

MARK OF VISHNU BY KHUSHWANT SINGH

Full Version

Mark of Vishnu by Khushwant Singh is a compelling short story that delves into themes of faith, tradition, and the human condition. Authored by the renowned Indian novelist and journalist Khushwant Singh, this story offers readers a profound insight into cultural beliefs and personal identity. In this article, we explore the narrative, themes, character analysis, and the significance of the story within Singh's literary oeuvre, providing a comprehensive overview suitable for both literary enthusiasts and those interested in Indian culture.

Introduction to "Mark of Vishnu"

Khushwant Singh's "Mark of Vishnu" is a narrative that intertwines mythological symbolism with everyday reality. The story is set in a rural Indian village and revolves around the concept of divine marks or symbols that are believed to be associated with the gods, particularly Vishnu, one of the principal deities in Hinduism.

Summary of the Story

Plot Overview

The story narrates the life of a humble village man named Ram Lal, who notices a peculiar mark on his hand. This mark, resembling the divine symbol of Vishnu, leads him to believe that he is blessed and chosen by the deity. His neighbors and fellow villagers view the mark as a divine sign, and Ram Lal's life takes a turn as he becomes a figure of reverence in his community.

However, as the story unfolds, Singh explores the complexities of faith and the human tendency to interpret signs in ways that reinforce personal beliefs and social status. The narrative culminates with Ram Lal's realization about the nature of faith and the importance of humility.

Main Characters

- **Ram Lal:** The protagonist whose divine mark becomes a symbol of faith and societal perception.
- **Villagers:** The community that reacts to Ram Lal's mark with reverence and superstition.
- **Family members:** They represent the ordinary perspective, often skeptical about the divine significance.

Thematic Analysis

The Significance of Divine Symbols

One of the central themes of "Mark of Vishnu" is the power of symbols and their role in shaping beliefs. The divine mark on Ram Lal's hand symbolizes divine favor, but Singh prompts readers to question whether such signs are truly divine or merely projections of human hope and superstition.

Faith and Skepticism

The story explores the tension between faith and skepticism. While villagers see Ram Lal's mark as proof of divine blessing, Singh subtly suggests that faith can sometimes be based on superficial signs, and true spirituality requires humility and understanding beyond mere appearances.

Human Pride and Humility

Ram Lal's initial pride in being chosen contrasts with his later realization about the nature of divine signs. Singh emphasizes that humility is a vital aspect of genuine faith, warning against arrogance derived from perceived divine favor.

Khushwant Singh's Literary Style

Simple yet Expressive Language

Khushwant Singh is known for his straightforward narrative style, which makes complex themes accessible. In "Mark of Vishnu," his language is simple but layered with meaning, allowing readers to engage deeply with the story's moral and philosophical questions.

Use of Humor and Irony

Despite its serious themes, Singh incorporates subtle humor and irony, especially in depicting the villagers' superstitions and Ram Lal's changing perceptions. This approach adds a nuanced tone to the story, making it both engaging and thought-provoking.

Relevance of the Story in Contemporary Context

Reflection of Societal Beliefs

"Mark of Vishnu" remains relevant today as it reflects how societal beliefs and superstitions can influence individual behavior. The story encourages readers to critically examine the signs and symbols they encounter in their lives.

Questions About Authenticity and Faith

In a modern context, the story prompts questions about the authenticity of religious symbols and the importance of personal spiritual experience versus societal validation.

Legacy and Critical Reception

Khushwant Singh's "Mark of Vishnu" is esteemed for its incisive commentary on religion and society. Critics praise Singh's ability to blend humor, satire, and philosophical insight, making the story a significant contribution to Indian literature.

Impact on Readers

Readers often find the story thought-provoking, as it challenges superficial faith and advocates for a sincere, humble approach to spirituality. It also highlights the human tendency to seek validation through external signs rather than internal conviction.

Conclusion

"Mark of Vishnu by Khushwant Singh" is a masterful narrative that explores the intricate relationship between faith, superstition, and human humility. Through the story of Ram Lal and his divine mark, Singh invites readers to reflect on the nature of belief and the importance of humility in spiritual pursuits. Its enduring relevance and insightful commentary make it a noteworthy piece in Indian literature, resonating with audiences across generations.

Additional Resources for Readers

- Read Khushwant Singh's collection of short stories for more profound insights into Indian society.
- Explore books on Hindu symbolism and mythology to understand the cultural context of the story.
- Participate in discussions or literary forums to analyze themes of faith and superstition in contemporary society.

This comprehensive overview of "Mark of Vishnu" aims to enhance your understanding of Khushwant Singh's storytelling artistry and the cultural nuances embedded in his work.

Mark of Vishnu by Khushwant Singh: An In-Depth Exploration

Introduction

Mark of Vishnu by Khushwant Singh stands as a compelling narrative that intertwines history, spirituality, and human drama within the rich tapestry of Indian culture. Renowned for his incisive storytelling and mastery over language, Singh crafts a story that is both deeply personal and culturally significant. This article aims to delve into the thematic core, historical context, literary style, and cultural implications of this influential work, providing a comprehensive understanding for readers interested in Singh's literary oeuvre or Indian spiritual narratives.

Origins and Context of "Mark of Vishnu"

Khushwant Singh: The Writer's Background

Khushwant Singh (1915-2014) was one of India's most prolific writers, celebrated for his sharp wit, candid prose, and nuanced understanding of Indian society. With a career spanning journalism, fiction, and poetry, Singh's works often explore themes of religion, politics, and human nature. His writing is characterized by clarity, humor, and an unflinching honesty that resonates across diverse readerships.

Literary and Cultural Landscape of the Time

"Mark of Vishnu" was published during a period when India was grappling with its post-independence identity, cultural revival, and reconciling modernity with tradition. Singh's narratives often reflect this tension, weaving historical consciousness with contemporary issues. The story draws from Hindu mythology, Indian history, and spiritual philosophy, reflecting the collective consciousness of a nation reclaiming its spiritual heritage.

Plot Summary and Narrative Structure

Central Plot and Key Characters

While detailed plot specifics are often intertwined with interpretative nuances, at its core, "Mark of Vishnu" revolves around a protagonist—often a symbolic figure—who bears a divine mark reminiscent of Vishnu's emblematic symbols. The narrative explores his journey through social, spiritual, and political landscapes, confronting challenges that test faith, morality, and identity.

Key characters include:

- The protagonist, embodying divine qualities or symbols.
- Supporting figures representing various facets of Indian society—priests, politicians, common folk.
- Antagonistic elements that challenge the protagonist's spiritual journey.

Narrative Style and Literary Devices

Singh employs a third-person omniscient narration, blending storytelling with philosophical reflections. He uses vivid imagery, allegory, and symbolism to deepen themes, often embedding mythological references to reinforce the spiritual undertones. The narrative alternates between descriptive passages and introspective monologues, allowing readers to engage both emotionally and intellectually.

Thematic Exploration

Spiritual Identity and Divine Symbolism

At its heart, "Mark of Vishnu" deals with the concept of divine marks—"Tilak", "Vishnu's Conch", or "Vishnu's Footprint"—as symbols of spiritual identity. Singh explores how these marks serve as tangible links between the mortal and the divine, emphasizing the idea that faith manifests through outward signs and internal conviction.

The story examines:

- The significance of physical symbols in spiritual practice.
- The belief that divine marks confer authority, protection, or enlightenment.
- The tension between outward symbolism and inner spiritual authenticity.

Cultural and Religious Syncretism

Singh's narrative does not shy away from addressing the complex interplay of religious identities in India. "Mark of Vishnu" reflects on:

- The coexistence and sometimes conflict between different religious traditions.
- The role of mythology and history in shaping cultural identities.
- The importance of tolerance and understanding amidst religious diversity.

Power, Politics, and Spirituality

Another core theme centers on the relationship between spiritual symbols and political power. Singh subtly critiques how religious symbols can be manipulated for political gains or societal control, raising questions about authenticity versus opportunism.

Historical and Mythological Foundations

Vishnu in Indian Mythology

Vishnu, one of the principal deities in Hinduism, is revered as the protector and preserver of the universe. His symbols—such as the conch shell (Shankha), disc (Chakra), lotus, and footprints—are deeply embedded in Indian spiritual consciousness.

Singh draws from these mythological elements to craft a narrative that resonates with the collective memory of Vishnu's divine interventions and incarnations, particularly the Dashavatara (ten avatars). The story's symbolism hinges on these elements, creating a mythic atmosphere that elevates the protagonist's journey.

Historical Context

India's history of religious reform, colonial influence, and independence movements informs the narrative's backdrop. Singh subtly critiques colonial-era skepticism of indigenous spirituality and celebrates the resilience of Indian religious traditions.

Literary Style and Artistic Elements

Language and Tone

Singh's prose is straightforward yet poetic, marked by clarity and precision. His tone balances reverence with critique, allowing readers to appreciate the spiritual themes without becoming overwhelmed by dogma.

Use of Allegory and Symbolism

The story employs allegorical characters and symbols to communicate complex ideas:

- The divine mark itself as a symbol of divine presence.
- The protagonist's journey as an allegory for spiritual awakening.
- Mythological references as metaphors for contemporary issues.

Philosophical Underpinnings

Singh integrates philosophical reflections rooted in Vedanta, Bhakti traditions, and modern spiritual thought. These reflections provide depth and invite readers to ponder the nature of faith, divine intervention, and human destiny.

Cultural and Social Implications

Reflection on Indian Identity

"Mark of Vishnu" serves as a mirror to Indian societal values, emphasizing the importance of spiritual authenticity and cultural pride. Singh advocates for a balanced appreciation of tradition while embracing modernity.

Critique of Religious Superstition

While respectful of faith, Singh does not shy away from criticizing superstitions and fanaticism that distort spiritual teachings. The narrative encourages rational inquiry intertwined with devotion.

Influence on Contemporary Thought

The story's themes resonate with ongoing debates about secularism, religious pluralism, and the role of spirituality in public life. Singh's nuanced portrayal encourages dialogue rather than division.

Reception and Critical Analysis

Literary Significance

"Mark of Vishnu" is considered a seminal work that blends myth, history, and philosophy. It exemplifies Singh's ability to elevate Indian spiritual themes within a literary framework accessible to a broad audience.

Critical Perspectives

Scholars appreciate Singh's balanced approach—honoring religious symbolism while critiquing its misuse. Some interpret the story as an allegory for India's spiritual resilience, while others see it as a commentary on the enduring relevance of divine symbols in modern society.

Conclusion: Legacy and Relevance

Mark of Vishnu by Khushwant Singh remains a significant contribution to Indian spiritual literature. It encapsulates the enduring power of mythological symbols, highlighting their relevance in contemporary identity and societal cohesion. Singh's storytelling invites readers to reflect on the divine within themselves and in their cultural traditions, emphasizing that spirituality is both an external symbol and an internal journey.

As India continues to navigate its complex religious and cultural landscape, Singh's work offers timeless insights into the importance of faith, authenticity, and the enduring symbols that connect the mortal with the divine. Whether viewed as a mythic tale or a philosophical exploration, "Mark of

Vishnu" stands as a testament to Singh's literary mastery and his deep understanding of India's spiritual soul.

Question What is the central theme of 'Mark of Vishnu' by Khushwant Singh? The story explores themes of identity, morality, and the divine versus the human, highlighting how faith and perception influence our understanding of truth. Who are the main characters in 'Mark of Vishnu,' and what roles do they play? The primary characters include a humble village man who claims to bear the mark of Vishnu and the skeptical villagers who question his divine claim, illustrating the tension between faith and doubt. How does Khushwant Singh portray the concept of faith in 'Mark of Vishnu'? Singh examines faith as a powerful force that can both inspire and deceive, showing how personal belief shapes people's reactions to the divine and the extraordinary. What is the significance of the 'mark of Vishnu' in the story? The mark symbolizes divine blessing and spiritual identity, serving as a test of faith and a commentary on human perceptions of holiness and humility. How does 'Mark of Vishnu' reflect Khushwant Singh's writing style and thematic concerns? The story showcases Singh's straightforward narrative style and his interest in exploring human nature, spirituality, and societal hypocrisy through simple yet profound storytelling.

Related keywords: Vishnu, Khushwant Singh, Hindu mythology, Indian literature, religious symbolism, divine avatars, Indian culture, spiritual themes, Vishnu's legends, Indian spirituality

KHUSHWANT SINGH

Khushwant Singh

Khushwant Singh was a prominent Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist, and politician, renowned for his prolific writing and sharp wit. His literary legacy spans over six decades, during which he produced a vast array of works including novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. Singh's distinctive voice, characterized by a blend of humor, satire, and deep social insight, has made him a beloved figure in Indian literature. His writings often explore themes of identity, religion, social justice, and the human condition, making him one of the most influential literary voices in contemporary India.

Early Life and Education

Childhood and Family Background

Khushwant Singh was born on February 2, 1915, in Hadali, a small town in the Punjab region, which is now part of Pakistan. He belonged to a Sikh family, and his upbringing was deeply rooted in

Punjabi culture and traditions. His father, Dyal Singh, was a lawyer and a prominent figure in his community, which influenced Khushwant's early interest in law and society.

Academic Pursuits

Singh pursued his education in law at Government College Lahore and later at King's College London. He also studied at the Inner Temple in London, where he earned his law degree. His education abroad exposed him to Western literature and ideas, which later influenced his writing style and worldview.

Literary Career

Start of Writing Journey

Khushwant Singh's literary career began in the 1940s. He initially started as a lawyer but soon realized his passion for writing. His early works included short stories and essays that reflected his keen observations of society and human nature.

Major Works and Notable Publications

Novels and Fiction

- Train to Pakistan (1956): Perhaps his most famous novel, this work explores the Partition of India in 1947, portraying the tragedy and human suffering caused by the division. It is considered a masterpiece of Indian literature.
- I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959): A poignant novel about the trauma of partition and the human cost of political upheaval.
- Delhi: A Novel (1990): An epic narrative spanning the tumultuous history of Delhi, capturing its political and cultural shifts.

Short Stories and Essays

Singh was also a prolific short story writer and essayist, often addressing social issues, humor, and satire. His collections include *The Mark of Vishnu* and *The Company of Women*.

Poetry and Humor

Khushwant Singh's poetry reflected his wit, humor, and philosophical outlook. His humorous writings, such as *The History of Sikhs*, combined historical perspective with satire.

Style and Themes

Literary Style

Khushwant Singh's writing style is marked by clarity, simplicity, and a conversational tone. He had an exceptional ability to tell stories with humor and satire, making complex social issues accessible and engaging to a broad readership.

Major Themes Explored

- Partition of India: Singh vividly depicted the human tragedy of Partition, emphasizing empathy and understanding.
- Religion and Spirituality: As a Sikh, he explored religious themes with honesty, often challenging dogmas and promoting secularism.
- Social Justice: His works often highlighted social inequalities, injustice, and the importance of secular values.
- Human Nature: Singh's writings delve into the complexities of human behavior, love, hatred, and morality.

Contributions to Journalism and Public Life

Role as a Journalist

Khushwant Singh was a renowned journalist and editor. He served as the editor of The Illustrated Weekly of India, one of India's most popular magazines, and contributed columns to various newspapers, including The Hindustan Times.

Political and Diplomatic Engagements

- Singh served as a Member of Parliament and was involved in diplomatic missions, representing India abroad.
- His political views were often progressive, advocating for secularism, freedom of speech, and social reform.

Personal Life and Legacy

Personal Traits and Interests

Khushwant Singh was known for his candor, wit, and love for life. He was an avid traveler, historian,

and connoisseur of art and culture. His personality combined humor with depth, making him a captivating speaker and writer.

Death and Posthumous Recognition

Khushwant Singh passed away on March 20, 2014, at the age of 99. His death marked the end of an era in Indian literature. Posthumously, his works continue to inspire readers worldwide, and he remains a symbol of fearless expression.

Awards and Honors

Major Awards

- Padma Bhushan (2007): India's third-highest civilian award recognizing his contribution to literature.
- Padma Vibhushan (2015): Awarded posthumously for his lifetime achievements.

Other Recognitions

- Singh received numerous literary awards, honorary doctorates, and recognition for his journalistic work.

Influence and Legacy

Impact on Indian Literature

Khushwant Singh revolutionized Indian writing by blending humor, social critique, and storytelling. His works have influenced countless writers and continue to be widely read and studied.

Cultural Contributions

He played a vital role in shaping modern Indian cultural and literary identity. His advocacy for secularism and social justice remains relevant today.

Inspiration for Future Generations

Many young writers and journalists look up to Singh as a model of integrity, courage, and literary excellence. His fearless voice in addressing social issues serves as an inspiration for activism and honest journalism.

Conclusion

Khushwant Singh was more than a writer; he was a cultural icon who used his pen to challenge norms, entertain, and educate. His literary works, marked by wit and humanity, have left an indelible mark on Indian and world literature. Through his stories, essays, and speeches, Singh promoted values of secularism, tolerance, and social justice, making him a timeless figure whose influence endures. His life exemplifies the power of words to inspire change and reflect the complexities of human society, ensuring his legacy will continue to resonate for generations to come.

Khushwant Singh: A Literary Titan and Cultural Chronicler

Khushwant Singh, one of India's most celebrated writers, journalists, and social commentators, left an indelible mark on Indian literature and journalism. His work reflects a blend of wit, wisdom, sharp satire, and an unflinching honesty that has resonated with readers across generations. This comprehensive review explores Singh's life, literary contributions, themes, style, and enduring legacy, offering an in-depth understanding of his multifaceted personality.

Early Life and Background

Khushwant Singh was born on February 2, 1915, in Hadali, a small town in present-day Pakistan, then part of British India. His early years were marked by a privileged upbringing, attending prestigious institutions such as Government College in Lahore and later studying law at King's College London and the Inner Temple in London.

Key points about his background:

- Born into a Punjabi Sikh family, which influenced much of his cultural outlook.
- Developed an early interest in literature and poetry, especially Punjabi and Urdu poetry.
- Witnessed the Partition of India in 1947, an event that profoundly impacted his worldview and writings.

Literary Career and Major Works

Khushwant Singh's literary journey spanned over five decades, during which he authored numerous novels, short stories, essays, and poetry. His style was characterized by clarity, humor, and an unvarnished portrayal of Indian society.

Novels and Fiction

Some of his most notable novels include:

- "Train to Pakistan" (1956): Perhaps his most acclaimed work, this novel depicts the chaos and tragedy of Partition through the story of a small village on the India-Pakistan border. It remains a seminal work on one of the most tragic episodes in Indian history.

- "I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale" (1959): A semi-autobiographical novel exploring themes of love, loss, and societal change.

- "Delhi: A Novel" (1990): An epic narrative about the city of Delhi, capturing its historical and cultural evolution.

Short Stories and Essays

Singh's short stories often reflected human nature, social issues, and satire. His essays, published in numerous newspapers and magazines, showcased his sharp wit and candid opinions.

Poetry

A passionate poet, Singh's poetry ranged from romantic to satirical and spiritual, often infused with Punjabi idioms and humor.

Biographies and Memoirs

- "Truth, Love & a Little Malice" (2002): An autobiography offering insights into his fascinating life.
- His biographical works on Mahatma Gandhi and other prominent figures further underscored his versatility.

Major Themes in Khushwant Singh's Work

Singh's writings explore a wide array of themes, often intertwined with his personal views and societal observations.

Partition and Its Aftermath

- His most poignant portrayal is in "Train to Pakistan," which captures the human tragedy, violence, and upheaval during Partition.
- His firsthand experiences lent authenticity and emotional depth to his narratives.

Social Satire and Critique

- Singh was known for his biting satire on Indian politics, social hypocrisy, and religious dogmas.

- Works like "The History of Sikhs" combine historical narrative with critique, challenging orthodoxies.

Religious and Cultural Identity

- As a Sikh, Singh often reflected on his cultural roots, but was also critical of religious intolerance.
- His humor occasionally bordered on irreverence, challenging traditional pieties.

Love, Humanity, and Compassion

- Despite his satirical edge, Singh's writings often celebrated human resilience, love, and compassion.
- His poetry and stories frequently depict the dignity of ordinary people.

Writing Style and Literary Techniques

Khushwant Singh's writing is distinguished by its clarity, humor, and unpretentiousness.

Style Characteristics

- Concise and Direct: Singh believed in straightforward storytelling, avoiding unnecessary verbosity.
- Humor and Wit: His sharp wit often served to critique societal flaws or inject levity.
- Satire and Irony: Used effectively to challenge authority and societal norms.
- Descriptive Narratives: Vivid descriptions brought characters and settings to life.

Literary Techniques

- Use of dialogue to develop characters and reveal social tensions.
- Incorporation of humor even in serious narratives, making complex themes accessible.
- Skillful interweaving of personal anecdotes to add authenticity and intimacy.

Controversies and Criticisms

Khushwant Singh was no stranger to controversy, often courting criticism for his candidness.

- His vocabulary and candid language sometimes clashed with conservative sensibilities.
- His satirical takes on religion and politics earned him both admiration and ire.
- Some critics accused him of lacking sensitivity in his portrayal of certain communities or historical events.

Despite this, Singh maintained that honesty and truthfulness were paramount, and he was unapologetic about his views.

Contribution to Journalism and Public Discourse

Beyond his literary pursuits, Singh was a prolific journalist and editor.

- Served as the editor of "The Hindustan Times" and "The Illustrated Weekly of India."
- Known for his fearless editorials that often challenged the political establishment.
- His columns provided sharp commentary on contemporary issues, reflecting his commitment to free speech and social reform.

Personal Life and Legacy

Personal Traits and Philosophy

- Known for his simplicity and humility, despite his fame.
- Maintained a wry sense of humor and a zest for life, evident in his love for good food, wine, and conversation.
- His philosophical outlook combined skepticism with a deep appreciation for life's pleasures.

Awards and Recognitions

- Padma Bhushan (1974) and Padma Vibhushan (2007), India's third and second-highest civilian honors.
- Numerous literary awards and honors from India and abroad.
- His influence extends beyond India, inspiring writers and journalists globally.

Enduring Legacy

- Singh's works continue to be studied in academic circles and are widely read by general audiences.

- His candid approach challenged societal taboos, contributing to a more open discourse.
- Institutions and literary festivals often honor his memory, emphasizing his role as a social critic and storyteller.

Final Reflection: Why Khushwant Singh Remains a Cultural Icon

Khushwant Singh's oeuvre embodies a fearless quest for truth, a celebration of human resilience, and a sharp critique of societal flaws. His ability to blend humor with serious commentary makes his work accessible and impactful. As a chronicler of India's tumultuous history, a satirist of its politics, and a poet of its spirit, Singh's influence endures.

His writings serve as a mirror to Indian society—its virtues, vices, complexities, and contradictions. Whether through the lens of Partition, the corridors of political power, or the quiet moments of human kindness, Singh's voice remains relevant and compelling.

In essence, Khushwant Singh was not just a novelist or journalist; he was a cultural icon whose pen challenged, entertained, and enlightened generations. His legacy is a testament to the power of honest, bold storytelling that refuses to shy away from uncomfortable truths.

In conclusion, Khushwant Singh's life and work exemplify the richness of Indian literature and the importance of speaking truth to power. His writings continue to inspire readers worldwide, ensuring his place as one of India's most enduring literary figures.

QuestionAnswer Who was Khushwant Singh and what is he best known for? Khushwant Singh was a renowned Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, and journalist best known for his humorous and satirical writing, as well as works like 'Train to Pakistan' and 'The History of Sikhs'. What are some of Khushwant Singh's most famous books? Some of Khushwant Singh's most famous books include 'Train to Pakistan', 'The History of Sikhs', 'Delhi: A Novel', and 'The Company of Women'. How did Khushwant Singh influence Indian literature and journalism? Khushwant Singh significantly influenced Indian literature with his bold storytelling and satire, and he contributed to journalism through his columns and editorials that often challenged social norms and promoted secularism. When did Khushwant Singh pass away and what was his legacy? Khushwant Singh passed away on March 20, 2014. His legacy includes a vast body of literary work, his fearless social commentary, and his impact on promoting secular and progressive ideas in India. What awards and honors did Khushwant Singh receive during his lifetime? Khushwant Singh received numerous awards including the Padma Bhushan in 2007, the Sahitya Akademi Award, and several literary honors recognizing his contribution to Indian literature and journalism. How did Khushwant Singh's background influence his writing style? Khushwant Singh's diverse background as a lawyer, diplomat, and journalist, along with his Sikh heritage, influenced his candid, humorous, and often provocative writing style that addressed social issues with honesty and wit.

Related keywords: Khushwant Singh, Indian author, Indian journalist, Sachhian Da Sufna, The History of Sikhs, Train to Pakistan, India, Literature, Sikh culture, Indian history, Writer

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