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**SUBJECT II**  
**CHANGING AGRARIAN RELATIONSHIPS IN RURAL AREAS**

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**Agrarian Relations in Tribal Areas of Andhra Pradesh : Are Conditions Brewing for a Heightened Tribal Land Alienation?**

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INTRODUCTION

Households belonging to Scheduled Tribes (STs) are widely reported to be getting alienated from the land under their possession (APARD, 2004a; Prabhu, 2002; Engineer, 2002; Prasad, 2002; Mander, 2002; Mohanty, 2001; Srinivas, 1995; Swaminathan and Chaudhary, 1995).<sup>1</sup> The paper seeks to examine if the economic and living conditions of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) households are such as to draw them into a situation where the forces and relations of production work to their disadvantage so as to result in the land under their control getting increasingly alienated from them.

First, the economic conditions of tribals can impact on the forces and relations of production and, therefore, on land alienation. If incomes to tribals from the land and non-land resources under their control are extremely meagre, besides being uncertain, they may have a deterrent effect on the release of the forces of production. For instance, plots of poor quality (APARD, 2004b; Rama Rao and Murty, 1980) may stifle tribals from using material inputs of adequate quantity, other than family labour, to effect substantial improvement in their yields. Low investment on the plots can perpetuate low yields. Under the circumstances, tribals may be compelled to borrow from the credit agencies they have easy access to – the traders and moneylenders - for meeting their production and consumption needs. The relations of production that get established between tribals and these lenders may be rooted in exploitation which may be all pervasive, as to encompass the markets for labour, crop output, forest produce and the lease market, besides the credit market and severe as to make tribals get steeped in debt. Indebtedness may culminate in tribals getting alienated from their land.

Second, the living conditions or more particularly the culture of tribals and the cash disposition it demands of them can impact on the forces and relations of production. For instance, unobtrusive sale of intoxicants brought from outside into

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The paper is based on a 'baseline survey' carried out by CESS, Hyderabad; for CARE, Visakhapatnam, as part of its 'Sustainable Tribal Empowerment Project (STEP)' among the tribal households of north coastal Andhra Pradesh. The author wishes to thank CARE for giving him permission to use the data. Thanks are also due to the members of the Expert Team of the Survey, N. Subba Reddy, S. Subrahmanyam, V. Saravanan, K. S. Babu and C. Durga.

tribal parts can ruin the tribals. In a situation where tribal culture does not quite look down upon the one taking intoxicants and even demands that they are served in rituals and ceremonies,<sup>2</sup> the free availability of intoxicants might work to bring them doom. But the data from the NSS for rural India indicate that the proportion of consumption expenditure on 'pan, tobacco and intoxicants' among tribals increased only marginally from 4.43 in 1983 to 4.57 in 1999-2000.

More important, however, is the monetisation of the tribal economy and its impact on the cash disposition of tribals. To the extent that tribals are now drawn more into the mainstream life in the era of globalisation, the traditional exchange relationships based in barter are on the decline. While the need for cash arises to procure both food and non-food items, it would be more so with respect to the latter. Between 1983 and 1999-2000 one finds an increase in the proportion of expenditure on non-food items among the tribals from 29.88 per cent to 37.91 per cent at the all-India level according to the NSS. If the living conditions of tribals shaped by tradition and culture make heavy demands on their earnings, they can impact on both the forces and relations of production, the culmination of which will be a change in the way the land is cultivated and distributed, the way the production is organised and the way the dominant few exploit the many tribals.

The stranglehold of the non-institutional sources of finance, mainly the non-tribal traders and moneylenders, over the tribal land may increase in phases. The lenders may first gain control over the land through the lease market before they completely divest tribals of their land. Thus, at the all-India level, the proportion of lessee households in tribal areas was higher among non-tribals at 13.1 per cent than among tribals at 9.3 per cent in the year 1988-89 – the corresponding percentages for Andhra Pradesh being 19.9 and 12.0. Besides, the observed correlation between the proportion of land leased-out under usufructuary mortgage and 'other terms' (usually rent-free as per NSS) and the proportion of ST population in 1991, in the states of the Central Tribal Belt ( $r = 0.88$ ) and in those where ST population was in excess of 10 per cent ( $r = 0.92$ )<sup>3</sup> cannot be dismissed as spurious for, it is plausible that the leases of these two types can be high in regions of tribal concentrations in the presence of restrictions over legal transfer of land.

#### DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The circumstances that could fuel tribal land alienation are noted above. During the course of our survey in the last quarter of 2003 among the tribal households in the 'tribal areas' of the four north coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, viz., Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari, we happened to assess these conditions as they were obtaining in the agricultural year 2002-03. From the description of the conditions detailed below, it is possible to gauge the threat they could pose to the tribals in their endeavour to retain possession of their land. Also, it is possible to view some of the conditions impacting on tribal land alienation in a dynamic context by drawing upon the data on the 'Life and Economy of Scheduled Tribes' in the 'tribal areas' of Andhra Pradesh available from the 44th Round of NSS

pertaining to the year 1988-89 (Government of India, 1994), and comparing them with our data for the year 2002-03. The intervening period between 1988-89 and 2002-03 had been marked by globalisation and it occasioned a tremendous increase in the connectivity of tribal areas of the region and also might have exacerbated the problem of tribal land alienation.

Our survey in the four north-coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh was carried out among a representative sample of 6,081 tribal households, comprising about 2.5 per cent in a total of about 240,000 tribal households of the region. About 30 households were selected from each of the 200 odd villages randomly selected from 16 of the 41 tribal mandals of the four districts, giving due representation to mandals with differential access.<sup>4</sup>

#### LAND TENURE PATTERN OF THE TRIBALS

The landless tribal households in the study region formed 31.38 per cent of the total tribal households (or those with owned land constituted 68.62 per cent) in 2002-03.<sup>5</sup> Besides, even those owning land were mostly small and marginal ones – those with 5 acres or less constituting 93.5 per cent of all households. The tribals were found to be in possession of three types of owned land – owned land with title, owned land without title and *podu* land without title (Table 1).

TABLE 1. DETAILS RELATING TO LAND TENURE OF SCHEDULED TRIBES IN TRIBAL AREAS OF ANDHRA PRADESH : 1988-89 AND 2002-03

Sl. No.	Details relating to land tenure	2002-03*	1988-89**
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
1.	Owned land	3.14	2.49
	Of which: Land with title	2.01	
	Land without title	0.33	
	<i>Podu</i> land	0.80	
2.	Leased-in land	0.15	0.10
	Of which: Land leased-in under usufructuary mortgage	0.09	0.00
	Land leased-in under other terms	0.06	0.10
3.	Leased-out land	0.16	0.07
	Of which: Land leased-out under usufructuary mortgage	0.11	0.00
	Land leased-out under other terms	0.05	0.07
4.	Operated land (1+2-3)	3.13	2.52
5.	Land leased-out as per cent of land owned	5.09	2.81
6.	Land leased-out under usufructuary mortgage as per cent of land owned	3.50	0.00
7.	Land leased-out under usufructuary mortgage as per cent of total land leased-out	68.75	0.00

\* Corresponds to the tribal areas of the districts of Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, Visakhapatnam and East Godavari in north coastal Andhra Pradesh.

\*\* NSS 44th Round data for Andhra Pradesh are based on the sample survey of tribal households drawn from the districts of 'Type 1 Strata' (tribal areas), comprising all the above four districts plus Nellore, Mahabubnagar, Adilabad, Warangal, Khammam, Nalgonda, West Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Prakasam, Ranga Reddy, Medak, Nizamabad and Karimnagar.

The land tenure pattern had been changing over time. The proportion of tribal households owning land, which was 90 per cent in the year 1988-89 came down to 68.62 per cent now (in 2002-03, the reference year of our survey) (Table 1) and the lease market had become more active over time. There was an increase in the proportion of owned land leased-out from 2.81 per cent to 5.09 per cent over the reference period. Another worrisome development over the years had been the emergence of the practice of leasing-out land under usufructuary mortgage. While leasing-out under this form was totally absent in 1988-89, now 3.50 of the total owned land or 68.75 per cent of the total land leased-out was under mortgage (Table 1).<sup>6</sup> Given the endemic poverty of the tribals, the land once mortgaged-out could ever remain so, or could even be sold once for all.

Of the total area devoted to cultivation, major share went to paddy (31.63 per cent), other cereals (33.39 per cent) and commercial crops (15.81 per cent). The productivity of land here was extremely low, as may be seen from the gross value of output (GVO) per acre. Income arising from different crops net of paid-out costs (net of Cost A2 – that is, paid-out costs plus the rent on the leased-in land) was as a rule less than Rs.1,000, and even when it exceeded the Rs. 1,000 mark, as in the case of fruits and vegetables and commercial crops, it was barely so. On an average the net income from cultivation in the study area was merely Rs.753 per acre or Rs.1,978 per household for the year 2002-03 (Table 2).

TABLE 2. DETAILS RELATING TO CROPS GROWN AND VALUE OF OUTPUT OF TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS: 2002-03

Crops grown	Per cent share of the crop in		GVO per acre of GCA (Rs.)	Net value of output per acre of GCA (Rs.)	Per cent share Cost A2 in GVO
	GCA	Gross value of output (GVO)			
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Paddy	31.63	35.38	1,369	825	39.7
Other cereals	33.39	21.45	776	491	36.7
Oilseeds	5.10	4.62	1,093	768	29.7
Plantation crops	4.15	1.36	395	112	71.6
Fruits/vegetables	3.58	5.19	1,754	1,029	41.3
Commercial crops	15.81	24.14	1,844	1,190	35.5
Pulses	6.34	7.42	1,415	937	33.8
Total cropped area	100.00	100.00	1,208	753	37.7

Notes: Area operated during the year 2002-03 = 19058 acres. Gross cropped area = 15974 acres. Land left fallow = 25.47 per cent of the operated area. Intensity of cropping = 83.82.

Rainfall in the districts of study was on an average 40 per cent less than the normal.

While not disregarding the impact of drought on the amount invested in land, one might have to accede that what was invested by the tribal cultivators, as seen from the proportion of Cost A2 in GVO was very much on the lower side. Cost of cultivation statistics of the CACP (Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices) show that, the share of Cost A2, was 53.5 per cent for paddy and about 76.9 per cent for other cereals in the year 2000-01 for Andhra Pradesh. For the tribal cultivators of the

region, the share of Cost A2 was merely 39.7 per cent for paddy and about 36.7 per cent for other cereals in the year 2002-03 (Table 3).

TABLE 3. DETAILS RELATING TO ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF INCOME TO TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS: 2002-03

Sl. No.	Source of income	Per cent of households reporting income from the source	Per cent share of net income from the source to total	Average annual net income per household from the source (Rs.)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
1.	Cultivation	81.84	20.42	1,978
2.	Agricultural labour	82.40	37.10	3,593
3.	Livestock and fishing	9.78	1.31	127
4.	Minor forest produce	36.70	4.08	395
5.	Casual labour in:			
	Non-agriculture	26.44	9.28	899
	Food-for-work programme	68.32	4.28	414
6.	Government service	13.47	18.94	1,835
7.	Private sector service	2.09	2.82	273
8.	Business	1.63	0.85	82
9.	Rent from leased-out land	0.82	0.25	25
10.	Others	1.04	0.67	65
11.	All	100.00	100.00	9,687

### *Employment and Income Avenues of the Tribals*

The activities that kept the tribals occupied during 2002-03 were mainly agricultural labour, cultivation, collection and sale of non-timber forest produce (NTFP), and, because of the drought proofing done by the government, the Food-for-Work Programme (FWP) (Table 3). Cultivation brought little income to the tribal households. Next, the limited rights enjoined upon the tribals to collect NTFP served only to occupy their time with no commensurate benefits. As large a proportion as 36.70 per cent of households reported to have occupied themselves in the collection and sale of NTFP during the year, but the occupation brought them only 4.08 per cent of the total income (Table 3). The monopoly character of the Girijan Co-operative Corporation (GCC), set up to guarantee remunerative prices to the tribals for their minor forest produce was increasingly put to test. The private traders and moneylenders were conniving to lure the tribals into selling their wares to them at prices much lower than those offered by the GCC.

From a linear multiple regression exercise carried out after allowing for differences in the access of the selected mandals, and those in the four districts, we come to the conclusion that unless the land base of the tribals is increased and/or the yield per acre raised and members of tribal households are made to go through the portals of education, their per capita net income would not increase. An increase in the worker-dependent ratio is also found to impact positively and significantly on the



net income. Dependence on the collection and sale of NTFP could only impact negatively on the income level under the present circumstances (Table 4).

TABLE 4. DETAILS RELATING TO THE STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE TRIBALS TO RAISE INCOME TO SUSTAIN THEMSELVES IN THE DROUGHT OF 2002-03

Survival strategy	Per cent of households resorting to the strategy to total households	Per cent share of the amount raised through the strategy	Amount raised per sample household (Rs.)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sold land	0.69	22.1	4.92
Sold livestock	6.05	7.3	1.62
Sold jewellery	1.91	22.1	4.92
Used up past savings	14.24	4.4	0.98
Mortgaged land	5.11	19.2	4.26
Resorted to borrowings	46.59	10.5	2.33
Migrated for work	5.30	8.2	1.83
Mortgaged ration card	0.18	0.7	0.16
Sold household items	0.11	2.1	0.46
Others	0.25	3.4	0.77
All	80.43*	100.0	22.25

\* Involves double counting. The percentage is arrived at including households resorting to more than one survival strategy and can provide only a rough estimate of the households in distress.

The annual income derived by the tribals from all sources in 2002-03 was merely Rs. 9,687 on an average per household or Rs. 174 per capita per month. Needless to say, this is far below the income level necessary to cross the normatively determined poverty line of Rs. 283.04 per capita per month for the year 2002-03 (This poverty line corresponds to the state specific official poverty line of Rs 263.94 for the year 1999-2000). The poor in the study region formed 90.5 per cent of all tribal households in the year. This is much higher than the estimate of 66.0 per cent for 1988-89 for the tribals in the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh as reported by the NSS. If we estimate poverty among the tribals of the region, on the assumption that both their cultivation and agricultural labour incomes would be higher in a normal year, taking the output of foodgrains as the norm (the foodgrain output was on an average 77.93 per cent of the normal in 2002-03 in the four districts under study), it would work out to 65.7 per cent. Poverty of this magnitude cannot but force the tribals into mortgaging-out or selling their land.

As the tribals were drawn more and more into the money economy, the age old practice of their dependence on cereals, other than rice, for consumption was assuming less and less priority. The tribals were now steadfast about procuring rice from the Public Distribution System (PDS). They were so religious about visiting the fair price shops trekking long distances that they did not mind sacrificing a day's work to do so. Even as the tribals' latent liking for rice was changing their cash disposition, they were also compelled to buy items that they could do without from the PDS.

Poverty, coupled with the changes in the habits of cash disposition, was culminating in the tribals making little investment in land. This was only

exacerbating the problem of low productivity on their lands. And one bad year, such as the one they encountered in 2002-03, was enough to ruin their economy irreparably. To cope with poverty, the tribals resorted to strategies of various hues to raise cash (apart from satiating their hunger by eating roots and tubers available in the forest). The households resorting to borrowings during the year formed 46.59 per cent of the total. Besides, 42 households (or 0.69 per cent of the total households or 1.01 per cent of owners) resorted to sale of land. Also, as many as 311 (or 5.11 per cent of the total households or 7.45 of owners) households mortgaged-out their land (Table 4) and, thereby, got exposed to the threat of land alienation.

### *Indebtedness Among the Tribal Households*

The tribal households having outstanding dues formed about 66 per cent of all households. Those having outstanding dues to moneylenders formed 22.13 per cent and to traders 8.98 per cent. These two informal and often tied sources of credit between them accounted for as much as 40.83 per cent of the total outstanding loans as on date of survey in the last quarter of 2003. Of the total, the dues owed to the institutional agencies constituted 34.17 per cent and the rest 65.83 per cent were due to the non-institutional agencies (Table 5).

TABLE 5. DETAILS RELATING TO OUTSTANDING DUES OF THE TRIBAL HOUSEHOLDS BY CREDIT AGENCY IN ANDHRA PRADESH: 1988-89 AND 2002-03

Sl. No.	Source of borrowing	Per cent of households reporting dues to the agency to total households		Per cent share of the amount due to agency in the total amount due		Average amount due per sample household in 2002-03 (Rs.)
		1988-89	2002-03	1988-89	2002-03	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	All institutional agencies	11.1	19.55	23.9	34.17	763
1.	Moneylenders: Tribal	9.3	22.13	17.0	30.46	680
	Moneylenders: Non-tribal	15.6		48.6		
2.	Traders	2.6	8.98	3.3	10.35	231
3.	Friends	1.8	3.85	2.2	4.43	99
4.	Relatives		12.51		11.67	260
5.	Landlords	2.8	1.32	21.5	2.39	53
6.	others	1.4	2.25	2.5	6.54	146
	All non-institutional agencies	31.5	47.06	76.1	65.83	1,470
	All agencies	40.1	66.61*	100.0	100.00	2,232

\* Involves double counting. The percentage is arrived at including households borrowing from both institutional and non-institutional agencies and can provide only a rough estimate of the households reporting dues to any agency.

Over time, the percentage of tribal households with dues both to institutional and non-institutional agencies had increased. One silver lining in this otherwise gloomy situation is that the low-interest bearing outstanding loans of the institutional agencies now constituted a larger share than in the past – they formed 34.17 per cent of the total dues now, compared to 23.9 per cent in 1988-89 (Table 5). Self-Help Groups



(SHGs) have of late emerged as important formal sources of finance with 6.80 per cent of the households reporting dues to the tune of 5.5 per cent from them. It is, however, worrisome that as high as 74.10 per cent of the loans outstanding were contracted at interest rates in excess of 18 per cent in 2002-03. Dues bearing interest rates in excess of 36 per cent formed 35.5 per cent of the total in the year. Looking back, in the year 1988-89, outstanding loans carrying interest rates above 18 per cent accounted for 77.6 per cent of the total. Thus, there had not been much of a change over time in the proportion of loans contracted at high rates of interest.

There is a clear sign that loans contracted for 'productive purposes' had been on the decline and those taken for 'non-productive purposes' were on the increase between 1988-89 and 2002-03. It bears emphasis that contrary to the generally held notion that tribals are driven into financial difficulties because of their inability to break free from their extravagance in ceremonies, we find that only 5.07 per cent of their dues were due to ceremonial expenditure in 2002-03. As of 1988-89, the indulgence of the tribals in ceremonies was responsible for a much higher proportion of outstanding dues at 10.7 per cent (Table 6).

TABLE 6. DETAILS RELATING TO HOUSEHOLDS REPORTING OUTSTANDING LOANS AND THE AMOUNT OUTSTANDING BY THE PURPOSE FOR WHICH THEY WERE BORROWED FOR SCHEDULED TRIBES IN TRIBAL AREAS OF ANDHRA PRADESH : 1988-89 AND 2002-03

Sl. No.	Purpose of loan	Per cent of households reporting dues incurred for the purpose to total households		Per cent of dues incurred for the purpose to total dues		Amount due per sample household in 2002-03 by purpose (Rs.)
		1988-89	2002-03	1988-89	2002-03	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Productive purposes	18.5	17.86	48.2	28.26	630
1.	Ceremonial expenditure	4.3	3.29	10.7	5.07	113
2.	Repayment of old debts	0.9	0.33	1.2	0.56	12
3.	Health expenditure	n.r.	4.31	n.r.	5.36	120
4.	Children's education	n.r.	2.01	n.r.	2.64	59
5.	Consumption	n.r.	43.73	n.r.	57.08	1,275
6.	Others	17.7	0.73		1.02	23
	Non-productive purposes	22.8	54.40*	51.8	71.73*	1,602*
	All purposes	40.1	67.42	100.0	100.00	2,232

n.r. = not reported. \* The figures are arrived at including the expenditure on health and education also.

#### CONCLUSIONS

Notwithstanding the legislative provisions to safeguard their landed interests, tribals are getting driven to circumstances in which retaining hold over the land under their possession is becoming difficult. The quality of land held by them is so poor that, in its present form, it cannot promise them any reasonable returns. The low returns leave little surplus for tribals to plough it back into agriculture to improve the quality of the land. Their incomes from other sources are also meagre to consider using them to effect sustainable improvement in land productivity. The right enjoined by tribals to collect and sell NTFP serves only to occupy their time with no

commensurate benefits. Poverty has, therefore, become endemic among tribals. To cope with penury and hunger, in the context of an increase in their pecuniary needs because of the hastened process of their mainstreaming in recent times, the tribals are found resorting to borrowings both for productive and not-so-productive purposes from the agencies they have ready access to and those that charge usurious interest rates – the traders and moneylenders. These conditions seem to be shaping the agrarian relations between the tribals and their extortionate lenders more and more to serve the interests of the latter at the cost of the former. As a rule the lenders are engaging their tribal-borrowers in unequal exchange relationships that are increasingly culminating in the tribals getting dispossessed of their land, first, through usufructuary mortgage and, subsequently, through some dubious but permanent transfer of ownership rights.

Hope for arresting tribal land alienation lies in making the SHGs a major source of credit to reckon with, to reduce the reliance of tribals on informal lending agencies; in conferring ownership rights on land held by tribals without title, to induce them into making earnest effort on their part to improve its productivity; and in the government channelling material and men to improve the productivity of the tribal land<sup>7</sup> and to see tribals at least through local schools.

#### NOTES

1. For instance, in 2003-04, land transfer cases that were detected to be in contravention of the AP Land Transfer Regulation in Scheduled Areas, 1970 (as amended in 1978) involved an extent of 329,961 acres and of this only an extent of 31,111 acres or 9.43 per cent could be restored to the tribals as per the data provided by the Tribal Cultural Research and Training Institute, Hyderabad (c.f. APARD, 2004a). Some of these studies cited in the text also deal with state enforced or acquiesced tribal land alienation, while the present paper does not.

2. Guha (2000) cites several such instances based on the works of Elvin, the English man who persevered to further the interests of tribals of India.

3. States in the Central Tribal Belt (as defined in NSS 44th Round, 1988-89) comprise Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and West Bengal. Although Dadra and Nagar Haveli region is also part of the belt, our correlation exercise is confined to the states numbering 8. The states with the proportion of ST population in excess of 10 per cent, as of 1991, were 9 in number and they are Assam, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Manipur, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Tripura.

4. The 16 mandals were so selected as to represent the (1) plain accessible, (2) plain inaccessible, (3) hilly accessible, and (4) hilly inaccessible mandals with a view to cover the tribal households of varying socio-economic status.

5. The increase in landlessness suggested by these figures is contradictory to the conclusion of a decrease in its incidence emerging from a comparison of the NSS data of 1987-88 (43rd Round) and 1999-2000 (55th Round). The contradiction could be due to a reduced pace of the land assignment programme and the increased tendency towards land alienation in the recent past and/or due to differences in the land ownership pattern between the tribals in tribal areas (that are considered in our survey and in the NSS 44th Round for 1988-89), and the tribals in all areas of the state (as considered in the 43rd and the 55th Rounds).

6. It appears that the extent of land mortgaged out as given here is an underestimate because while answering questions on survival strategies (see later) many households are reported to have mortgaged-out their land during 2002-03 itself.

7. Realising the need for developing the land assigned to the poor, the state government launched a programme called *Indira Prabha* on 19 November, 2004, to rejuvenate the productivity of the land assigned to the poor at an estimated cost of Rs. 500 crores to benefit 2.72 lakh families and 3.94 lakh acres of land in the state.

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