

Love, resistance, and social justice: A Foucauldian analysis of power dynamics in Ravinder Singh's *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*

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Abstract: This research paper examines Ravinder Singh's novel *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* (2014) through the theoretical framework of Michel Foucault's power relations and resistance concepts. Previous scholarship primarily focuses on the novel's romantic elements and social commentary; however, this analysis employs Foucault's theories to illuminate how the text navigates institutional power structures, mechanisms of control, and forms of resistance within contemporary Indian society. Through close textual analysis, this study demonstrates how Singh's narrative reveals the complex interplay between power and resistance in educational institutions, gender relations and social activism. The research argues that the novel's portrayal of love and activism represents what Foucault terms 'points of resistance' against systemic oppression while simultaneously illustrating how power relations permeate all aspects of social interaction. This paper examines the novel *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* through the lens of Michel Foucault's terms and concepts, including the microphysics of power, institutional space, the panoptic mechanism, counter-conduct, the regulatory ideal, technologies of the self, the practice of freedom, subjugated knowledge, games of truth and parrhesia.

Keywords: power relations, resistance, social activism, gender violence, Foucauldian analysis

Introduction

Ravinder Singh's *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* presents a compelling narrative transcending the traditional boundaries of romantic fiction, offering a nuanced exploration of power dynamics and resistance within contemporary Indian society. Set against the backdrop of Delhi University, the novel interweaves a love story with crucial social commentary, making a significant contribution to modern literature.

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Singh's work represents a new wave in Indian fiction where personal narratives become inseparable from social consciousness. The integration of romance and social activism reflects the evolving landscape of Indian society and literature in the 21st century, particularly when viewed through a Foucauldian lens.

The novel centers on Rupali, a small-town girl from Patna, who arrives at Delhi University with aspirations to change the society. Her romantic and political journey serves as an ideal canvas for exploring what Foucault calls 'the microphysics of power,' where power relations manifest in everyday interactions and institutions. Through Rupali's experiences, Singh demonstrates how power operates through overt oppression and subtle control mechanisms embedded in educational, social, and cultural norms.

This study utilizes Foucault's theoretical framework to examine several aspects of the novel: the university as a site of power and resistance, the interaction of personal and political spheres in student activism, and the role of gender within systems of power. Drawing on Foucault's concepts from *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, this paper argues that Singh's work reflects the power dynamics that permeate social life and underscores the potential for resistance through individual action and collective movements.

Theoretical framework

This analysis employs Foucault's conception of power, which provides a theoretical lens that moves beyond traditional views defining power as purely repressive and top-down. Foucault argues that power is productive and operates through complex networks of relationships. In *The History of Sexuality*, he writes, "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault 1978, 93). This understanding of power as omnipresent yet dynamic helps illuminate the complex social dynamics portrayed in *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*.

Foucault's concept of resistance, particularly relevant to Singh's novel, posits that resistance is inherent in power relationships. He argues that wherever power exists, resistance inevitably emerges, and this resistance is never positioned externally to power. This theoretical framework elucidates how Rupali and Arjun's activism operates within existing power structures while also challenging them, revealing the complex interplay between conformity and resistance within institutional frameworks.

The university serves as a pivotal site of power relationships, exemplifying what Foucault terms 'institutional space,' where power relations are both exercised and contested. The university environment acts as a microcosm of broader social power dynamics, where various forms of authority engage with resistance mechanisms. Singh's portrayal of campus life reveals what Foucault describes as disciplinary mechanisms that regulate behaviour, thought, and social interactions within educational institutions, while concurrently fostering spaces for intellectual discourse and political activism. The novel's treatment of surveillance and control in educational spaces particularly resonates with Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish*, where he argues that "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection." (Foucault 1977, 202-03)

The leak scandal becomes a point where this power becomes visible and contestable. The portrayal of campus life aligns with Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, particularly evident in institutional spaces that regulate behaviour through surveillance and normalisation. The novel depicts various forms of monitoring and control, from official administrative oversight to informal peer surveillance, characteristic of autonomous educational institutions.

Then all of a sudden, something struck Rupali, 'I have evidence!' she smiled. Arjun was curious. He waited for Rupali to speak. 'I have . . .' Rupali stopped as soon as she began her sentence. She took a second or two to speak again. As she was about to say it, she realized she couldn't look into Arjun's eyes while revealing what she was about to. 'A video of Mahajan sexually abusing Raheema will definitely serve as evidence. Right?' (Singh 2014, 92)

By recording and exposing the abuse, Rupali's video engages with the contemporary mechanisms of disciplinary power. It provides evidence for legal action and functions as a tool for surveillance, control, and the normalisation of acceptable behaviour within institutional spaces. This reflects Foucault's broader argument that modern societies regulate individuals through force, observation, documentation, and disciplinary mechanisms. He explains that "visibility is a trap" that makes individuals more susceptible to power and control (Foucault 1977, 200).

The scene was similar at every epicentre of protest. The gathering at the vast space in front of Rashtrapati Bhavan was the biggest of all, seeing which the Rapid Action Force (RAF) had been installed next to the state police. From tear gas pistols to water cannons, the law and order machinery had prepared itself to deal with the situation at hand. (Singh 2014, ix)

The university's attempt to suppress student activism through the use of surveillance cameras and security personnel exemplifies what Foucault refers to as the 'panoptic mechanism,' where the possibility of being observed influences behaviour. As Singh describes:

A gathering of thousands at this one place was a sight to behold. Every single sound, be it the frequent voices over the hundreds of walkie-talkies in the hands of cops, the centralized loudspeaker installed over the RAF's Vajr van, or the news journalists reporting live, all of it added to the noisy chaos. But the one sound that dominated and suppressed every other was the thumping hum of the crowd. (Singh 2014, ix)

Singh's portrayal demonstrates how Foucault's analysis of surveillance systems operates through direct observation and the internalisation of disciplinary norms. The novel shows how students develop what Foucault terms 'counter-conduct' - ways of resisting power while operating within its constraints. The institution's surveillance mechanisms serve as both a means of control and a catalyst for resistance. Foucault explains that "... we must hear the distant roar of battle" when analysing power and resistance, as it is through these struggles that power becomes both visible and malleable (Reid 2003, 5).

The novel's exploration of gender issues, viewed through a Foucauldian lens, reveals intricate power dynamics. Rupali's experience as a female student activist exemplifies what Foucault refers to as 'polymorphous techniques of power' at play on gendered bodies. Her navigation of traditional patriarchal expectations alongside modern aspirations illustrates how power relationships shape individual subjectivity. For example, Rupali's decision to participate in a protest against the institution's discriminatory policies is an act of resistance within the constraints of the surveillance mechanisms in place. The surveillance cameras that monitor her every move also serve as a reminder of the institution's power over her, but they also fuel her determination to challenge and subvert that power. As Foucault posits, "The individual, that is, is not the vis-à-vis of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects." (Foucault 1980, 98) As Singh writes:

'Babloo iske purse mein se mobile nikal ke switch off kar pehle. Fir muh band kar saali ka!' (Search her purse for her mobile and switch it off first. Then shut her damn mouth!) the guy on the seat next to the driver shouted. His command was immediately followed. The guy on the left quickly searched her purse, switched off her mobile and took all the cash he could find. He then threw it behind the seat. Rupali could only watch as the other guy had his hand pressed on her mouth. (Singh 2014, 221)

This illustrates how gender functions, as Foucault describes it, as a 'regulatory ideal' as the norm that gets established as an optimal or ideal normal and is then used to regulate populations, dictating how they ought to behave. "The idea that the norm functions differently within disciplinary and biopolitical contexts ..." (Taylor 2009, 51) influencing behaviour and identity formation while simultaneously creating possibilities. Rupali's journey from a small-town girl to an activist challenges traditional gender norms and established power structures. The novel's depiction of gender-based violence aligns with Foucault's analysis of how power operates upon bodies, with distinct forms across gender lines. The threats and harassment Rupali endure exemplify how social institutions and practices regulate and control bodies. Nevertheless, her activism and educational efforts highlight how power relations can be contested and redefined.

The novel's depiction of resistance and social activism aligns with Foucault's concept of resistance as inherent to power relationships. Singh's portrayal of student protests demonstrates what Foucault terms 'points of resistance' within the power network. In her article "The Politics of Time and Temporality in Foucault's Theorisation of Resistance: Ruptures, Time-Lags and Decelerations" Mona Lilja discusses Foucault's concept of 'points of resistance' within power networks, stating:

Resistance occurs as micro complexities – with words and sentences – and spreads itself about as a network. Still, the net-like organisation of small instances/intensities of resistance, which are imperceptibly repeated in all venues of society, can give rise to 'a revolution' after a delay of time. (Lilja 2018, 426)

The university serves as a ground where both resistance and contestation take place. The student movement against corruption represents not just opposition to authority but what Foucault would identify as the strategic codification of points of resistance. Singh describes the evolution of student resistance:

A few thousand feet below the angry black clouds were many thousand angry souls who had come out on the streets of Delhi. Agitated young men and women—college students and office goers. There was rage in their eyes, their young faces, their body language. They were a mass of anger and protest. And they were loud—louder than the loudest thunderclaps. It didn't matter if they knew the person standing next to them or walking with them. They had all gathered for a cause that was common to each one of them—justice! (Singh 2014, viii)

This passage shows Foucault's assertion that resistance is not merely reactive but productive, creating new knowledge and social relations. Through organising protests, information-sharing networks, and strategic use of media, the students demonstrate what Foucault terms 'tactical reversals' of power relations.

The novel's exploration of social media activism particularly resonates with Foucault's analysis of discourse and power. When Arjun and his fellow activists utilise social media to expose corruption, they engage in what Foucault would recognise as the creation of counter-discourses. Digital resistance exemplifies Foucault's concept of power as productive rather than merely repressive, as students generate new forms of knowledge and solidarity through online activism. The intersection of political and personal power in the novel, where romance intertwines with social activism, illustrates Foucault's insight that power relationships permeate every aspect of social life, including intimate relationships. The love story between Rupali and Arjun exemplifies what Foucault terms 'the microphysics of power' operating at the most personal level of human interaction. Their relationship evolves within and against existing power structures, rendering even love itself a site of power dynamics.

Gosh! This is happening. She knows she isn't dreaming. It is all for real. She is present at that moment. And she is prepared for it. He bends down to kiss her. Arjun closes his eyes and their lips meet. There is an explosion of senses as Arjun goes deeper and sucks on her lower lip as if trying to extract all his share of love from her. He pulls her closer to himself. She tightens her arms around him and kisses him back with equal passion. They are now kissing each other hungrily as if they have waited for this all their lives. The cold, the darkness, the world around them ceases to matter. All they feel is each other—the wetness between their lips. (Singh 2014, 163)

The novel depicts how personal relationships can become sites of resistance while simultaneously being influenced by broader power dynamics. Foucault's concept of 'technologies of the self'—how

individuals transform themselves within power relations—helps illuminate how Rupali and Arjun’s relationship facilitates personal and political growth. The development of their romance mirrors their increasing political consciousness, exemplifying Foucault’s theory of the interconnection between individual transformation and social resistance. Their shared activism creates what Foucault refers to as a ‘practice of freedom,’ a means of existing within power relationships while actively reshaping them.

Singh’s exploration of corruption in the education system aligns with Foucault’s analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge. The novel demonstrates how institutional power maintains itself through knowledge control, while resistance involves the production and circulation of counter-knowledge. The student’s investigation of the corruption in the education system exemplifies what Foucault terms ‘subjugated knowledge’—forms of understanding that challenge official narratives.

Your Dreams Are Mine Now portrays how the struggle for social justice inevitably involves what Foucault calls ‘games of truth’—contests over what constitutes legitimate knowledge and who has the right to articulate it. Through their investigation and exposure of corruption, the students engage in what Foucault terms ‘truth-telling’ or ‘parrhesia’—speaking truth to power despite personal risk. The students jeopardise their safety and future by uncovering governmental corruption, challenging the authorities’ narrative of truth. Their participation in these games of truth ultimately questions the legitimacy of those in power.

The students demonstrate their commitment to fighting for a more just society by challenging the authority’s monopoly on truth. Their actions emphasise the importance of transparency and accountability in governance and the individual’s power to hold officials accountable. The novel thus serves as a testament to how the struggle for social justice requires active participation in shaping the narrative of truth rather than passive acceptance observation.

The treatment of urban space and power dynamics in the novel *Your Dreams Are Mine Now*, particularly the representation of power relationships in Delhi, offers another rich avenue for Foucauldian analysis. Singh’s portrayal of the city, especially the university campus and its surrounding areas, illustrates Foucault’s concept of spaces that simultaneously reflect and contest social power structures. Singh’s Delhi emerges as a complex tapestry of overlapping power

relationships, a maze of invisible boundaries delineating privilege from poverty, tradition from modernity, and authority from resistance. The contrast between Rupali's small town and the urban landscape unveils distinctly different power structures operating in each space. The university campus emerges as what Foucault would term a 'disciplinary space,' where architectural design and spatial organisation regulate behaviour while also providing opportunities for subversion. The physical layout of the campus reflects institutional power structures, simultaneously creating spaces for resistance and collective action.

Singh's portrayal of technology and social media as instruments of both surveillance and resistance reveals the intricate nature of what Foucault describes as 'panoptic power' in the digital era. The novel examines how contemporary technology generates new forms of control while concurrently facilitating new modes of resistance. The student's use of social media platforms demonstrates what Foucault might call a 'tactical reversal' of surveillance mechanisms:

That's when Prosonjeet played Sherlock Holmes and suggested what he believed was a brilliant idea. 'Create an anonymous account and post this on the Internet. YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, everywhere! It's that simple! Then we need to make sure a few people from the college watch it, bas! I can bet, it will go viral in no time!'

Everyone was quiet for a while, mulling over the idea. Then Arjun spoke, 'That sounds good! Really good! I think it addresses both the challenges: It promises to keep us anonymous and if we, through an anonymous ID, post this on our college's Facebook group, it will definitely go viral. And something like this going viral on a public domain is bound to create maximum damage! Very clever, Prosonjeet!' (Singh 2014, 96-97)

The university campus emerges as an architectural space where design and spatial organisation regulate behaviour while simultaneously offering opportunities for subversion. Singh's exploration of technology and social media as tools for both surveillance and resistance uncovers the complex nature of what Foucault describes as 'panoptic power', wherein modern technology creates new forms of control while facilitating new modes of resistance.

During protests, the students' bodies become primary instruments of resistance as they link arms and occupy spaces they have been instructed to vacate. This physical defiance against power structures challenges authorities' attempts to control not just minds but also physical presence in contested spaces. The physical toll of activism

illustrates what Foucault refers to as ‘the materiality of power relationships’—exhaustion becomes a constant companion, voices grow hoarse from shouting slogans, and muscles ache after hours of protest. Their bodies bear witness to the tangible reality of resistance. Rupali’s experience of gender-based harassment and her tragic end demonstrate how the female body serves as a particular site of power contestation. Singh’s approach to language and communication provides rich material for Foucauldian analysis, illustrating how language functions both as a tool of oppression and as a means of resistance. While the administration communicates in formal, bureaucratic language designed to intimidate and control, students cultivate their own vocabulary, transforming official terms into rallying cries. The multilingual nature of campus life reflects competing discursive frameworks, with Hindi, English, and regional languages generating distinct power dynamics. Although English remains the language of official power, resistance finds expression in every tongue, challenging institutional hierarchies.

Rupali finds empowerment in her capacity to communicate beliefs and values through the language of activism. With each word spoken, she uncovers a sense of power and agency that was previously unknown to her. As she gains fluency in the language of resistance, she cultivates a renewed sense of identity and purpose, emerging as a warrior for justice and equality. She confronts existing power structures with her words and ensures her voice is heard in a society that frequently seeks to silence dissent.

Singh’s portrayal of the emotional toll of activism offers insight into what Foucault might term the ‘affective dimensions’ of power relations. The novel demonstrates how emotional experiences serve as sites of both control and resistance. Through her characters’ experiences, Singh illustrates the transformative power of collective action and solidarity in confronting oppressive systems. By highlighting the protagonist’s emotional journey as they navigate fear and anger, she emphasises the significance of emotion in shaping an individual’s responses to power dynamics. For instance, when Rupali witnesses a police officer brutally assaulting a protester, her initial fear and anger evolve into catalysts for organising a protest march with fellow community members. This collective action not only highlights police brutality but also empowers the characters to challenge the oppressive system and demand justice.

The novel illustrates how local struggles are linked to global patterns of resistance. Social media allows students to gather inspiration and strategies from movements across the world, transforming their local battle against corruption into a component of a broader global dialogue regarding educational justice and institutional accountability. Singh's depiction reflects what Foucault describes as 'the multiplication of points of resistance,' where interconnected social movements amplify individual voices into a collective front against oppression systems.

This collective resistance highlights the power of solidarity and collaboration in fostering meaningful global change. By recognising the common threads binding disparate movements, society can strive to dismantle the structures that perpetuate inequality and injustice. Singh's novel demonstrates that no struggle exists in isolation – individuals can pursue a more equitable world through unity and solidarity.

The novel's exploration of media and information control exemplifies what Foucault refers to as 'the regime of truth,' in which society defines and upholds what is considered true. Singh delves into this dynamic across various media forms, investigating how these different media types function as both instruments of power and tools of resistance. This dynamic between traditional and social media highlights the complexities of information dissemination in the digital age. While official narratives dominate traditional outlets, alternative platforms enable new voices to challenge the status quo. Singh's analysis emphasises the importance of media literacy and critical thinking in navigating competing narratives that shape our understanding of truth. The interplay between power and resistance in media reflects broader societal tensions and struggles for truth and justice. The novel demonstrates the complex relationship between media and power:

The channel, a sycophant of the party in opposition in the state, knew how to use every opportunity against the party in power. When backed by its promoters, the channel lambasted Mahajan, who was the ruling party's right-hand man in DU, without giving it a second thought.

When one channel broke the story, others too wanted to play up the hype. Without investigating the source, they simply ran a ticker claiming that 'The channel doesn't vouch for the authenticity of the video', and went ahead with Mahajan's character assassination, debating how the whole education system had become corrupt. (Singh 2014, 102-103)

Knowledge and truth therefore emerge not only as instruments for maintaining power but also as weapons of resistance that challenge dominant narratives. The novel underscores social media's dual nature as both an oppressor and a liberator. Through active engagement with knowledge and truth, individuals resist and confront systems of control and manipulation.

Singh's novel provides significant insights into what Foucault terms 'the analytics of power' in contemporary society. Its complex portrayal of institutional power and resistance offers theoretical contributions that extend Foucault's analysis of educational institutions. The narrative illustrates how power relations operate at multiple levels simultaneously, from institutional structures to personal relationships, while demonstrating the possibility of resistance within these systems.

Singh's analysis of university power structures reveals the modern adaptation of traditional disciplinary mechanisms. The intersection of various power systems in the novel provides novel theoretical insights. This concept of 'networked resistance' transcends the conventional understanding of power dynamics as a simple oppressor-oppressed binary. Instead, it highlights the complexity and interconnectedness of different power structures and individuals' navigation through them. By recognising these multiple layers of power, we gain a deeper understanding of resistance and agency within society. The novel presents a rich tapestry of intersecting power dynamics, offering a nuanced and multifaceted view of contemporary power relations. This intricate interplay between power and resistance emphasises the continually evolving negotiation of societal structures. By illustrating how individuals and groups navigate and contest power dynamics, the novel highlights the potential for social change and transformation. Ultimately, the book serves as a profound reminder of the significance of agency in shaping the world around us.

The novel explores how cultural memory sustains resistance through characters who draw on their cultural history and traditions to inform their acts of resistance. By illustrating how power dynamics shape resistance efforts, Singh demonstrates the complex interplay between authority and those who challenge the status quo. The narrative suggests that cultural change necessitates collective action and a deep understanding of cultural heritage.

Conclusion

This Foucauldian analysis of Ravinder Singh's *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* reveals the intricate relationships between power, resistance, and social transformation in contemporary Indian society. By examining institutional power, student activism, and personal relationships, the novel offers crucial insights into how power operates and how resistance arises within modern educational institutions and broader social contexts. The application of Foucault's theoretical framework illuminates several key aspects of the novel. First, the university setting emerges as what Foucault terms a 'disciplinary space' where power relations are both exercised and contested. Singh's portrayal of Delhi University demonstrates how educational institutions employ various control mechanisms, ranging from surveillance cameras to examination systems, thus simultaneously becoming sites of resistance and transformation. The students' response to these control mechanisms, particularly their creative use of technology and collective organisation, illustrates what Foucault refers to as the 'strategic reversibility' of power relations.

The novel's exploration of gender dynamics offers rich material for understanding how power operates intersectionally. Through Rupali's character, Singh illustrates how female activists must navigate multiple power systems simultaneously: institutional authority, patriarchal structures, and social conventions. Her journey from a small-town student to an activist leader highlights the constraints imposed by these power systems and the potential for resistance and transformation. The gender-based violence she encounters exposes how institutional power often employs physical threats to maintain control, while her resistance demonstrates how collective action can challenge these mechanisms of oppression.

Integrating personal relationships with political activism in the novel suggests new ways to understand resistance movements. The love story between Rupali and Arjun demonstrates how emotional bonds can sustain political commitment and shows how shared activism can deepen personal connections. This interweaving of personal and political narratives challenges traditional distinctions between the private and public spheres, suggesting that effective resistance requires engagement with both dimensions of life.

Singh's portrayal of student activism offers valuable insights into the development and sustainability of movements. The novel illustrates that resistance involves not only opposing power but also creating

alternative spaces, narratives, and forms of knowledge. The students' utilisation of documentation, social media, and collective memory-making exemplifies how movements generate what Foucault refers to as 'counter-discourses' that challenge official narratives and inspire future activism. The novel's treatment of technology and surveillance reflects the challenges faced by contemporary social movements. Singh demonstrates how digital tools can serve both power and resistance, creating new organising opportunities while facilitating new forms of control. This dynamic illustrates how power relations evolve in response to technological change, necessitating that movements continuously adapt their strategies and tactics.

The novel's tragic ending serves not only as a commentary on institutional violence but also as an illustration of how movements can turn personal loss into collective resistance. Rupali's death acts as a catalyst for renewed activism, demonstrating how movements can continue to thrive even in the face of severe repression. This transformation of tragedy into resistance reflects Foucault's insight that power relations give rise to opposition. The implications of this analysis extend beyond literary criticism to illuminate broader questions regarding social change and collective action. Singh's novel suggests that effective resistance necessitates engaging with multiple forms of power simultaneously – institutional, cultural, technological, and interpersonal. The student movement thrives through confrontation and the establishment of alternative spaces, narratives and forms of knowledge.

The contemporary relevance of the novel's themes remains striking. As educational institutions worldwide grapple with issues of equity, accountability, and digital transformation, *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* offers valuable insights into how power functions and how it can be challenged. The novel's examination of institutional corruption, gender violence, and student activism speaks directly to current social movements and political struggles. This analysis also suggests several avenues for future research. The intersection of digital technology, institutional power, and student resistance merits further investigation, particularly as educational institutions evolve. The novel's exploration of gender and activism proposes new perspectives on how movements confront intersecting forms of oppression. The role of memory and documentation in resistance movements, especially in the digital age, represents another promising area for future study.

This study demonstrates the ongoing relevance of Foucauldian theory for understanding contemporary power relations and resistance movements. Singh's novel illustrates how power operates through prominent forms of repression and subtle control mechanisms embedded within institutional structures, cultural practices, and social relationships. At the same time, the novel unveils how resistance emerges through collective action, alternative knowledge production, and the transformation of personal relationships. *Your Dreams Are Mine Now* significantly contributes to our understanding of how power functions and can be challenged in contemporary society. Through its narrative and integration of social critique, the novel shows how literature can illuminate individual experience and collective struggle. Singh's work suggests that lasting social transformation necessitates engagement with both personal and political dimensions of life, highlighting how love and activism, individual growth and collective action can reinforce each other in the pursuit of justice.

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