice cultivators, from whom government takes a proportion of the produce than it does from to other subjects. Government had been permitted to retain enough food for whole year subsistence. They must buy it in the market through the nominal rate. Only 15 days consumption is permitted to be sold to house hold at one time, according to the number of resident in each house. The people who lived in towns of Kashmir that was non-agriculturists were in much alarm, even this allowance be withheld or diminished and complain loudly want of food. While the government seems afraid that by sanctioning unlimited purchases, the town's people might be enable to buy up grains and sell it at advanced rates, at the end of the season. Gulab Singh's system, which remained in place with minor changes until the late 19th century, allowed each Kashmiri a fixed amount of ration; if an individual wanted more than the designated amount, he had to get permission from the officers in-charge of the government store house.

High ranking revenue officials benefited from this system of grain distribution and could make profit without much difficulty. Since, the state fixed prices of commodities. Maharaja Gulab Singh² assumed the control, the present system of shali in large granaries in the city and selling it by retail through government officials³. But this system, the price of shali lower than the market demand for the product would

¹ The saffron was cultivated by the Maharaja himself. The saffron fields of Pampore carefully watched by the government thanadars. The soldiers had been employed to pick the saffron crops from the fields. Foreign Dept, 1848, op.cit., File No. 66-77.

² By the end of A.D 1947, the Company felt compelled to adopt a policy of direct interference by pressuring the Maharaja to initiate reforms. Early in June it asked the Kashmir government to reduce price on foodstuffs and to make available in market an abundant supply of rice. Satinder Singh Bawa, The Jammu Fox, op.cit., p: 168.

have warranted, the price of commodities such as Cotton and Mung were hiked to much more than the demand warranted.

In A.D 1852 the Dogra kingdom was divided into several provinces, including Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh, and Frontier illaqa or regions. The two provinces of Jammu and Kashmir were placed under the control of wazir or ministers whose position was analogous to that of provincial governors. The provincial governors attended the court of Maharaja⁴. These two provinces were divided into several parganas (district). The top official in each pargana were the zilahdars (district officer) the thanadar (police officer) was the chief officer of the each pargana. He had from 40 to 50 spays under him. His duty was maintain law and order to supervise the condition of crops and pass on this information to his tehsildar. Tehsildar has under him from two to five Territorial sub-divisions and he exercise a supervision over the accounts of the Kashmir's within his district. He has a power of punishment up to a fortnight in dispute and offences occurring within his tensile. He has from 200 to 400 spays under him [12]. The qanugo (revenue officer) these officials were responsible for peace and collection revenues in the area under their jurisdiction. Gulab Singh frequently toured the parganas, and dividing the latter part of his reign displayed special interest in the production of cotton, silk, saffron, chestnuts, tobacco and opium. Gulab Singh however, few concrete measures were taken to promote or expand these industries.

In each village Numbardars were appointed who were being called by the name of "Mokdams" (A village headman). Kashmir was separated into thirty six- parganas. One divisions of an organization was made come into existence separately for getting income in kind which was named as "doabjinsh" and was to be noted twice a year at the end of each harvest. It was the tax of Kardar to put a value on income at the time the years produce was ready. Gulab Singh had given teaching that time income of ten parganas near the great town was to be got money for at a fair rate. He allowed to zamindars to doing trade in rice when and where they liked. But they had under all condition to doing trade in it at a rate not higher than rupee one a Khirwar. Thus the moving of grain from one place to another was not let through by the Government. The Government order authorizing free moving end free exchange of goods for money of rice by the zamindars was gave out under the signature and keep from opening of Maharaja Gulab Singh himself.

Another department created by the Maharaja was Daftar-i-Dewani (Department of Dewani). The accounts belonging to each and every Department of the State were to be checked and audited by this office [13].

The third department was called Dafter-i-Nizamat (Land Record/ Office). It task was to keep land records throughout the state and to give details to the Maharaja about the condition of the zamindars at

the end of each harvest. Patwaris were sent to their separate village to get ready statements, giving in full the detail of daily.

The fourth department was set by the Maharaja was to support inside peace and to put to stop and put out of the way crime. Be comforted in object-lesson and his to do with punishment system was at any rate good in sending away the country of crime. He kept a sharp eye on his officials and a close hand on his revenues. Kotwals and thanedars were having all necessary things for the system of care for trade of living and property of the general people. The outcome of these measures was that no sooner crime against property Case occurred than the person taking property was made prisoner and the taken (property of another) property got loss back in law good [14]. The fifth department established by the Maharaja was treasury department which was separately put in charge of Dewan, while another dewan supervised the Maharaja's household and private toshkhana. Another Dewan headed the department of information. The troops remained under the directly under the Maharaja [9].

Dr. Honigberger represented to Maharaja Gulab Singh the suitability of the soil of the valley of Kashmir for the cultivation of beetroot, and was granted a monopoly for the establishment of a sugar factory, but the enterprise was never pursued. Later experiment, both in a private garden in Srinagar and in the sarkari bagh have led to the most promising results; in the former, beetroots were grown, weighting ten seers each, which were very rich in saccharine matter, yielding both sugar and alcohol of excellent quality. But this experiment, however, was made on a very small scale [15].

Maharaja Gulab Singh reign at the very outset⁵, all the matters involving the general administration, the land revenue system and the internal and external trade were submitted to him for his consideration, but he did not declare any structural change in the revenue administration. He appears to have more or less adhered to the Sikh system.

In order to do work on behalf of the Government, Maharaja realized that the system of forced labour (beggar) in vogue was harsh and required to be liberalized. No arrangements were made for the distribution of the beggar. The Sikh rules did not pay wages to bagar labours. Gulab Singh undertook the reforms of the labour system and appointed an officer whose job was to fix number of labours from every village to be do forced labour. Government issued order for serving the two times meals to them on the day of work [15]. Besides, one kharwar of grains every month from government stocks. Beggar performed services such as carrying loads of rations and other supplies to Gilgit for the state, or for foreign visitors on their journey around the valley [16].

³ Before the period of Maharaja Gulab Singh, the normal price of shali was about eight annas per kharwar, and that it varied with the harvests. During the famine of A.D 1831-33, the price rose greatly, and even after A.D 1833. It remained for some time as high as Rs. 11/2 per kharwar. A. Wingate, Preliminary Report of Settlement officer, op.cit., p: 17.

⁴ Jammu & Kashmir State Archives, File No. 1 of 1873, (Old English Records). In A.D 1852 for administrative purpose Maharaja Gulab Singh got the whole of the valley divided into seven divisions and tried to fallow British code but owing to the incompetent and illiterate Kashmir revenue this could not succeed. The immediate relief that the regular settlements provided to the people of Punjab appears to convince Gulab Singh of the necessity of introducing the British code. Baden Powell, Land System of British India, pp: 532-34.

⁵ Gulab Singh had come as vanquisher in Kashmir and he was determined to make his power to felt through his territorial acquisitions. He was blazing with the desire more and more wealth. He was extremely voracious and money was his religion. Gulab Singh had pay taxes heavily, it is true but he sucked the life blood of the people. They had laid violent hands on a large proportion of the fruits of the earth, the profit of the loom and the work of men's hands, but he skinned the very flints to fill his coffers. Lt. Col. Torrens, as quoted in Inside Kashmir, P.N.Bazaz, p. 37. see also Robert Thorp, Kashmir Misgovernment, Gulshan Publication Srinagar, Kashmir. 1980.

The shawl industry in Kashmir was so important⁶. The Government Department had been maintained for long to deal with it. In A.D 1846 the Maharaja Gulab Singh re-organized the department. The shawl department was carried one Controller, under him the Nukdee Karkhandars. These Nukdee Karkhandars or master of a factory is in general a man of property. The Shawl weaver's on the other hand, were dependent upon the Karkhandars and were virtually their slaves and were forced to work very hard.

Before A.D 1833, the duty of shawl was levied at 3 annas per rupees of value. Afterwards, Gulab Singh was to fall upon the artisans especially. He imposed heavy taxes on this industry and imposed other duties such as poll tax of Rs 47 per annum on each shawl weavers and he also charged an advalorem duty of 25 percent on each shawl. A tax of Rs. 96 per annum per shop was fixed and extended to 1000 shops. In the face of such oppression, the workers started fleeing from the Valley. Gulab Singh imposed tax on every shop at Rs. 120 per shop and Rs. 60 per annum for new shops [17]. In A.D 1846 the last Sikh Governor Sheikh Imam-ud-din gave them a little relief by setting the shawl weavers free from oppression of karkhanders and remitting two annas per Kharvar. This animated the industry and during Gulab Singh's rule there were 27,000 weavers working at 11,000 looms. But the wages paid to the workmen were also low [5]. For new shops Gulab Singh charged only half tax for first year. In A.D 1847, the karkhandars requested the Maharajah that there should be a yearly numbering of workmen that the Nazarana and Baj should be reduce, the wages of the labour should be fixed and that a settled Ayeen should be established for them. The other most important reform that the Maharaja introduced as soon as possible he arrived in Kashmir was, firstly abolition of the moult, by which the accounts were continued to the 14th month, and secondly, the cancellations of unnecessary taxes like the chuttinia [18].

After the increase of duty in A.D 1846 the workman struck work and about 400 shawl weavers set out for Lahore. Maharaja told them that their complaints would be enquired into if they returned to work. Gulab Singh called their leaders to meet him. The Maharaja enquired into their case in open darbar. In July A.D 1847, the Maharaja got alarmed and announced a new rules and system of control for the shawl department. Under this system, he abolished the system of indenture under which worked, and introduced a system of taxation by which the amount of tax was regulated in accordance with the price of shawl⁷. The minimum salary for the workmen was fixed at 4 annas in the rupees and tax being imposed on the finishing articles.

The great difficulty that the Maharaja experienced was with regards to jagir grants. There were no less than 3115 jagirs granted in dharmath and numerous alienations. A large number of them were

unregistered. The Sikh governors Sheikh Gulam Mohi-ud-din and Sheikh Imam-ud-din were extremely lavish in their grants, especially the latter, who for the sake of popularity signed away large facts of land at the end of the Sheikh regime. As soon as the Maharaja took change of his country he brings an inquiry of quo-warranto. The jagirdars and other grants were greatly agitated and complained that the Maharaja was resumed their ancient possession [19].

Tyler⁸, who conducted an independent enquiry, states that the Maharaja was inclined to be just and able. The point of Maharaja was that people who began as revenue farmers should not claim the land they held in forms to be jagir; that grants when made should be strictly adhered to; that grantees who were given one acre should not be allowed to possess two on the same sand, and that incases treason, rebellion and grass misbehavior the jagirs should be liable to resumption. Maharaja Gulab Singh had been assigned in free land grants to religious persons and other learned in the Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit languages. The substance of these persons whether they receive much or little depends solely on this provision. The presence of such people is an honor to a country.

Owing to his character for oppression and advarice. Gulab Singh was not a popular ruler, and the people did not well take in him, writes Younghouseband. But with the support of British government, he was finally able to make certain his rule over the Kashmir by the end of 1846 needing payment to the existence of Henry Lawrence [20]. Maharaja Gulab had only aims in life and these were zamin and zar. By his loyalty of the British, he had he had obtained the kingdom of Jammu, Kashmir, Baltistan and Ladakh. He was not satisfied with it. At the outset of his reign, he confiscated all the unregistered jagirs and declared that all land in his subjugated territories of Kashmir belonged to him and the owners of the tillers of land were simply tenants at will⁹. This was the first time in history of Kashmir that the Kashmir's people lost ownership of their own land. Maharaja Gulab Singh, in his first instance dispossessed peasants of all those propriety rights which the Kashmiri peasants enjoyed under the Mughals, Afghans and Sikhs without any interruption. In the new circumstances, to quoted, A. Wingate, the government became former, working with coolies under a management closely approximately forced labour. The peasants lost not only the propriety rights but the occupancy rights also. As mentioned above, it was only the Kashmiri peasants whose propriety rights were confiscated. The new law did not apply to Jammu peasants. He continued to enjoy propriety rights in land, because the Dogra rulers considered always Jammu as their home land and Kashmir as the conquered territory. The rights so seized were assumed by the Maharaja himself who partially transferred them to neo-class of intermediaries, mostly Hindu Rajputs, called jagirdars (assignees)

⁶ The shawl goads of Kashmir are well known. These goads were yearly manufacture and exported. Formally, these were 18000 workshops of shawl weavers in Kashmir. In consequence of the oppression of their rulers, many have migrated especially into the Punjab, so that about 6000 shops only remain. These shops give employed to 15000 workmen that was, at the rate of 21/2, to each shop two me work together and make one set. These 6000 shops prepare shawls of the first class, long and square, and the kind called jamawar. The latter is exported to Bokhara and Kharasan. The former chiefly exported to Bombay and England. The greatest price of long shawl was Rs. 1125 and the square one was Rs. 280.

⁷ Mirza Saif-ud-din to Montgomery Lawrence, 15 June 1847, VOL I. See also Annual Administrative Report of the Jammu and Kashmir, 1936, p: 20.

⁸ In A.D 1847 Taylor sahib came to Kashmir in inquiry into the conditions in Kashmir and to suggest reforms in the Maharaja's administration. For some time he studied the local laws and revenue regulation. He called a general darbar in the Maisuma grounds (at Srinagar), and in a very loud voice he inquired "O you, the people of Kashmir, are you happy with the Maharaja's rule or not? Some of the people who had been tutored by the Pandit Raj Dhar Kak (a high government official) shouted back, "yes, we are." When Taylor sahib heard this and he felt disgusted with the character of the people of Kashmir and went back to (British) India.

⁹ Hassnain FM. British Policy towards Kashmir (1846-1921). Sterling Publication, Pvt Ltd New Delhi p: 32.

muafidars (land holders exempted payment of revenue) and pattadars (rent receiver of piece of land) [21]. Gulab Singh's greed for money has earned him a low reputation, "with the customary offering of a rupee as Nazar," says Drew, "anyone could get Gulab Singh's ear, even in a crowd, one could catch his eye by holding upon a rupee and crying out "Maharaja arz hai" that is Maharaja's petition." He would pounce down like a hawk on the money, and having appropriated it, would patiently hear out the petition. Once a man, after this fashion making a complaint when the Maharaja was taking the rupee, closed his hands on it and said: "no, first hear that I have to say." Even this didn't go beyond Gulab Singh's patience. He waited till the fellow had told his tale and opened his hand. Then taking the money, he gave orders about the case [22].

The Maharaja oversaw the military department an organization which made up of well army, with the same energy and Interest as he did in the society-related the civil administration [23]. The efficiency, contentment, and training of his forces were always matter of deep concern to him. He increased his military power to 50,000 army on foot and military horsemen. He regularly oversaw the army, their arms and bedding, if any army man became ill; his disease was confirmed to the Maharaja. Without loss (waste) of time a physician was at once dispatched for his process end medical activities were supplied to him free of charge. Foundries and arsenals were established in the state. He repaired all the military buildings made strong against attack and deputed army in these military buildings made strong against attack. Hill taxes were put into order into regiments. In addition to, a general rule of behavior of a group of military teachings and orders was outlined up by him. He made the words of need in Sanskrit and his regiments were called by the name of Gobardhan sizeable military unit, the Raghunath sizeable military unit and Luchhman Regiment [24-26]. He was dependent on much on his Dogra army. The power to do of his army was taken by India and its adjoining States and his army turned good many a time in limit disputes of Gilgit frontier. As Gulab Singh was growing strong, he started a building in which goods are made in his state for producing arms and making connections [13].

Conclusion

The Kashmir valley came under the Dogra rule with the ominous terms of the treaty of Amritsar signed between the British and Maharajah Gulab Singh of Jammu in 16 March 1846. Gulab Singh consolidating his rule in Kashmir. But he had hardly any time left for sitting up an administration, though he makes a few changes. Maharaja Gulab Singh spent most of his time in consolidating and expanding his political boundaries but at the same time he took some initiative to improve the land system. He could not succeed in his efforts mainly because illiteracy, arbitrariness and corrupt revenue staff. However, he was able to improve the conditions of peasants by regulating various processes of assessment and revenue collection.

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