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## Chisti Sufis: The Mystics Who Shaped Indian Sufism in 13<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Sudhanshu Kumar

M.A. History, UGC-NET JRF

Department of History, University of Delhi

**Abstract:** - The Chishti Sufis played a pivotal role in shaping Indian Sufism between the 13<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, leaving a lasting spiritual and cultural impact. Originating from the Persian Chishti order, these mystics, led by figures like Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, Baba Farid, Nizamuddin Auliya and many more emphasized love, devotion, and inclusivity. Their teachings promoted humanitarian values, religious harmony, and social welfare, making Sufism accessible to people across different faiths and backgrounds.

During the Delhi Sultanate and Mughal period, the Chishti order gained immense influence, attracting royal patronage while maintaining a distance from political power. The establishment of dargahs (shrines) as centers of spiritual guidance and community service further cemented their legacy. Their practice of sama (devotional music and poetry), particularly through qawwali, became a hallmark of Indian Sufi culture.

This paper explores the spiritual philosophy, socio-cultural contributions, and enduring influence of the Chishti Sufis in medieval India, highlighting their role in shaping a distinct Indian Sufi tradition that continues to thrive today.

**Keywords:** - Sufism, Sufi Silsila, Chisti Sufis, Sufi Centres, Khanqah, Dargah, Urs, Chilla-i-makus.

### Introduction: -

Sufism (Tasawwuf) in a general term, can be used for various mystical tendencies in Islam. There is division among Scholars regarding the root of the term Sufism. Some say that the original word is 'Sophia,' which means wisdom. Some Scholars believe that the term is derived from Arabic word "Saf which means rank. There are many words such as "Safa means Purity, Sof, means wool, "Suffah" means terrace. There is not a single term, that is Popularly acceptable among historian.

Scholars have also debated about the relation between Sufis and Islam. After discussion it is widely accepted that Sufi movement is characteristically Islamic in nature, which originated in Arab and Spread in different Parts of the world as the Muslim empire expanded. Almost all the Sufi on Sufi Silsila trace their origin from Prophet Mohammad, and they look him as a Perfect example for themselves. The Sufi says, that the Prophet led an extremely Simple life. He avoided all luxuries, he gave all things in charity, regular fasting, mostly spend night in praying. The Sufis look Prophet Mohammad as a role model, for living their life.

The Sufis, were very much muslims, who follows all the rules and doings of Islam. They are not against Islam or believe of Islam. The Sufis only says that by only doing the necessary work (Farz) you will not become a good muslim, we have to do some other Spiritual exercise to attain that level of devotion. The faith and practice of Islam is made up of three elements which is the basis of Islamic religion. 1. Iman (believe in revealed word of Allah) 2. Itaa (Compliance with Sahaadah) 3. Ihsan (practice of virtue and sincerity)<sup>1</sup>. Love is an essential feature of Mysticism. The Sufis also talk about Ishq, with God and not loving only for return but with devotion. "Muhabbat is the increasing intensity of Ishq. The idea of Wahdut al- Wujud.( Union with God). In sufi tradition Dhikr is very important which is taking the name of Allah repeatedly. Sama and Qawwali is also strong among some of the sufi silsilas. The Sufi says that Nafl is equally important as Farz works.

Sufism in India, Come with the expansion of Muslim empire. There is no doubt that. Sufism was Connected with missionary zeal. Prior to the Invasion of Muhammad ibn al-Qasim the Sufis were not very much interested in the region of Indian Subcontinent, as the muslim Population was meagre at that time. Sufis started settling in that region after the territory Come under Muslims. The Sufis had two Purpose to show the right Path to the rulers and spread the message of Islam to the natives. Al-Hujwiri was the earliest Sufi of eminence to have settled in India. He was the author of Kashf-ul-Mahjub<sup>2</sup>. The prominent Sufi order only Came in the time when Delhi Sultunate established in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Many Sufis turned toward Indian Subcontinent, because of the destruction by the Mongols in Central Asia. Indian Subcontinent became the centre of refugees and centre of Islam in the East. In 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, Khanqah sprang up in Various parts of India.

After giving a brief introduction about Sufism, now we will move to our main theme of discussion which is the major Chistis Sufis Centres and their reasons for Popularity among the masses. The Place Called "Chist" or "khrist" in Present day Afghanistan, is the origin important Centre for Chistis. Shaikh Abu Ishaq Shami migrated from Syria to chist, who claim Spiritual Origin from Ali and the prophet. when we talk about famous chisti Sufi centres, we find many of them in 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century in South Asia. Some of the early chisti Sufi's gained Popularity in their life time only through their spiritual excellence and piety and many sufis gained popularity after their death, as their Dargah on khanqah become an important centre from Pilgrimage. The dargah of the early chistis not only have religiously significant but socio-religious role in early medieval times. There are certain dargahs which played an important role in the Cultural integration of different religion and Communities.

<sup>1</sup> Raziuddin Aquil, Music and Practices in Chisti Sufism, Vol-40, No-3/4, (Social Scientist, 2012) p.18

<sup>2</sup> S.S.A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India, vol.1 (New Delhi: Munshilal Manoharlal, 1978), p.112

We will discuss these points further in detail below discussing further we have to keep this in mind that "dargah" were not mere centre of religious matter but also centre of "Socio-religious and even "Political".

Most of the early Chisti Sufi Centre, of north India, belong to 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century. The oldest dargah is of "Shaikh Muinuddin Sijzi, the founder of the chisti Silsila in India, popularly known as Khwaja Garib Nawaz died in 1235 and buried in Ajmer. Khwaja Garib Nawaz, Spiritual Successor was Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar kaki (Qutb shahi) is associated with a Second oldest Dargah. He died in 1235 in Delhi. Another, early chisti Sufi was Shaikh Hamiduddin Nagauri, whom his Piru, Shaikh Muinuddin chisti posted in Nagaur where he died in 1276. Next was the khalifa of Bakhtiyar kaki, Called Shaikh Fariddudin Ganj-e-shakar, (Baba Farid), who died in 1265 at Pakpattan in Pakistan. The next Popular Chisti Sufi was shaikh "Nizamuddin Auliya", who was the Khalifa of Baba Farid who died in 1325 in Delhi. The next and the last famous Sufi chisti in Delhi was "Nasir-ud-Din Chiragh-i- Delhi, who was a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya, is last in the Chain of 5 great chisti Sufis.

Historians, have pointed out some of the reasons for the Popularity of early Sufis chistis. Some of the reasons are common for all chistis whereas, some of the chisti sufis become popular due to its distinct feature. The popularity of dargah was depended upon the spiritual excellence and noble qualities possessed by the Saints. The popularity of saint also dependent upon the spiritual greatness of his immediate successor. The expansion of the silsila and the legends that developed afterwards about the supernatural power of the saints and dargah. The Popularity was also because of the Visit of a monarch /sultans in the dargah, for gaining legitimacy and to give patronage<sup>3</sup>. The chistis also get popular because, it accepted many of the mystical cultures and tradition which were of non-muslims. Religious tolerance, every religious community was welcomed. These are the Popular reasons for Popularity of early sufi chistis but there are many other distinctive features that we will look, when we will focus on individual early sufi chisti dargah.

### **Muinuddin chisti of Ajmer (Garib Nawaz)**

The biographical details, from a standard Sources about Muinuddin chisti is very scanty. We can know about Shaikh Mu'inuddin Chisti, from Various text like Siyar-ul Auliya, Khairul Majalis, Fawaid ul Fuad, Surur-al-sudur etc. But historians doubt the historicity of these texts. There are debate among historians, regarding the date of arrival of Shaikh Muinuddin Chisti. Different sources give different year of arrival. Siyar-ul-Auliya of Amir khurd, says he came in the reign of Rai Pithora in Ajmer. This Point is also supported by Yusuf Hussain. S.A.A. Rizvi says that shaikh Muinuddin chisti Came to India and settled in Ajmer in 1206, during the reign of Sultan Qutubuddin Aibak. I.H. Siddique, refuted the above argument and says that, by the malfuzat, the Surur al Sudur, we came to know that shaikh Muinnuddin chisti came to Delhi and then proceeded to Ajmer during the reign of Sultan Iltutmish after the Hindu resistance in the region has been subdued. I.H. Siddique, also use Tarikh-i-Muhammadi to prove the argument that he came in the reign of Sultan Iltutmish. Khwaja was born in Sistan,

<sup>3</sup> Iqtidar Alam Siddique, The Early Chisti Dargahs, in Christian W.Troll, Muslim Shrines in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, pp.3-4

father was Ghiyasuddin Hasan. After Serving Usman Harvani, his master Usman Harwani appoint Muinuddin as his khalifa by giving khirka. I.H. Siddique, says that shaikh Muinuddin dargah doesn't become popular in his lifetime but with the passage of time from fourteenth Century onwards, many sufi Literature give evidence of the Popularity of dargah. There are many factors for popularity. First is the piety and the extreme austerity of the saint which influence a large number of People. Second is the greatness of his Spiritual Successors, particularly S. Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar and Shaikh Nizamuddin Auliya, Contributed to the Popularity of the dargah of Ajmer of their master. There was tradition in India, that the devotees of the Successor had also to cherish his memory and lay a Visit to his dargah. Siyar-al- Arifin of Shaikh Jamali Dihlawi who flourished during the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, give details about the dargah of Muinuddin. Siyan-at-Arifin, gives important information about the dargah's role in cultural integration of the two major communities hindu and muslims. Members of all the communities were allowed to visit in the dargah. All the people approached with different Spiritual, psychological economic problems and returned in Peace and filled with hope on account of their faith in the barakat (blessings) of the dargah. Conversion was not necessary for visiting the dargah. Unconverted hindus, also remained attached to dargah and pay regular visit there and made offerings in cash and kind. It was tradition of medieval time to give offerings to patron saint or deity, if their Prayers were answered. For Hindus and for new Converts to Islam whose conversion was partial, the dargah was a substitute for the idol. Therefore, the non-muslim Communities doesn't find much difference with their religion/Culture therefore it was more Popular<sup>4</sup>.

The visit of a mighty ruler in the dargah also raised the prestige of dargah among the Populace. Muhammad Bin Tughlaq first visited the dargah after defeating Kachwaha. Later it became a tradition to visit dargah by Sultans and to distribute money there. The sultans were no doubt doing this for gaining political legitimization but it increased the Popularity and belief in the power of the dargah. The dargah become more popular in 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Only in the time of Khalji of Malwa, the tomb was built over the grave. The grave dargah came into limelight only in the reign of Akbar. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century all the elite and masses started visiting dargah of Ajmer and become most Popular by the time Akbar ascended the throne. From '1570-1500' Akbar visited dargah several time. In 1568, after defeating Rama Udal Singh he visited the dargah, and also offered gigantic cauldron. A mosque was also built on Akbar's order. Akbar succession also showed respect to the dargah of Ajmer. They visited it and had a member of beautiful building added to Complex. In 1614 Jahangir gave even larger cauldron Shahjahan added beautiful mosques and gardens. As we have discussed earlier that, the Popularity of Saints was also dependent on his successor popularity. The successor of Muinuddin was very much famous like Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki and Qazi Hamiduddin Nagori. The legends, that were written invented by servitor and of miraculous powers of the saints made them popular.

<sup>4</sup> Iqtidar Alam Siddique, The Early Chisti Dargahs, in Christian W.Troll, Muslim Shrines in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1989, pp.6-7.

**Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki (Qutb Shahi)**

In 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Delhi become the seat of the Sufi movement due to Mongol invasions mainly Sufi, scholars migrated to Delhi as a peaceful area. Delhi became the Qubbatul-Islam. Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki was the Successor of Khwaja Garib Nawaz, who move to Delhi and died there only in 1235 CE. Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki was born in Ush. From an early age he was devoted to Prayers and meditation. At Baghdad he met Muinuddin Chisti and become disciple of him. He went to Delhi in 1221<sup>5</sup>. By the hagiographical records of 14<sup>th</sup> century, we came to know that the dargah of shaikh Bakhtiyar Kaki did not take long to emerge as a popular Centre of Pilgrimage. Like the factors we have discussed earlier in the Case of Muinuddin Chisti this dargah of Bakhtiyar Kaki also has many factors for gaining Popularity.

First is the emergence of Delhi as the center of Islam in the eastern world. Second, is the growth of furious malfuzat of Sufis regarding the miraculous power, that increase the believe of the devotees. The growth of Chisti-i-silsila, through the missionary work of Fariduddin and Nizamuddin contributed to the popularity in north India. The visit by Sultan Iltutmish on the dargah twice a week, also increased the prestige of the Sufi shaikh. Bakhtiyar Kaki, kept himself aloof from royal patronage or contact, but he was very much fond of "Sama" devotional Songs and music and he listened Secretly because of the ulemas. But the ulema cannot prevent the devotees, both hindus and muslim from paying visits to the shaikh/dargah. The popularity can be seen, in the accounts of Ibn Batutta, who arrived Delhi in 1333. He gives details about the blessed tomb of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki<sup>6</sup>. He also gives details why he was called Kaki.

One of the distinctive features of this dargah was that, there was a popular belief about the sanctity and blessed power of this dargah which led, muslim from different strata to bury their relations, within the dargahs compound. Therefore, by Fifteenth century the dargah contained, thousands of graves of sufis, ulema and notables. People desire to bury in the close vicinity of dargah, so that the blessing of shaikh would be always with them. There was also a popular believe that whoever will be offer Prayer in dargah, would be success in difficult circumstances<sup>7</sup>. Sultan Husain Sharqi of Jaunpur attacked in Delhi, then Sultan Bahlol Lodhi is reported to pray in Dargah whole night. People from city come to offer vows, but many villagers also came to the dargah for blessing in the time of distress, and some adopted the Islamic faith. The rich Hindu also made vows at dargah and sometimes converted, when their prayer were answered. These were the factors for the Popularity of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki.

<sup>5</sup> S.S.A. Rizvi, History of Sufism in India, vol.1 (New Delhi: Munshilal Manoharlal,1978),pp.134

<sup>6</sup> Ibn Batutta, The Travels of Ibn Batutta, vol-3,p.625

<sup>7</sup> Iqtidar Alam Siddique, The Early Chisti Dargahs, in Christian W.Troll, Muslim Shrines in India, Oxford University Press, Delhi,1989,p.13



**Fariduddin Ganj-e-Shakar (Baba Farid)**

Shaikh Fariduddin Ganj-i-Shakar, was one of the prominent Chisti Sufis in South Asia. Fariduddin was a disciple of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki known as qutub shahi, he moves from Delhi to Ajodhan where he died in 1265. The shrine is very much popular, because of piety and extreme austerity of the sufi. He was really very popular therefore, he was buried in his khanqah by his son against his will. There are many factors for the Popularity of the shrine and how the shrine gained religious and some political authority under his control. Ajodhan was Situated on the merchant caravan route linking Multan, with Delhi and other Parts of Delhi Sultunate. The merchants, nobles and soldiers from Delhi pay regular visit to dargah for the blessings of Sufi and for safety from dacoits and wild animals. Ibn Batutta says that huge amount of wealth flowed to Delhi. According to Richard Maxwell Eaton, the popularity of Baba farid also increase because of the Tawidh Culture. The Common people Come to Shaikh and ask to give Tawidh for the protection from evil eyes or other problem, in return they will give Some futuh gifts to the Shaikh. This 'tawidh-futuh system'<sup>8</sup> made Baba Farid as an intermediary between the devote and the God in the eyes of common people. But in reality, it was the material wealth for many works Baba.

After the death of Baba Farid many new things were introduced to the norms and added to the Complex. Vast shrine was made based on his tomb, a mosque was build, a langar khana was built. By the death, hereditary religious leadership was started, called as "Diwan". There was celebration of Urs (death anniversary celebrations). The regularization of ecstatic singing at the shrine. The tradition of opening the Southern door ( Bihisht darwaza/Door of Paradise) of Baba Farid tomb at the time of urs also started in this time. The Tughlaq were very much fond of Patronage to the shrine. Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq came very much attracted to the spiritual power of Tughlaq spiritual Diwan 'Ala-al-Din Mauj Darya". Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq brought Muhammad bin Tughluq and his nephew Firoz Shah Tughlaq, all three were given a turban by Diwan and told them all of them are destined to rule Hindustan. By these the symbols of shrine merged with the royal court. In the time of M.B. Tughlaq the shrine came under the control of court patronage. By the institutionalization of shrine, the popularity of the shrine spread to the rural areas, in the fourteenth Century. At this time the Shrine of Baba Farid Started appearing showing his Spiritual Power or authority. This Concept further developed in form of Baba Farid Wilaya (Spiritual kingdom) for certain geographical boundaries of Punjab.

The shrine of Baba Farid also attracted non-muslim to embrace Islam. But it was not Simply conversion but it was Islamization. A Popular legend of the Jawahir-i-Faridi, mentions many low Caste, people, high caste who embraced Islam by the hands of Baba Farid. R.M. Eaton, explain the process of Islamization. He says that the Jats, khokhars and Sial Rajputs were first integrated into the Socio- Political system of the Shrine through Patronage, when these groups saw that by associating them with the shrine has many advantages like access to the Court, Patronage, honour then they gradually integrated into the ritual and the religious structure of the Shrine.

<sup>8</sup> Richard M. Eaton, The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid, reprinted in R.M.Eaton India's Islamic Tradition ,711-1750, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003,pp.265-266

For the Jats, Rajputs shrine was like 'Theatre state' of the court System at Delhi<sup>9</sup>. The relation between there Converts and the Shrine members increased immensely through matrimonial alliance and other methods. By all these things the Popularity increased immensely of the shrine. The spiritual successors Nizamuddin Auliya also added to his prestige.

### **Nizammud-Din Auliya :-**

Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya, is also referred as Sultan-ul-Mashaykh (sultan of sufis) and Mahboob-I-Ilahi (Beloved of God) the Saints shrine in Central Delhi has attracted a large number of devotees over the centuries. The charismatic life of Nizamuddin is well documented in various sources like Fawa'id ul Fuad, Khairul Majalis, Qiwan ul Aqaid and Siyar ul Auliya. Now we study about the secret behind the popularity of the Saint and tomb. Shaikh Nizamuddin, was born in Badaun. He was qualified religious scholars (alim) of his age. Nizamuddin went to Delhi for search of Job as imam or khatibs. In Delhi Shaikh Najib-ud-Din Mutawwakil, Younger brother of the chisti Saint Baba Farid drew him to mystic path (Tarika). By seeing, young scholar, Farid immediately enrolled him as his disciple and soon as his successors<sup>10</sup>. The saint encounter with two kings of Delhi sultanate, qutb-ud-din Mubarakshah khalji and Ghiyasuddin Tughlaq. He never visited the court of sultan despite the invitation by sultans. He never accept the ruler's authority over his wilayat. So, there was always a tension between the two authorities. The Popularity of Nizammuddin lagged for some time because of the shifting of capital by M.B. Tughlaq from Delhi to Deogiri. But it doesn't took long time to gain popularity. Ibn Battuta, Says that M.B. Tughlaq, visited the khanqah very often. The popularity increased when G. Tughlaq died while coming to Delhi, and everyone thought that it was Nizamuddin's jalal (wrath) that killed G. Tughlaq. M.B. Tughlaq Successor F.S. Tughlaq paid frequent visit to the dargah and constructed the beautiful Jama'at khana mosque. In the time of F.S. Tughlaq, the Popularity of dargah increased as he left no stone unturned to beautify the dargah. Like king, nobles and rich men also raised buildings to provide rooms for sufi saints all around the dargah.

The greatness of the dargah of kaki and Baba Farid also help in the popularity of the dargah of Nizamuddin and vice versa. Another reason for the Popularity of dargah was with the muslim Intellectuals and literature, with it from very beginning. Many intellectuals of the early 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century were his murids and sincerely believed in the blessing of the Saint. Amir Khusrau Calls him the Christ of the age and reviver of Islam. Zia Barani Compares him with Junaid and other early saints of Islam. Many modern Philosopher Poet, like M. Iqbal paid visit to Dargah and find it as a source of life for the soul. Popularity was due to the religious tolerance and broad mindedness.

<sup>9</sup> Richard M. Eaton, The Political and Religious Authority of the Shrine of Baba Farid, reprinted in R.M.Eaton India's Islamic Tradition ,711-1750, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2003,pp.275-279.

<sup>10</sup> Raziuddin Aquil, Hazrat-i-Delhi: The Making of the Chistis Sufi Centre and the stronghold of Islam, (SAGE, Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore.2008) pp.37-38.

### **Nasir- Din- chiragh-I- Delhi**

He was the successor of Nizamuddin Auliya managed to keep the chisti tradition alive in Delhi at a time when Muhammad Tughlaq was reported to have turned hostile towards the shaikh and insisting cooperation of the sufis and ulema in strengthening his hold in the Deccan. By Sufi traditions we came to know that Nasiruddin decided to live in his own 'wilayat' only. His house was said to be the only one where lamp kept burning in Delhi, this is no doubt exaggeration. By this only he got the title of Chiragh-I-Delhi Lamp of Delhi.

With Nasiruddin Chiragh-e-Delhi, the first cycle of the 5 Great Chistis Came to an end, as he did not nominate any of his disciple as his successor to the Chisti order. In the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century, there was no concentration of chisti sufis in Delhi, a large number of chistis sufi Spread all over Hindustan, Bengal and the Deccan region.

One of the most important chisti sufi of Deccan was **Shaikh Banda Nawaz Gesu Daraz**. He was the disciple of Nasir-ud-Din chiragh Delhi, but he moved to Deccan because of the fear of Timur invasion and fading away of Delhi as the Darul-khalifa. The popularity of Genudaraz, increases after the death of saint in 1432. The Bahmani sultan granted the first inam land to Gesudaraz in early 15<sup>th</sup> century and continued giving lands to the descendants of the shaikh. After the city of Gulbarga and its surrounding lands passed to Bijapur's control in the early 16<sup>th</sup> Century. The Adil shahi court evidently honored the grants in 1609. The dargah was Constructed in 1422 but it was enlarged in 1640s. Sultan Muhammad Visited this dargah twice, this dargah by the time of 1650s, become as one of the great devotional Centre at the Deccan. The most important event for any dargah was "Urs". The Celebration of Urs, is nicely discribed by Abbe Carrée. It became an economic centre/market place<sup>11</sup>.

**Conclusion:** After the above discussion we can say that, the spiritual excellence and extreme piety of sufi saints was not the only reason for their popularity. There were many socio-economic and political reasons through that there dargah become so popular and still visited by millions of people. It is a misconception that chisti Sufis had no connection with the court. In reality both were interdependent on each other. The rulers needed the support of the Sufis and other holy men for legitimizing their political authority whereas the Sufis needed political patronage and support even tried to influence the rulers to be able to dominate the rivals. The most significant reason for their popularity of chisti Sufis according to me was syncretization of local cultures within their practices. The theory of Wahdat-ul-wujud is very much similar to the belief of Advaita Hinduism that Atma and Parmatma are one. The Sufis also learned the practices of Yoga from Nathpanthis Yogi. The practices of Pranayama (breath control) and Chilla-i-makus were incorporated in sufi practices. The non-muslim traditions also influenced by the ideas of Islam like criticism of idol worship, useless rituals, emphasis on equality and devotion for one God.

<sup>11</sup> Richard M. Eaton, The Sufis of Bijapur, 1300-1700, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2015) pp.227-235.



This period sets an example of religious and cultural coexistence. This ideals of sufi saints greatly attract large numbers of followers.

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