

## The Portrayal of the Politics of Partition in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man (Cracking India)*:

### A Comparative Study

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#### Abstract

It is a known fact that the socio-political and historical issues of any country can attract the attention of creative writers, and they reflect the same in their works of art. One such significant and heart-rending issue is the Partition of India. This research article portrays the political issues in particular and other related issues in general, making a comparative study of Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man (Cracking India)*. The reader of these two selected novels can understand how the British rulers used the 'divide and rule' policy, two-nation theory, and Machiavellian trickery in dividing the Indian subcontinent into India and Pakistan. As this tragic event of Partition was politically motivated, it upset the religious and cultural harmony among the Indians. It will be explored how these two celebrated novelists have dealt with the politics of Partition, focusing on the role played by the Congress, the Muslim League, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, etc. It will be specifically explored how M.K. Gandhi exerted an impact on these two novelists while writing their respective novels on the theme of Partition.

Keywords: Politics, Partition, History, Communal Violence, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, British Rule, Divide and Rule, Lord Mountbatten, M.K. Gandhi, M.A. Jinnah, Sardar Patel, J. Nehru, Machiavellian trickery

## I

### Introduction

Being the most effective and useful genre of literary expression currently, fiction has attained a prominent place in Indian Writing in English. The novel, by and large, is the most appropriate literary form to explore the ideas and experiences in our contextual times, and Indian English fiction unarguably occupies its deserving place in English literature. Prof. M. K. Naik mentions: “One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountainhead of story-telling; the novel as we know today was an importation from the West”. (Naik 99)

It is a fact to be acknowledged that the political, sociological, and historical issues of any nation perpetually attract the attention of novelists, dramatists, poets, short story writers, etc. The Partition of India (1947) was such a huge and noteworthy event that every writer wanted to thematically deal with it in their works of art. It was certainly a national disaster that was gruesome and heart-rending because it was quite intentional and not a natural calamity like a flood, tsunami, drought, or earthquake. Many creative writers have explored in their works of art the turmoil, violence, and psychological trauma of Partition.

While depicting Partition as a theme, the writers have also appealingly portrayed the role of the then towering politicians like Mahatma Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Rajaji, Allama Iqbal Khan, Subash Chandra Bose, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, etc., who were held responsible for Partition. This research article focuses on Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man (Cracking India)* selected to make a comparative study of these two novels portraying the impact of Mahatma Gandhi in particular and other

seasoned political leaders in general on these writers and also how these writers have depicted them in their respective novels on the theme of Partition.

## II

### Discussion

Chaman Nahal is one of the most prominent novelists of Partition fiction. The Indian subcontinent was divided into two sovereign nations on the basis of two-nation theory. It was the most political and Machiavellian trickery played by the British imperialistic rulers. As this event was politically motivated, it caused religious and cultural disturbances among the Indians. The cultural chaos and disharmony perpetrated by the divisive politics during the time of Partition is lucidly portrayed in the novel *Azadi*. In this research article, the role of Mahatma Gandhi and other political leaders, as described by the novelists in their novels, is portrayed. Nahal's *Gandhi Quartet* has a larger dimension that enveloped the complete picture of the Gandhian era in Indian life.

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*(2001) is one of the four novels of the *Gandhi Quartet* that gives a comprehensive picture of the traumatic impact of the division of the country into India and Pakistan on the life of the people living in the north-western province of the frontier of India. Nahal graphically described the tragic repercussions of Partition in *Azadi* with a focus on the life of Lala Kanshi Ram, the central character of the novel belonging to Sialkot (presently in Pakistan). He becomes a true representative of the Hindus, who are distraught by this abrupt political event. Albeit the novel is written from an omniscient point of view, it depicts the life of people, as perceived through Lala Kanshi Ram's consciousness.

Lala Kanshi Ram, as a grain merchant, has been living very happily in Sialkot. He has bought a few acres of land in Sialkot. He has a lovely and virtuous wife, Prabha Rani. As she is uneducated, he tries to teach her incessantly. He has a son, whose name is Arun, and a daughter, whose name is Madhubala. He has been living in a rented house, and the owner's

name of the house is Bibi Amar Vati. He is a whole-hearted Hindu, who has great respect for Vedic philosophy. He knows the Hindi, Sanskrit, and Punjabi languages sufficiently well. As a member of the Arya Samaj, he has great reverence for Hindu culture.

As Chaman Nahal himself was a refugee, he wonderfully describes his own experiences with astounding penetration and realism. He has given a realistic representation of the event of Partition. Be it as it may, the notable feature of his narration is all about the disastrous effect of Partition. The reader of the novel feels mentally shocked, knowing about the terrible consequences triggered by Partition. In his research article, *The Trauma of Partition in Azadi*, Basavraj Naikar has investigated the traumatic experiences of the Partition of India, as vividly narrated in *Azadi*. He tries to evaluate the impact of the tragedy of Partition on man's psychology – emotion, fear, and tension. Naikar observes that,

*Azadi* is, thus, an important novel which deals with various aspects of the traumatic experience of partition of the country into two. Chaman Nahal shows his remarkable powers of observation of the human nature in general and the political behaviour of Hindus and Muslims in particular. Though the novel is tragic in its tone, it is epic in its vast canvas. (Naikar 60)

In *Azadi*(hereafter, *Azadi*), the first four chapters of the first part 'The Lull' delineate the character of Lala Kanshi Ram, who is very inspired by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. He, by faith, is a loyal Hindu nationalist living in Sialkot—the area highly dominated by the Muslims. His father and his forefather lived in this region. Thus, he develops a sense of emotional attachment with Sialkot. He feels that the tyrannical British rulers must leave the Indian subcontinent and grant freedom to her. "Like any other Indian, he had a prejudice against the British. He hated them for what they had done to his country and wanted azadi." (*Azadi* 7)

A well-known writer and Indian biographer of Gandhi, B.R. Nanda records the enigmatic silence in his chapter 'The Lull between the Storms', and the people's mood existing in the western districts of Punjab just before the attainment of independence. He asserts: "From the end of March 1947 to the middle of August 1947 the western districts of Punjab were comparatively quiet; but it was the silence of the grave"(Nanda 52). The action of *Azadi* is focused on Lala Kanshi Ram living in Sialkot along with his family, and how they are agonised by the unexpected Partition. The novelist unequivocally states his opinion about Partition:

In *Azadi* I was largely concerned with showing how the partition of India in 1947 destroyed an existing harmony which had prevailed for centuries. India is known for its cultural synthesis, and never once when I was growing up did it strike me that I belonged to one particular sect and had to act according to its norms. The norms by which we lived were Indian norms, accepted and acknowledged all over the country and practised as such". (*Azadi* xii)

Without a doubt, the Congress party is responsible for splitting the country. This move by the British rulers is a devastating one for the whole country. The assurance of granting a geographical segment in the East of India to the Muslims and a geographical segment in the West of India makes Muhammad Ali Jinnah cognizant of fulfilling his dream. It articulates a mutual foreign policy and also makes M.A. Jinnah envisage a liberated nation for the Muslims: "Until then Jinnah had talked of Pakistan, but he did not quite know what he meant by it. Gandhi, by going to him, not only gave Pakistan a name, he gave Jinnah a name too". (*Azadi* 27)

Kanshi Ram comes to know that the Viceroy is to make an important announcement over the radio on the evening of 3 June 1947, and this announcement put a stop to all his assumptions. He looks very worried about the shocking consequences "if the English agree to

give Pakistan to Jinnah” (*Azadi* 27). He becomes frightened about the division of the country, and he understands the cunning British plan to divide India. When his wife tells him about Gandhi’s strong resolve in opposing Partition, he sadly reacts: “That’s true. But what if there is no other way out? And you know these English, they would rather divide than leave behind a united India”. (*Azadi* 27)

The reader of these lines can at once recognise the Machiavellian trickery of the British rulers. All the efforts made by Gandhi for more than twenty-five years in making India a liberated and blissful home appear to be a herculean task. He gloomily exclaims: “Everything will be ruined if Pakistan is created” (*Azadi* 27). The view of Kanshi Ram is that the announcement of the Partition of India into two different self-governing nations brought great name and fame to M.A. Jinnah and is rather a personal victory for him as an influential leader of the Muslim League. He thinks thus: “Who took Jinnah seriously before September 1944? It was doubtful if he took himself seriously, either. Ever since then he had been sharpening his teeth and becoming more and more menacing. If the Congress would give this much, why not go for complete separation?” (*Azadi* 27-28)

All Indian political thinkers and historians know that India won its freedom after her prolonged struggle and great sacrifice. It certainly remains a haunting experience in the annals of Indian history. The novelist successfully portrays a very genuine picture of the horror and paradoxes of Partition faced by the native people of the north-western province of India around 1947. In this regard, Bhagwat Goyal says: “It deals with the political, social, economic, religious, psychological and cultural implications of ‘azadi’ which India achieved in 1947”. (Goyal 124)

Kanshi Ram, the members of his family, and his neighbours have become distressed and traumatised after listening attentively to the announcement made on the radio by Lord

Mountbatten, the Viceroy of India. He has announced that the British government has taken a decision on the partition of the nation into India and Pakistan:

The viceroy spoke in a clipped, sharp accent and even this non-English speaking audience could sense the emotion behind what he was saying. He was soon finished and all eyes turned first towards Suraj Prakash (since he was older of the two), who knew some English, and when he threw up his hands in despair and shook his head... Arun had understood it all only too well, and in a shaken voice he said, "Partition"! and made a gesture with his hands of chopping a thing in two. 'Partition!' many voices shouted out loud and the mouths remained open. 'Yes Partition!' said Arun. (*Azadi* 48)

The government's announcement of Partition is understood by the diverse religious communities differently. The Hindus and Sikhs of Sialkot realise their imminent catastrophe in the declaration of Partition, whereas the Muslims are very triumphant, and they go berserk after listening to the news. They rejoice in this favourable news with a demonstration of fireworks. These are full of bright light and ear-splitting noise that exasperate and mentally disturb the people of the Sikh and Hindu communities. The rooftops and homes of the Muslim community are lit with clay lamps and other sorts of lights in such a manner that it seemed as if the earth had unpredictably exploded in a volcanic eruption. They irritatingly display their exhilaration by singing, dancing, mock fighting, and taking a procession forcibly and deliberately through the Mohalla of the Hindus, where Lala Kanshi Ram and his friends reside.

The Superintendent of Police and the Deputy Commissioner try their best to bring the situation under their control. The people of the Hindu and the Muslim communities begin to start abhorring one another unexpectedly with some unusual exemptions like Lala Kanshi Ram and Chaudhri Barkat Ali, who had listened to M.K. Gandhi's speech in 1929 at Ramatalai. Both of them are overwhelmingly touched by Gandhi's vision of the unity and

harmony of the Hindus and the Muslims, non-violence, nationalism, self-discipline, self-sacrifice, and Purna Swaraj. They have taken an oath to be lifetime friends and have never thought of developing communal hatred between each other.

The novelist criticises the politicians, who are culpable for the partition of India into two nations— India and Pakistan. Firstly, he remarks in the beginning that Gandhi and Rajaji have thought of having an independent nation mainly for the Muslims in the name of ‘Pakistan’. Afterward, they, however, do not give their consent to the division of India. But Muhammad Ali Jinnah coerces the Congress party to create ‘Pakistan’, particularly for the Muslims. In this way, M.A. Jinnah becomes the iconic leader of the Muslims. They remain very loyal to him honestly. The novelist finds Jinnah in particular and other political leaders in general for the horrifying consequences of Partition. Ambuj Sharma mentions that “*Azadi* is about the freedom struggle of India ending into a tale of woe—a holocaust, genocide, mass destruction, arson, rape, carnage and turbulence, gerrymandered by the British and the Muslim League.” (Sharma 194)

At last, Kanshi Ram and his family reach Delhi, where they have to face several problems. The major problem is their relocation. The custodian officers are unfriendly and avaricious for a bribe. As Kanshi Ram is tired of his life at a refugee camp, he wanted to live as a tenant in a house, but the dwellers of Delhi did not accept him to stay in their houses as a tenant because he was a Punjabi. They thought that the Sikhs are confrontational people. As a result, his efforts to find a private house in Delhi turn out to be futile. His unsuccessful search for a house and the stubborn attitude of the government officers makes him very desolate and depressed.

Sardar Tej Singh and his daughter Isher Kaur, who were Lala Kanshi Ram’s co-tenants of Bibi Amar Vati’s house, somehow get some shelter in the suburbs of Delhi. After facing several difficulties, Kanshi Ram and the members of his family reach India. He settles in the

Kingsway Camp on Alipur Road and starts his life afresh with a small business, i.e., a small grocery shop to make his living. Even Suraj Prakash's wife, Sunanda Bala, makes her livelihood with tailoring work. The tragic repercussions of Partition make Kanshi Ram feel the loss of his self-respect. Therefore, he stops wearing his turban. "He had no dignity left. He now wore a forage cap" (*Azadi* 323). Subsequently, he has stopped wearing any cap to show his submissive and pitiable situation to the world. At this point, he hears the heart-breaking news about the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, which comes to him like a sudden shock, and the sad demise of Mahatma Gandhi makes him realise that it is the end of everything. All the people pay their last tribute to Gandhi expressing their grief over his sad death. He was assassinated just because of communal hatred. When Jawaharlal Nehru makes an announcement of Gandhi's demise, the entire country is driven into the world of utter melancholy.

Another novel that has been selected for this research article to make a comparative study is Bapsi Sidhwa's *Ice Candy Man*. A famous Pakistani diasporic novelist, Sidhwa belongs to India, Pakistan, and the United States of America simultaneously. In this age of globalisation, it is a difficult task to categorise a few writers, and one of them is Sidhwa. However, she wants herself to be known as a Parsi-Punjabi-Pakistani woman. Her novels written in English explain her understanding of Partition and its socio-political issues.

There are a very wide variety of themes in her novels such as the quandary of Partition, social and political peculiarities of her minority community, the situation of the Parsi community, experiences of refugees, and women's problems. Her depiction of such a diversity of themes in her works of art serves as a true testimony to her progress as a wonderful novelist who is a perceptive observer of her society. She is probably the best Pakistani novelist in English fiction. Her novels are deeply rooted in the Indian subcontinent,

where she was born and brought up. The national, cultural, political, racial, sociological issues of historical importance are the quintessence of her novels.

Her third and the most famous novel, *Ice Candy Man* (1988), was first published in London. This title was changed to *Cracking India* in the 1991 American edition because the publishers thought that Americans would misinterpret 'ice candy' and confuse it with drugs. The reader of the novel needs to understand it through the lenses of a child-narrator belonging to the Parsi Diaspora in provincial Lahore. The novelist depicts the traumatic account of Partition when the lofty ideal of nationalism was unexpectedly negotiated for a communal cause. As a result, there were huge destruction, political illogicality, and troubled social sensibilities. *Ice Candy Man* is the prism of the sensitivity of Parsis through which she describes the cataclysmic incident of Partition. Set in pre-Partition India in Lahore, this novel examines Partition as a result of religious fundamentalism inflamed by communal disharmony. The novelist makes the reader understand that Partition turned even normal friends and people susceptible and insane. She portrays the episodes of Partition purely from the viewpoint of Pakistan.

Bapsi Sidhwa in her *Ice Candy Man* (hereafter, *Ice*) vividly portrays the people's fate in Lahore. Lenny, the child-narrator, resides on Warris Road. She realises that she has a restricted movement between Jail Road and Warris Road. She observes the wall of the Salvation Army through ventilation slits, which make her feel worried and deserted. She describes the localities in Lahore brilliantly through Lenny's character. She says that "I feel such sadness for the dumb creature I imagine lurking behind the wall". (*Ice* 1) Lenny is an introvert and is always occupied in her world.

It is important to note that the novelist was a small girl residing in Lahore before Partition, and therefore, like Lenny, she clearly describes the historical, sociological, and political incidents of the times in her novel. As there are contradictory characteristics in the

stories of Partition fiction, the element of truth becomes very vital in the writing process of non-fiction or fiction. As the novelist was a witness to this grave danger, she selected the age and sex of the storyteller of her novel with utmost care. As the novelist uses the first-person narrative of Lenny, an eight-year-old girl, in her novel, the reader feels the nervousness and insecurity experienced by the ethnic, religious, and cultural marginal group—the Parsis. In this connection, Mamatarani Subudhi remarks that,

The *Cracking India* or *Ice-Candy-Man* is the story told by an eight-year-old girl, Lenny; who is the fictional incarnation of Sidhwa's childhood. The Parsi girl is an innocent observer of Partition violence and its consequences on the social, political and cultural life of own country that collapses her previously idyllic world (Subudhi 45).

Subudhi asserts that the novelist through the character of Lenny, the fictional incarnation of Sidhwa's childhood, explains the political, social, and cultural issues of Partition. She remarks that there was communal harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus in the pre-Partition period as compared to the post-Partition period, which was replete with political irrationalities, the treachery of the British rulers, and communal hatred.

As a consequence of religious extremism, communal violence is perpetrated. This leads to mayhem in the entire city of Lahore. Mutilated bodies are a usual and poignant sight in the religious violence triggered by Partition. After witnessing this horrible incident, Lenny returns home and performs the identical action on her doll—she drags the toy's limbs apart. She is frightened by the result, crying, and her brother is perplexed and frustrated by Lenny's "pointless brutality" (*Ice* 139). Lenny's action is a response to her seeing a disfigured body. It has laid a mentally damaging impact on Lenny's attitude. It is an assumption fixed in her mind about Partition. The novelist criticises in her novel that the great image of Gandhi given by the British and Indian historians is completely false. When he is observed through Lenny's eyes: "He is small, dark, shrivelled, old. He looks just like Hari, our gardener, except he has a

disgruntled, disgusted and irritable look; and no one would dare pull off his dhoti! He wears only the loin-cloth and his black and thin torso is naked.”(*Ice* 86)

Unlike the majority of the Indian political leaders and historians who extol Gandhi for single-handedly liberating India from British rule, the novelist degrades him to the role of an eccentric dietician in the novel advising every woman to “flush your systems with enemas” (*Ice* 87).As stated by Masseur, Gandhi “is a politician” and “it is his business to suit his tongue to the moment” (*Ice* 91).Through Masseur’s character, the novelist affirms that Gandhi is a very cunning politician, and like a chameleon, he changes his colours. In Sidhwa’s opinion, he uses his tongue as per the situation.

The Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims develop an unprecedented animosity among themselves immediately after Partition. Sidhwa severely criticises the Indian perspective on Partition in general and M.A. Jinnah particularly. Partition, from the novelist’s viewpoint, was the result of the British government’s policies like the policy of ‘divide and rule’; Gandhi’s mixing of religion and politics; and Jawaharlal Nehru’s ambition of becoming the first Prime Minister of independent India.

It is to be noted that Bapsi Sidhwa’s vilification of Gandhi’s top-notch personality, on the one hand, is quite straightforward and brutally outspoken, but her criticism of Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, is quite indirect and a little bit obscured. The novelist makes the Ice-Candy-Man and Masseur, Muslim characters, speak about Nehru in a derisive language. She takes exceptional care to remark how Nehru influences Lord Mountbatten, overshadows Jinnah, and defeats the interest of the Muslims. The Ice-Candy-Man makes a sarcastic remark against Nehru, as he states that he is “a sly one.....He’s got Mountbatten eating out of his one hand and the English’s wife out of his other what not.....He’s the one to watch!” (*Ice* 131).

What differentiates *Ice-Candy-Man* from other Partition novels is Sidhwa's concern for M.A. Jinnah. The novelist speaks favourably of M.A. Jinnah in a very lucid and naive tone using her child-narrator: "And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi's and Mountbatten's lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah, who for a decade was known as 'Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim unity' is caricatured and portrayed as a monster" (*Ice* 160).

The novelist believes that M.K. Gandhi in particular and Sardar Patel, J.L. Nehru, and Master Tara Singh in general were blame worthy of this ghastly tragedy of Partition. Simultaneously, she pardoned M.A. Jinnah as he showed a way for an alternate view of reality. She wholeheartedly appreciates the role of M.A. Jinnah in the struggle for independence. Arabati Pradeep Kumar aptly states that Sidhwa's "assessment of Jinnah's role in the freedom movement is also noteworthy. She is of the view that the British have been less than fair to him as well as to Pakistan. Her portrayal of Gandhi is too radical to miss. She directly blames Gandhi for the Partition, while not caring to remember that the strongest opposition to the idea of Partition came from Gandhi himself (Kumar 147).

It needs to be understood that Sidhwa not only keeps the popular image of M.A Jinnah intact but also damages the reputation of Gandhi and Nehru, contradicting the Indian and British versions of Partition. She believes that the British rulers have shown partiality to Jinnah and the newly created state called 'Pakistan'. The novelist's portrayal of Gandhi's role is so satirical that it cannot be ignored. She brazenly denounces Gandhi for dividing India into two separate nations. It is ironic, as Sidhwa remarks, that the serious disagreement to the division of India also comes from M.K. Gandhi himself. The novelist's portrayal of the Indian political leaders is very subjective. Mahatma Gandhi, as everyone is aware, has been respected across the world, but the novelist has regarded him in her novel *Ice Candy Man* as a crafty politician. The novelist lays emphasis on the identity crisis of the Parsis just before the

division of the Indian subcontinent. The novelist severely criticises the role of the British rulers and Indian political leadership in cracking the Indian subcontinent into two different sovereign nations—India and Pakistan. Regarding Bapsi Sidhwa, Rituparna remarks:

Her stance is undoubtedly different from that of her Indian counterparts, and nowhere more radically so than in her portrayal of the ‘chief players’ of Partition – the triumvirate of Jinnah, Gandhi and Nehru. To counter what she claimed to be the British and Indian versions of Partition, Sidhwa in *Ice-Candy-Man* not only tries to resurrect the image of Jinnah but also seeks to demystify the images of Gandhi and Nehru.

Jinnah in the novel is highlighted as an ambassador of Hindu Muslim unity. (Roy 64)

Rituparna Roy states that nobody belonging to any religious community started the on slaughts. But she firmly believes that it was just due to the political, cultural, and social differences among the communities. There are several connotations in the novel. But after reading the novel carefully, the reader, without a shadow of a doubt, perceives that it is essentially a novel reflecting the sociological and political issues of Partition. The crux of the novel is that Bapsi Sidhwa censures the Congress party, Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, etc., who are responsible for Partition and she, at the same time, applauds the Muslim League and M.A. Jinnah for showing an alternative to the Muslim community.

### III

#### Conclusion

As the ghastly tragedy of Partition was politically motivated, it caused a lot of disturbance to the religious and cultural harmony among the Indians. This research article has portrayed the politics of Partition in particular and other related issues in general, making a comparative study of Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi* and Bapsi Sidhwa’s *Ice Candy Man (Cracking India)*. Chaman Nahal’s *Azadi*, a part of *Gandhi Quartet*, has a greater dimension that encased the comprehensive picture of the Gandhian age in Indian life. While accusing the

Britishers' use of their Machiavellian trickery to divide India and the Congress party, Nahal in his novel, *Azadi*, appreciates all the efforts made by Gandhi in making India a freed and wonderful home. The novelist was successful in accomplishing his main objective by depicting M.K. Gandhi's inevitability of his role in the nation's struggle for independence.

Bapsi Sidhwa's denigration of Gandhi's sterling personality, on the one hand, for being the main reason behind the heart-rending and catastrophic Partition is rather forthright and brutally outspoken, but her criticism of Jawaharlal Nehru, on the other hand, is quite indirect and a little bit obscured. Sidhwa thought that M.K. Gandhi in particular and other political leaders in general were blameworthy of the ghastly tragedy of Partition. But simultaneously, she pardoned M.A. Jinnah as he showed a way for an alternate view of reality for the Muslim community. She unstintingly appreciates the role of M.A. Jinnah in the struggle for independence.

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