

A Study On The Relevance Of Lok Adalat At Present In The Indian Judiciary System

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Abstract

The Indian judiciary system the epitome of Justice which has been providing impartial and quality justice for the last 70 years, is currently facing a huge unfortunate downfall because of its heavy pendency of cases. This pendency and an inordinate delay in disposal not only hamper the smooth running of the system but also causing major inconvenience for the people. This critical condition needs an immediate solution which can be an alternative dispute resolution platform where people can resolve their disputes. Here comes the Indian invention ADR platform Lok Adalat, where cases that are pending in courts or which are at the pre-litigation stage are settled amicably. This Lok Adalat is not only trying to provide a helping hand to the Indian judiciary system to overcome the downfall but also providing a helping hand to those distressed people who are exhausted from being in a queue to wait for their justice. This article aims to discover the relevancy of Lok Adalat at present in the Indian Judiciary system. The article also determined to discuss the problems associated with Lok Adalat and discover the possible solutions to those problems.

Keywords: Affordable for citizens, Alternative dispute resolution system, Indian Judiciary, Lok Adalat, Right to litigation

Date of Submission: 02-04-2024

Date of Acceptance: 12-04-2024

I. Introduction

Justice has always been a leading priority of our country our preamble and constrictions of India is proof of that. In the preamble, the first thing that was assured to people was justice social economic, and political then comes article 14¹ and art. 39-A² which was made underlying the notion of justice and equality. Indian Judiciary system consists of the Supreme Court at the apex, then the High Court, District, and other subordinate courts at the lower level playing a significant role towards the fulfilment of our constitutional goal by providing Justice with an amenability. But currently, the lack of infrastructure, lack of judicial strength, and Rigid complex procedures make the system slow resulting in an inordinate delay in disposal of even some small petty cases. According to William Gladstone 'Justice delayed is justice denied'. the high cost of the court fee is also denying justice to the poor section of people because they can't afford it. These conditions are not at all favourable for a democratic country like India where Justice is the main leading priority. According to the situation's requirement, India invented Lok Adalat a unique contribution to the World ADR³ jurisprudence. With time by viewing its growing popularity, it got a statutory status in 1987 under the Legal Service Authority Act 1987⁴ by promoting Article 39-A of the constitution of India which ensures justice on the basis of equal opportunity to all.

An Analysis of the Lok Adalat System

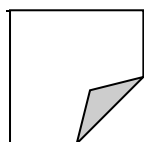
Lok Adalat, as suggested by its name it's a people's court, operating as a court for the public. It traces its origin to the Gandhian principle. It fosters a peaceful resolution by resolving cases through negotiation, conversation, and compromise. In the past, we used to apply this method of case resolution through gram panchayats and Nyaya panchayats by engaging conciliators and negotiators. Now we can see the resurgence of this approach of case resolution in the form of Lok Adalat. In the legal case of P.T Thomas v/s Thomas Job, the

¹ Art.14- Equality before law and equal protection of Law

² Art 39A- provides for free legal aid to the poor and weaker sections of the society and ensures justice for all

³ ADR- Alternative dispute resolution system is a platform where people can solve their cases outside the courtroom without a trial. Some common ADR mechanisms are Mediation, Arbitration, and Conciliation.

⁴ Legal Service Authority Act 1987- this is an act made by the Indian parliament to enforce the provisions of Article 39



Supreme Court elucidated that Lok Adalat is an ancient adjudicating system, which retains its legitimacy even in the current legal landscape. Lok Adalat can be conducted at different levels such as National, State, District, and Taluk, as outlined in sections 3, 6, 9, and 11a of the State Legal Service Authority Act of 1987. There is also mention of the Supreme Court and High Court Legal Service Committee in sections 3A and 8A accordingly in this act. In Chapter VI, section 19 Lok Adalat is directed to convene at intervals and places, with the authority to exercise jurisdiction over areas deemed appropriate. Section 19(2) states Lok Adalat organized for an area shall consist of such number of serving or retired judicial officers and other persons of the area as may be specified by the authorities.

The jurisdiction of Lok Adalat is elaborated in Section 19(5). it can determine any dispute in respect of “i) Any case pending before any court and ii) Any matter which falls under the jurisdiction of but not brought before. So, it not only solves pending cases but also solves cases that are at the pre-litigation stage. It is to be mentioned here Lok Adalat does not exercise its jurisdiction on any case or matter which is not compoundable under any law.” (Kukreja, 2019)

Section 20 deals with the cognizance of cases by Lok Adalat. In the context of pending cases “a) If parties thereof agree b) or one of the parties makes an application to the court c) and the courts satisfied that the case is appropriate to be taken cognizance by Lok Adalat then only the case can refer to Lok Adalat. In case of pre-litigation disputes the case can be referred to Lok Adalat by the agency organising it on an application made by any of the parties.” If the Lok Adalat remains unsuccessful in reaching a compromise or providing an award, the matter will be sent back to the court from which it was initially received. In case of pre-litigation cases if Lok Adalat couldn't make any award on the ground that the parties couldn't arrive at a solution then the Parties can exercise their legal right and further go the court for the redress. In instances of dissatisfaction with the award given by Lok Adalat, the dissatisfied party involved in the case cannot further appeal against that award. Nevertheless, they possess the right to litigation by initiating a new fresh case. Section 21 of the Legal Service Authority Act narrated that “Every award of Lok Adalat shall be deemed to be a decree of a civil” court which means the award made by the Lok Adalat shall be binding on the parties. Section 22 deals with the power of the Lok Adalat. As per this act the Lok Adalat and permanent Lok Adalat exercise the same power as a civil court can under the code of civil procedure, 1908⁵ that is

- a) “Summoning and enforcing any witness and examining him on oath
- b) The reception of evidence on affidavits
- c) The requisitioning of any public record or document
- d) Such other matters as may be prescribed.” (Patil, 2015)

II. Permanent Lok Adalat

Chapter VIA and Section 22B of the Legal Service Authority Act deal with the establishment of Permanent Lok Adalat. The Legal Service Act 1987 was amended in 2002 and established The permanent Lok Adalat to deal with the cases related to public utility services. The permanent Lok Adalat consist of a chairman who is or has been a district judge or additional district judge or has held a judicial officer higher in rank than that of the district judge and two other persons having adequate experience in public utility services. Just like the Lok Adalat permanent Lok Adalat cannot exercise its jurisdiction in cases that are non-compoundable under any law. Any of the parties can make an application to the Permanent Lok Adalat for settlement of the disputes before bringing the case before any court after the application is made to the Permanent Lok Adalat, no party to that application shall invoke jurisdiction of any court in the same dispute.

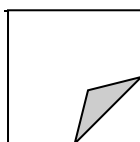
Section 22D of this act clarifies that while conciliation between two parties that is during the procedure, of solving the dispute the Permanent Lok Adalat shall be guided by the principle of natural justice, objectivity and fair play and shall not be bound by the code of civil procedure, 1908 and the Indian evidence act, 1872⁶ section. 22E states that the award made by permanent Lok Adalat is by majority and is final and cannot be questioned in any original suit. (Legal Services Authority Act, 1987)

Necessity of the Lok Adalat system

Conflicts and disagreements have entrenched themselves within our society. Over time it is solidifying as an inseparable facet. In parallel with this, there is a discernible surge in public consciousness about legal entitlements. People are becoming more aware and conscious about their legal rights. This rising consciousness compelled them to dissolve their disputes through litigation. It can be perceived as a positive trend because the tendency of individuals to possess their legal rights illustrates a social transition towards a more empowered citizen and underscores a growing reliance on Individuals in our Legal system. Though the surge in litigation is a positive trend but it also presents challenges for the judicial apparatus. Since courts are struggling with growing

⁵ Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 is a procedural law related to the administration of civil proceedings in India.

⁶ Indian Evidence Act, of 1872 contains a set of rules and allied issues governing the admissibility of evidence



caseloads, causing burdens and delays that ultimately obstructing the timely delivery of Justice. Now the concern is there is a discrepancy between the increasing number of cases and our judicial capacity. According to the 2001 census, India had only 14 judges per million people. The Law Commission of India, in its 120th report from July 1987 on judicial workforce planning, recommended 50 judges per million of the population. This recommendation however remained a mere suggestion, no action has been taken up on this recommendation. On December 31, 2021, The Law Minister conveyed to the Rajya Sabha that the judge-to-population ratio, based on the sanctioned judges' strength according to the 2021 census is 21.03. (The Economic Times, Feb 10, 2022) However, this current number is still insufficient in light of the increasing number of cases. According to the National Judicial data grid, more than 4 crores of cases are pending in India right now as of 1st May 2023 out of those more than 68 thousand cases are pending in the Supreme Court, more than 60 lakh cases are pending in the High court and more than 3 crores of cases are in the district and other subordinate courts. These are huge numbers. This number clearly indicates the inadequacy of existing judicial strength to meet the demands imposed by the rising caseload. This deficit has the potential to undermine the timely and efficient disposition of legal cases. Lack of courtrooms, insufficient infrastructure, lack of judges and rigid complex procedures collectively contribute to the delay in the disposal of even minor cases. This complex situation causes pendency and clogging of the legal system. This overburdening of the judiciary makes it difficult to ensure speedy and efficient justice delivery. This unwanted situation causes frustration among litigants and further diminishes public trust in the efficacy of the judicial system. (Noorani, 2006)

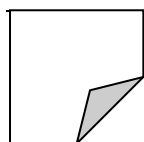
In the light of the increasing caseload on courts. It's evident that there is a need for an alternative platform to resolve some cases. This not only lightens the burden of courts but also ensures a speedy and efficient delivery of justice to people. An alternative platform like Lok Adalat aims to alleviating the strain on traditional courts and also streamline the legal process for quicker resolutions, ultimately benefiting both the Judiciary system and people who are exhausted from being in queue, waiting for their justice.

It is widely understood that court expenses are exorbitant, and lawyers charge a huge amount of money from their clients. It is not possible for every section of people to afford that money. Now it has to be ensured that someone's financial constraint should not impede one's right to access justice. Everyone has this right no matter who they are, and what their financial condition is. The Indian constitution, through Article 39a, mandates the provision of free legal aid to those who are financially vulnerable and belong to the weaker sections of society. No condition can deprive them of pursuing their legal right because our Constitution of India has given them the right.

Lok Adalat was established underlying the notion of providing free legal aid to the people. Those who can't afford the high expenses of courts can seek help from an alternative platform like Lok Adalat. It endeavours to save litigants both time and Financial resources. (Kachhwaha, 2017)

Advantages of Lok Adalat

- 1. No court fees:** It is universally known that court fees are very high, Lawyers charge a huge amount of money from their clients. Economically vulnerable people may not afford the high cost associated with lawyers. Lok Adalat is cost-effective. There are no court fees. By waiving court fees Lok Adalat guaranteed access to justice for everyone. Irrespective of their financial capacity. The adoption of this approach promotes the legal framework to become more inclusive and encourages individuals to have faith in the legal system of our country. It motivates individuals to pursue resolutions without the added strain of financial burdens. By not imposing court fees, Lok Adalat confirms its dedication to providing a justice platform that is both expeditious and economically viable. (Garg, 2014)
- 2. No strict procedure:** Lok Adalat is flexible and informal in nature. It does not consist of strict rigid provisions which are hard to understand for a person who belongs outside the Legal sphere. The absence of rigid procedures paves the way for an approachable and user-friendly atmosphere where involved parties have the opportunity for open communication and negotiation. The free environment encourages them to talk freely without any hesitation. While the lack of strict procedures may seem unconventional, it plays a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency of Lok Adalat in providing quick and just resolutions. (Prakash)
- 3. Direct interaction with the judge:** In Lok Adalat parties have a unique opportunity to directly interact with the presiding judge this dynamic feature of Lok Adalat distinguishes it from conventional court proceedings. This distinctive characteristic establishes a more individualized and direct mode of interaction between the concerned parties and judicial authority unlike regular courts, where communication is held through legal representatives and under standardized protocols. In Lok Adalat creates a space for the concerned parties to openly voice their concerns, articulate arguments and directly seek clarification from the judge. The direct interaction not only facilitates the legal process to become streamlined but also enhances the transparency of the entire system.
- 4. The award of Lok Adalat is Final:** the award of the Lok Adalat is deemed final and binding on the parties involved. An award given by the Lok Adalat becomes final and conclusive which means the decision cannot



be questioned or further appealed in traditional courts by the involved parties. Though this provision might limit the opportunity of further appeal to the party who decides it as unjust on the positive side this provision contributes to the expeditious resolution of disputes by eliminating the lengthy appellate process. The ultimate nature of Lok Adalat contributes to the primary goal of easing the workload on traditional courts.

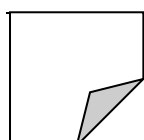
5. **Trying to reduce the burden of courts:** By reducing the backlog of cases, Lok Adalat trying to alleviate the burden on traditional courts. Lok Adalat has been playing a crucial role by focusing on the reduction of pending cases. They have been actively addressing the problem of backlogs. (Khan, 2005)
6. **It aims to make justice more accessible and affordable for citizens:** The traditional court system is quite expensive whereas Lok Adalat is affordable for all sections of society. The primary aim is to strive for the promoting of broadening access to justice and making it economically feasible. One of the key methods by which Lok Adalat enhance accessibility is by making Conciliation a priority. This not only promotes financial relief for litigants but also fosters a dispute-resolution culture that is less hostile and more cooperative. (Mehrotra, 2021)
7. **Lok Adalat encourages consensual arrangements:** Lok Adalat encourages litigants to solve their cases through consensual means. It encourages a collaborative environment wherein conflicting parties actively participate in negotiations. By avoiding confrontational legal disputes Lok Adalat generates an atmosphere that motivates the parties to seek common ground that is more or less satisfactory to both parties.
8. **Try to maintain a harmonious relationship between the involved parties:** By seeking to bridge gaps Lok Adalat try to maintain a harmonious relationship between the conflicting parties. The chief purpose is not merely the resolution of immediate Legal matters but also encompasses a commitment to enduring harmony and reconciliation. Furthermore, the focus on sustaining a harmonious relationship resonates with the broader societal goal of encouraging peaceful cohabitation. (Pandey, 2023)

Nationwide performance of Lok Adalat from 2018-2021

NATIONAL LEGAL SERVICE AUTHORITY												
Disposal of National Lok Adalat held on 14.07.2018												
S.No.	Authority Name	No. Of Lok Adalats	Pre-Litigation Cases			Pending Cases			Total			
			Expenditure Incurred	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)
1	ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
2	ANDHRA PRADESH	595	0	26284	5004	24441318	51448	9353	376223156	77732	14357	400664474
3	ARUNACHAL PRADESH	16	0	1273	310	2879489	258	48	10000000	1531	358	12879489
4	ASSAM	301	66321	59354	6266	170631739	15991	5587	168062861	75345	11853	338694600
5	BIHAR	410	81009	258149	27702	1295864420	13296	4041	115909342	271445	31743	1411773762
6	CHANDIGARH	13	0	1521	14	591500	3925	2443	159881011	5446	2457	160472511
7	CHHATTISGARH	870	0	310184	6385	89870837	57437	8161	537861868	367621	14546	627732705
8	DADRA AND NAGAR HAVELI	2	0	161	0	0	162	61	9370879	323	61	9370879
9	DAMAN AND DIU	41	2700	5	0	0	19	7	85945000	24	7	85945000
10	DELHI	121	0	5299	1051	19389442	14517	10461	365322114	19816	11512	384711556
11	GOA	19	13750	1881	192	8520570	1217	395	11082672	3098	587	19603242
12	GUJARAT *	1495	38500	77057	7142	222242530	52181	22639	1778600279	129238	29781	200842809
13	HARYANA	125	89546	18911	6571	81261346	51333	8509	198678719	70244	15080	279940065
14	HIMACHAL PRADESH	112	0	4647	1245	40778223	7035	3238	151367264	11682	4483	192145487
15	JAMMU AND KASHMIR	108	5500	7193	4668	34887348	12428	9412	363811062	19621	14080	398698410
16	JHARKHAND	236	23806	22055	10200	221951283	8357	6631	115481061	30412	16831	337432344
17	KARNATAKA	689	0	21165	2870	129959338	54698	19964	1040596398	75863	22834	117055736
18	KERALA	805	131270314	83458	21929	879271696	60774	12351	2653659226	144232	14280	3532930922
19	LAKSHADWEEP	2	0	6	4	0	0	0	0	6	4	0
20	MADHYA PRADESH	1165	130086	338613	29874	376372297	195310	19672	1707512437	533923	49546	2083884734

S.No.	Authority Name	No. Of Lok Adalats	Pre-Litigation Cases			Pending Cases			Total			
			Expenditure Incurred	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)	Taken Up	Disposed Off	Settlement Amount (Rs)
21	MAHARASHTRA	987	96000	604286	115612	449606442	161166	34067	2448890825	765452	149679	2898497267
22	MANIPUR **	16	193000	285	264	8852078	20	11	1891153	305	275	10743231
23	MEGHALAYA	36	0	1125	144	4138980	626	185	3907223	1751	329	8046203
24	MIZORAM	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
25	NAGALAND	19	0	1736	574	24911042	162	78	24626000	1898	652	49537042
26	ODISHA **	188	25000	47932	2540	101172727	37023	3770	442677304	84955	6310	543850031
27	PUDUCHERRY	12	0	2617	167	8499483	2409	1032	24039418	5026	1199	32538901
28	PUNJAB	274	6100	56100	9417	424573009	35198	19010	2735697470	91298	28427	3160270479
29	RAJASTHAN	793	15000	122384	10129	343473984	134282	26059	2118190569	256666	36188	2461664553
30	SIKKIM	10	0	8	8	166918	21	21	104500	29	29	271418
31	TAMIL NADU	483	25000	119669	20280	430353105	189936	79313	3625018929	309605	99593	4055327034
32	TELANGANA	241	6328	8047	6039	157592284	16627	10139	409115901	24674	16178	566708185
33	TRIPURA	50	28122	2677	351	10650525	619	85	7855847	3296	436	18506372
34	UTTARAKHAND	152	5776	9717	1144	83484607	6050	3357	226407416	15767	4301	398932023
35	UTTAR PRADESH	598	104412	774556	303539	1691600639	360134	169711	137572222	1137590	473250	306737861
36	WEST BENGAL	167	359094	22725	3968	151317592	11913	9351	81832527	34638	13319	231150119
37	SC/SC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
38	Grand Total	11151	132585364	3013980	605603	7489306791	1556572	498962	23375392653	4570552	1104565	30864699444

Note: * National Lok Adalat was held on 22.07.2018 in Gujarat SLSA
 ** National Lok Adalat were held on 28.07.2018 in Odisha and 4 Distt. Of Manipur SLSA.



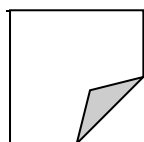
On December 11 National Lok Adalat was established in that Lok Adalat more than 54 lakh cases have been disposed of, which is huge in number. Out of 54 lakh more than 35 lakh cases were those cases which were at the pre-litigation stage and more than 19 lakh cases were those which were pending in courts.

Analysis of the overall performance

Every year the number is in the millions so we can see a positive growth in the performance of Lok Adalat. As the number of pending cases is huge so we cannot say that Lok Adalat reduces half of the burden overnight but we can say that Lok Adalat trying its best, they are trying to provide a helping hand to the courts. It is definitely going on the right path there is a positive hope that soon it will achieve its desired goal. By seeing the numbers one thing we can say with all assurance is that Lok Adalat is not merely in an experimental stage but is an effective mechanism accepted as a viable, economically efficient form of dispute resolution system.

Problems and their solutions

In the working of any system, one cannot find all the virtues together there must be certain flaws as well. However, the flaws can be minimized or totally eliminated. The limitations of the Lok Adalat are, **1.** Lok Adalat has faced criticism for giving more priority to quantity than quality as sometimes it focuses more on the numbers rather on providing quality justice, so the responsibility of maintaining a balance goes on the shoulder of the authority responsible for establishing Lok Adalat and the members of Lok Adalat involved. While expeditious case resolution is necessary for reducing judicial backlog at the same time the need to uphold the quality of the judicial process is also necessary for ensuring a fair and effective legal system. For Lok Adalat to succeed, it is crucial to strike a harmonious integration between the speedy disposal of cases and maintaining standards of quality. So, It is important for the authorities to enact measures that maintain standards, with an emphasis on ensuring fairness and thoroughness in the process. **2.** The existence of Lok Adalat is often overshadowed by a notable absence of awareness. There has been a lack of awareness among people. A considerable portion of the population is uninformed about its existence they don't even know that something called Lok Adalat exists in our Legal system. This lack of awareness poses a challenge for some individuals in knowing its potential benefits. A necessary response to this issue involves launching a comprehensive and focused publicity campaign. To enhance the awareness initiatives such as miking and the distribution of pamphlets in areas where Lok Adalat are scheduled can be done. Mainstream media platforms like television and newspapers, social media can be a great platform for broad coverage and to disseminate information to a broader audience. Furthermore, conducting seminars offers a proactive strategy for enlightening individuals about the potential advantages of Lok Adalat. Through the integration of these approaches, a holistic campaign can contribute significantly to increasing awareness and accessibility to Lok Adalat services. **3.** In certain instances, Mediators might find themselves without the adequate training needed to facilitate meaningful conversations between involved parties. So, it is important to invest in comprehensive and intensive training programs for these mediators. This strategy empowers them to acquire the skills necessary for promoting open dialogue and encouraging the involved parties towards reaching viable solutions. Well-trained mediators can go beyond mere guidance, they can actively provide alternatives and thoughtful advice, fostering an environment that facilitates constructive resolution. **4)** Strengthening the infrastructure of Lok Adalat is essential for fostering a robust legal system. The efficiency of a judicial system is inherently tied to the well-established infrastructure. So, it is important for the government to allocate resources to strengthen the infrastructure. By enhancing the infrastructure of Lok Adalat the government can improve the overall efficiency of Lok Adalat. Essential financial support is imperative for the establishment and maintenance of Lok Adalat, covering costs associated with infrastructure, and personnel operational expenses. **5)** Employing a strategic methodology entails the establishment of specialization benches that align with the quantity and nature of cases to ensure the most effective deployment of judicial resources. A proportional balance between bench numbers, caseload, and judge availability promotes a streamlined legal process, ultimately amplifying the overall effectiveness of Lok Adalat. Through a targeted allocation, cases are resolved more expeditiously, taking into account specific requirements and complexities linked to different facets of legal matters. **6)** It is further suggested that judges need to be more serious and sensitive in their approach towards Lok Adalat proceedings. It emphasizes the need for a departure from this legal space as a mere festival or showcase, encouraging a transition towards a more solemn and purpose-oriented interaction. It calls for a more serious and sensitive approach that expresses a firm commitment to maintaining the true core and effectiveness of Lok Adalat, stressing its role as a forum for fair and just resolutions, not merely a ceremonial display. **7.** In light of the difficulties posed by geographic constraints for access to Lok Adalat service, a creative solution can be the introduction of mobile Lok Adalats. Mobile Lok Adalats are able to take justice to the doorstep of individuals situated in distant regions. By bringing justice to the individuals mobile Lok Adalat provide as a fair and easily accessible platform. Mobile Lok Adalats offers a practical approach to the intricate challenges posed by geography, reinforcing the principle that Justice should be universally accessible, regardless of their geographical positioning. (Zainulbhai, 2016)



III. Conclusion:

To conclude, we can say that Lok Adalat is an effective alternative dispute resolution mechanism. It aimed to promote quicker and more accessible justice. Based on the earlier discussion it is clear that Lok Adalat resonates with the evolving with the changing societal needs by fostering peaceful settlements. Lok Adalat deals with a wide range of legal matters, showcasing its continued relevance in achieving more accessible justice. The flexibility to adapt to different issues underscores their relevance. On the whole, the analysis claims that Lok Adalat is an essential foundation in India's legal framework, playing a pivotal role not only in diminishing the backlog but also in fostering public confidence through a more accessible responsive justice. From the above discussion, it is quite evident that Lok Adalat has continued its relevance throughout the years in the Indian judiciary system. As no system is without zero flaws, Lok Adalat also possesses some loopholes but it can be diminished completely by making solutions of those so that it can work more efficiently and responsively towards its objective.

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