



Narrating The Climate Crisis In Pakistan: A Study Of Environmental Degradation In Awaiz Khan's Someone Like Her and No Honour

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Abstract

The study focuses on the representation of environmental degradation in Awaiz Khan's works, No Honour and Someone Like Her, from the perspective of David Wallace-Wells' climate-urgency discourse. The study will use textual analysis of Alan McKee as a method for gathering data from the selected text. The research explores how the novel portrays ecological deterioration in Pakistan through images of a polluted urban environment, garbage accumulation, toxic air, and extreme heat. The paper also highlights how these environmental conditions affect the lives of different characters in the novels. The study addresses two research questions: how do both novels depict the physical manifestations of environmental degradation in Pakistan, and do these novels, through the work of David Wallace-Welles, challenge the global narratives of climate urgency? The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Wallace-Welles' argument that climate catastrophe is a lived reality rather than a distant future threat. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to Pakistani ecocritical studies by foregrounding environmental injustice and climate anxiety within contemporary Pakistani fiction. The findings foreground that Awaiz Khan presents environmental challenges as an active force shaping social exclusion and human suffering.

Key Words: Climate urgency, Ecocriticism, Environmental degradation, Global warming, Urban pollution, Pakistani fiction



1. Introduction

The climate crisis has become one of the most urgent challenges of the twenty-first century, reshaping not only ecological patterns but also literary, cultural, and ethical discourses. Contemporary literature increasingly highlights ecological anxiety, environmental degradation, and the human fracture in its relationship with nature. Literature plays an essential role in raising awareness of ecological problems in the era of digital innovations, technological advancement, and industrialisation, where little regard is given to protecting the natural environment. The interplay between the environment and humanity is crucial, helping writers produce literary works that highlight how global climate and environmental concerns affect human life. Climate fiction and ecocritical studies spotlight the need for narratives that address the safety implications of ecological concerns for human societies alongside pressing environmental problems.

Pakistani English fiction has largely foregrounded themes of violence, gender, social injustice, political instability, class conflict, and urban violence. The contemporary Pakistani author Awais Khan's works are widely recognised for their themes of social issues, gender inequity, class conflict, honour-based killing, toxic masculinity, and toxic femininity (Ali & Gavino, 2008). These are the main themes of his writing, but his environmental concerns also appear in his novels. Writers like Awais Khan produce work that promotes environmental sustainability, reflecting a deep engagement with their homeland. As a developing country, Pakistan relies on its agricultural backbone, making it vulnerable to climate-related disasters. With a fragile governance structure, widespread corruption, weak infrastructure, substantial defence expenditure, and rampant poverty, it shares many of the same concerns and problems as South Asian countries. Pakistan witnessed escalating environmental crises in 2010, 2011, and 2025 floods that exposed its vulnerability and paralysed its agricultural and economic infrastructure (UNDP, 2023).

Khan's narratives do more than portray environmental degradation; they highlight the intersectionality of social injustices with climate change. His works exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly affecting marginalised communities. Khan's portrayal of characters grappling with their socio-economic realities shows that environmental crises reveal the deep interrelatedness of these issues. Through his storytelling, he urges readers to reflect on their relationship with nature and the urgent need for sustainable nature, positioning literature as a powerful catalyst for social change. By situating Awais Khan within this broader context, readers can better understand his contributions to the growing genre of climate fiction. His works resonate with global literary trends that respond to ecological crises and critique societal norms. Awais Khan became a significant voice in the conversation about environmental sustainability and social justice in South Asia.

1.1. Research questions

The research questions for the study are:

- How do the novels *No Honour* and *Someone Like Her* depict the physical manifestations of environmental degradation, such as garbage accumulation, air pollution, and heat within Pakistan?
- In what ways do these environmental depictions, through the lens of David Wallace-Wells' climate urgency, reflect or challenge the global narratives of climate change?

1.2. Research objectives

- To analyse how environmental degradation is symbolised and localised in *No Honour* and *Someone Like Her*, focusing on garbage, air pollution, heat, and plastic waste.
- To apply David Wallace-Wells' framework to assess how these local depictions evoke or contradict the global sense of climate emergency.



In doing so, the study aims to connect local, embodied experiences of pollution with the larger, existential stakes that Wallace-Wells articulates.

1.3. Delimitation of study

This study deliberately limits its analysis to two specific Pakistani novels, *No Honour* and *Someone Like Her*. Within this framework, the study confines itself exclusively to the depiction of environmental degradation, specifically garbage, air pollution, heat, and plastic waste, as represented in these novels. The scope does not extend to other environmental themes or other literary works, ensuring a focused investigation of how these specific narratives embody and reflect broader climate anxieties.

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is significant because it links a global climate crisis narrative articulated by Wallace-Wells to localised environmental degradation in South Asian urban contexts. By analysing *No Honour* and *Someone Like Her*, the study shows how everyday environmental issues such as trash, heat, and pollution are not isolated but reflect the broader, even existential, crisis Wallace-Wells warns about. This localised depiction helps readers understand that the environmental collapse described in global terms is also a lived, daily reality in South Asia.

2. Literature review

The literature review is already a scholarly work that identifies the research gap in the existing body of literature. The literature review is divided into two equal parts. The first part of it deals with the work of Awaiz Khan, novels such as *No Honour* and *Someone Like Hers*. The second part deals with the theory of David Wallace-Wells' In his work *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019).

A study by Hafiz Muhammad Jahanzaib Zafar et al. examines class issues in the novel *In the Company of the Strangers*. The researchers investigate differences between the elite class and the lower classes in Pakistan. The study examines the two main characters in the novel, Mona and Ali. Mona belongs to Lahore's elite class, while Ali belongs to the lower class. The study examines how Mona uses imported towels and "shows that she belongs to the elite class" (Zafar et al., 2023). The imported towels show her elite status in society. Similarly, Mona's house is also made of brick and glass, which also shows the luxury lifestyle of Mona. On the other hand, Ali belongs to a poor class and lives hand-to-mouth despite working hard; he is unable to provide for his family. He even lacks the basic necessity of life: a pillow. He "lacks even a pillow for sleeping" (Zafar et al., 2023). Therefore, Ali's character is an example of the poor class, where everyday struggle is a reality. In this way, the study examines class issues in Pakistan.

Farkhanda Shahid Khan's study of the novels *No Honour* and *Sold* is a comparative analysis that uses Kathleen Barry's concepts of trafficking and prostitution. Kathleen Barry argues that the chief objects of trafficking are "women in economically deprived societies" (Khan, 2023). These novels are set in developing countries like Pakistan and Nepal. The women of these countries are economically deprived, while the men are in power. Therefore, women become an easy target for trafficking in the country. The article further discusses the need for prostitution and how it should



be regulated. (Khan, 2023). Overall, the study highlights how women in less-developed countries suffer from a lack of resources.

Azhar Shah and Dr Rafiq Nawab study the novel *Some Like Her* from a psychoanalytic feminist perspective. The researchers look at how male chauvinistic attitudes lead to gender-based violence in the novel *Some Like Her*. In the novel, Raza Masood exemplifies male chauvinism. He uses his wealth and influence to gain Ayesha's approval for marriage. The researchers look at certain lines from the novel, for example, "That is exactly how my world works...What I want, I get" (Shah & Nawab, 2024). These lines show the deep inner particularity of the main character, Raza Masood.

A review published in Dawn newspaper by Sara Danial warns the reader of *No Honour* about the graphic violence that is presented in the novel. She calls it a "heavy and harrowing read" (Danial, 2025). The reason for this is that at the beginning of the novel, a 16-year-old boy kills his sisters in the name of honour. According to Danial, the novel "begins and ends with the debate of 'honour'" (Danial, 2025). Honour killing is the novel's main theme. Danial also appreciates Awais Khan's writing style, which is different from that of his first novel, *In the Company of Strangers*.

The Book Review Cafe calls *Someone Like Her* chillingly realistic because what happens to Ayesha is the daily reality for many women in Pakistan. The reviewers praise Khan for creating characters like Ayesha and Kamil, and for their courage. He calls this event "harsh facts rather than an author's vivid imagination" (The Book Review Café, 2023). And while talking about the novel, he describes it as an "Incredible read" (The book review café, 2023).

Muhammad Ajmal et al. examine how Pakistani short fiction represents environmental pollution and industrialisation through the combined framework of ecocriticism and stylistics, known as eco-stylistics. The study analyses selected works by Tariq Rahman, Daniyal Mueenuddin, and Mohammed Hanif. The study shows that the environmental pollution in these stories highlights a physical reality and serves as a symbolic reflection of social and moral downfall. The study is important as it focuses on the language rather than the themes of these works. The authors argue that "very few Pakistani writers have examined ecological degradation specifically by applying eco-stylistics," (Ajmal et al., 2025). The study further shows that these short stories "criticise industrial growth and the treatment of people towards nature" (Ajmal et al., 2025). The article also demonstrates that Pakistani short fiction plays a crucial role in fostering ecological awareness.

Contemporary literary studies on anglophone Pakistani and American fiction highlight the critical role of environmental degradation, pollution, and risk in shaping narratives and cultural perceptions. Mohsin Hamid and Uzma Aslam Khan write about these issues in their novels. Hamid's *Moth Smoke* portrays the environmental degradation and socio-economic disintegration of Lahore. In such a condition, Darashiko Shehzad lives. Darashiko Shehzad's world is marked by "In the morning, the smell of something burning brings me out of the house... neat moulds of rubbish in front of the neighbour's house smoulder, trash smoke rising only to be beaten down by the rain" (Hamid, 2000). Hamid uses words like "swollen flesh" and "dead skull," linking bodily decay to environmental degradation. Similarly, Khan's *Trespassing* explores environmental pollution and public indifference in Karachi, describing streets filled with "polyethene bags hung on tree limbs and telephone wires, plugged open gutters, tumbled along driveways... How could he even think clearly when his body struggled at the most basic level: for water, electricity, clean streets" (Khan, 2003). Through this imagery, Khan highlights the collective human negligence that exacerbates environmental and social risks.

Comparatively, in the American context, Don DeLillo's *White Noise*, public fear of contamination is omnipresent, with references to chemical leaks, airborne toxins, and household technologies as sources of invisible threats: "school premises were evacuated due to some toxic smoke, which was



perhaps caused by: ventilating system, the paint or varnish, the foam insulation... or perhaps something deeper, finer-grained, more closely woven into the basic state of things" (DeLillo, 1985). Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* situates toxic discourse within agrarian America, exposing the impact of chemical pollution on both land and women's bodies: "People have known for ten years or more that nitrates in well water cause miscarriages and death of infants" (Smiley, 1991). Here, environmental contamination is intertwined with moral and ethical concerns, linking the poisoning of land to the systemic abuse of women in the narrative (Smiley, 1991).

A study by Muskan Khan and Azhar Shah reads selected Pakistani novels through the lens of ecofeminism. The study looks at how "women and the environment are simultaneously exploited, regulated and commodified" (Khan & Shah, 2025). The study examines four Pakistani novels: *She Sleeps* (2018) by Bina Shah, *Trespassing* (2003) by Uzma Aslam Khan, *The Shadow of the Crescent Moon* (2013) by Fatima Bhutto, and *The Wandering Falcon* (2011) by Jamil Ahmad. In *Before She Sleeps*, all of Bina Shah's female characters live under a strict system and "The government forces women into polygamous marriages to increase the population". Females are bound to have more than one husband and have no rights. In the novel, "The Green City Handbook for Women," it shows that the administration doesn't pay heed to women and the environment. In the same way, in other novels, the researchers show how women's nature is controlled and used by man

A study by Wafa Irshad and Sajid Ali examines the short story "Animals" by Tariq Rahman. The researchers use Medovoi's Eco-Marxism to study the selected text. The study looks at how "land and animals are commodified under the guise of progress". The study examines how the rich benefit from environmental degradation under the guise of progress, while the poor suffer at the hands of the elite and from environmental degradation. The character of the Sahib in the story represents the elite capitalist. He "benefits from the infrastructure more than the indigenous population" (Irshad & Ali, 2025). Although Sahib provides infrastructure and roads to the valley, he also exploits the people and land in the process. He also introduced "the concept of wage labour." In this way, the study examines how elites profit in the name of progress while harming the land and the people.

A study by Muhammad Shoaib reads the novel *The Book of Gold Leaves* by Mirza Waheed. The novel is set in Kashmir, which is part of India. The study looks at the ecological crisis in the valley as an "unending cycle of violence and terror" (Shoaib, 2019). The violence in the valley is overshadowing its natural beauty. The study establishes that the novel "shows the effects of war, violence and poor urban planning on the physical environment and the living environment of Kashmir" (Shoaib, 2019). The novel shows the role of Pakistan and India in the degradation of natural beauty in Kashmir.

A study by Sonia Salam and Muhammad Shoaib analyses the movie *Don't Look Up*. The study is based on Ann Kaplan's book *Climate Trauma: Foreseeing the Future in Dystopian Films*. The researchers look at how the characters in the movies suffer from pre-traumatic stress related to the environment. The researchers examine the characters of Kate Dibiasky and Dr Randall Mindy. Kate Dibiasky "discovers the comet about to hit the Earth, and Dr Randall Mindy calculates when it will strike" (Salam & Shoaib, 2025). The comet is deadly as it has the power to destroy Earth. The study also examines how capitalism views money as present in everything. The study points out that Peter's character exemplifies the capitalist mindset. He believes he can destroy the comet in midair and extract critical minerals from it. Kate Dibiasky and Dr Randall Mindy suffer from pre-traumatic stress and a capitalist mindset in the movie *Don't Look Up*.

2.1. Gap



The existing literary criticism focuses on themes such as violence, identity, social conflict, moral disintegration, and psychological trauma in contemporary novels, often prioritising human-centred crises over ecological concerns. Due to its environmental dimensions, Pakistani literature has received limited scholarly attention. This gap is significant in the context of climate crises, recognised as a primary global safety problem that interrelates with social and economic instability.

3. Research method

The textual analysis method involves a close encounter with the text, examining its details without bringing more presuppositions than we can help (Belsey, 2013). This qualitative descriptive study employs Alan McKee's method of textual analysis to analyse Awais Khan's selected texts. Alan McKee's textual method has wider implications for textual analysis; his definition of "text includes Films, TV programmes, clothes, music, graffiti and many other such things" (McKee, 2003). In McKee's textual method, the researcher makes an intelligent guess at the most likely interpretations of the given text (McKee, 2003) and draws multiple interpretations rather than focusing on a single meaning.

McKee compares text analysis to forensic analysis. Texts are analysed by using forensic analysis in which different elements of texts are treated as clues or traces of how people have made sense of the world (McKee, 2003). Since this study involves a close encounter with the text, McKee's method is the most appropriate, in which the researcher draws on a variety of textual evidence to support their argument. It is also important because it goes beyond a fixed textual meaning and values the reader's analysis of the text.

4. Theoretical perspective

Climate change has emerged as one of the most urgent crises of the twenty-first century, disrupting not only ecosystems but also the social, cultural, and political structures of human life. In literary studies, this intersection of environment and culture is examined through ecocriticism, a critical approach that explores how texts represent ecological degradation, climate anxieties, and the human-nature relationship. As developing nations like Pakistan bear the brunt of environmental collapse, with rising heat, air pollution, unmanageable waste, and water scarcity, it becomes essential to adopt theoretical models that foreground these crises. David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019) offers such a framework, presenting climate change as an immediate and intensifying catastrophe that touches every dimension of existence. His arguments on "cascading climate consequences" (2019) provide a lens through which literature can be read not only as a reflection of ecological realities but also as a record of uneven suffering and environmental injustice.

David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth* (2019) frames climate change as an all-pervasive crisis that touches every dimension of human life. He warns that global warming is not a distant threat but an accelerating catastrophe: "It is worse, much worse, than you think" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Climate change, in his view, must be understood not as an isolated phenomenon but as a force reshaping social, political, and cultural realities worldwide. Wallace-Wells emphasizes the deadliness of heat, noting that "The climate-change-induced heat waves we are already experiencing kill more people each year than hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods combined" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Heat is not simply uncomfortable weather but a lethal disruption to the rhythms of human life, threatening survival in many regions. According to David Wallace-Wells, "Humans, like all mammals, are heat engines; surviving means having to cool off continually...At



seven degrees of warming, that would become impossible for portions of the planet's equatorial band, and especially the tropics, where humidity adds to the problem" (Wallace-Wells, 2019).

Similarly, he stresses that pollution will define the new normal: "Air pollution is now the world's leading environmental cause of premature death" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). This "invisible climate killer" infiltrates everyday existence, silently weakening bodies and societies. Wallace-Wells underscores that these air toxins are not only ecological problems but also social ones, compounding inequality and health crises. According to David Wallace-Wells, "the planet's air won't just be warmer; it will likely also be dirtier, more oppressive, and more sickening" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). The environmental crisis also manifests through waste and urban collapse. Wallace-Wells observes: "Plastic waste has been found at the bottom of the Mariana Trench and in the most remote Arctic ice" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Waste becomes a symbol of planetary degradation, transcending borders and even reaching the most remote and supposedly untouched corners of the Earth.

5. Critical analysis

5.1. *No Honour*

In the novel *No Honour*, Jamil's wife, Farida, is working at home when she tells Jamil that "I can't work in this heat... June is supposed to be hot, but not this hot, surely? I feel as if I will suffocate any second" (Khan, 2021). These lines indicate that Farida is unable to work due to the high temperature. She tells her husband that June is usually hotter than other months, but not this hot, suggesting that temperatures are rising each year. As she further says, "I feel as if I will suffocate any second" (Khan, 2021). She further explains the nature of heat and how hot it is, to the point that it is even difficult to breathe. Thus, it is clear from the dialogue between Farida and Jamil what David Wallace-Wells' *The Uninhabitable Earth* warns. According to Wells, "The climate-change-induced heat waves we are already experiencing kill more people each year than hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods combined" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). It is clear from Farida's example that breathing is becoming difficult in such hot weather, as she struggles to work in intense heat. She also compares the heat with that of the past and considers it increasingly difficult to handle. This also aligns with Wallace-Wells' view that global warming is not something that will occur in the future, but it is already here, and we are living under it.

Similar to other places in the novel, Abida also describes the extreme heat in these words: "It was last June, a month when the sun scorched the earth. There had been no rain, and the roads had baked... village women... at the tube well, where cool, running water soothed their frayed nerves" (Khan, 2021). These scenes also depict the extreme heat in the village, where women cannot stay at home and must go to the tube well. The writer also describes the road and how difficult it is to walk barefoot on it. So, it is clear from these lines that weather conditions are not good in Pakistan and in Khan Wala village. The condition is like what David Wallace-Wells discusses in *The Uninhabitable Earth*: "Humans, like all mammals, are heat engines; surviving means having to cool off continually" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Although the heat in the village is unbearable, women have found a way to survive by going to the tube well to cool off. This is exactly what Wallace-Wells points out that Humans, like all mammals, are heat engines; surviving means having to cool off continually" (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Overall, the scenes depict the unbearable heat. Although the women in the village find a way to survive, it is not a reliable one, as the heat continues to increase each year.



After arriving in Lahore, Abida encountered “the mountains of garbage... there was plastic everywhere. Plastic bags flew in the air...” (Khan, 2021). The air in the city was also not good, as she describes “The smell of the city was an assault on the senses. Underneath the heavy stench of the gutter... the unmistakable stench of burning garbage...” (Khan, 2021. As she describes “She took in the smell of potato fritters and rotten fruit... mixed with a noxious chemical vapor that seemed to blanket the very air. It left a bitter taste in her mouth” (Khan, 2021 According to Wallace-Wells “the planet’s air won’t just be warmer; it will likely also be dirtier, more oppressive, and more sickening,” (Wallace-Wells, 2019). This is clear from Abida's example, as she describes the city's smell as an assault on the senses. Similarly, she also discusses air pollution and what Abida encountered upon arriving in the city. In another scenario, Abida also describes the polluted air of Lahore, “it felt good to feel the fresh air on her face, as polluted as it was.” Although the air is fresh, Abida feels good about it. Still, she described it as polluted, suggesting the weather in Lahore is poor. This also aligns with Wells' theorisation that “Air pollution is now the world’s leading environmental cause of premature death” (Wallace-Wells, 2019). He also calls air pollution “an invisible climate killer” that infiltrates everyday life, silently weakening bodies and societies (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Likewise, Lahore experiences unhealthy weather conditions, mainly due to severe pollution.

5.2. *Someone Like Her*

In the novel *Someone Like Her*, Awais Khan once again brings the heat of Multan to describe the environmental issues in Pakistan. In his words, “the heat seemed to be rising from the ground. Thousands of old trees shaded Cantt, but they did little to help make the heat tolerable. Even at night, the wind did nothing to cool the sweltering city, the hot gusts only serving to add a layer of dust to the parched trees and road” (Khan 2023). In the given example, heat is increasing. With the wind, there's little relief, and the heat persists even through the night. The heat is intolerable, making survival difficult. Although the writer mentions that there are many trees in the area, they do not help reduce the heat, which is persistent. This goes with Wallace-Wells' assertion, “The climate-change-induced heat waves we are already experiencing kill more people each year than hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods combined” (Wallace-Wells, 2019). The conditions in the novel are unbearable, as people in the city endure extreme heat and strong gusts. While the conditions may not be as extreme as Wallace-Wells describes in his book, it is certainly very dire. The heat wave in the novel is unendurable, significantly challenging the characters' ability to survive.

According to David Wallace-Wells, “Humans, like all mammals, are heat engines; surviving means having to cool off continually” (Wallace-Wells, 2019). These lines emphasise that humans cannot survive at a specific temperature without cooling. This situation occurs in the novel when Ayesha moves from Pakistan to London. She describes the weather conditions in these words: “We don’t get this sort of weather in Multan in the summer. I just came from excruciating humidity that would curl the silkiest hair in the world. An absolute disaster” (Khan, 2023). In the lines above, Ayesha describes the weather as excruciating humidity that would curl even the silkiest hair in the world. It means the heat and moisture are unbearable, making everything uncomfortable. She also adds that it is an absolute duster. In this way, the heat is intolerable, and it is difficult to survive in these conditions.

In the novel *Someone Like Her*, Ayesha travels through a rickshaw. The condition of the rickshaw is described in these words: “It had to be a very old one, because it emitted clouds of toxic black smoke, forcing her to cover her nose with her dupatta” (Khan, 2023). Due to the toxic smoke, Ayesha has to cover his face. In Pakistan, travelling in these rickshaws is a daily reality for ordinary people like Ayesha, and without their knowledge, they are taking toxic smoke into their lungs. David Wallace-Wells explains in his book *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life After Warming* that air



pollution is part of daily life in the modern world. He explains that “the planet’s air won’t just be warmer; it will likely also be dirtier, more oppressive, and more sickening” (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Ayesha's action of covering his face is an example of how the air is dirtier and more sickening. David Wallace-Wells further emphasises that the consequences of air pollution are unavoidable: “we will nevertheless suffer,” even when suffocation is not immediate (Wallace-Wells, 2019). Therefore, the smoke from the vehicle represents environmental violence that does not kill instantly, but gradually.

6. Conclusion

In Awais Khan's works, *No Honour* and *Someone Like Her* depict environmental degradation in Pakistan not only as background scenery but as a lived social reality. Through vivid depictions of polluted air, unbearable heat, garbage-filled streets, overcrowded cities, and deteriorating living conditions, the novels expose how environmental crises directly affect the emotional and physical lives of women from different backgrounds. These environmental manifestations symbolise both ecological collapse and societal neglect, revealing the unequal burden borne by the poor and vulnerable. The theoretical perspective of David Wallace-Wells' climate urgency, as applied to Khan's novels, reflects the severity and immediacy of climate change as an ongoing human crisis rather than a distant future threat. Wallace-Wells argues that climate catastrophe is now shaping everyday life. Awais Khan's fiction presents how environmental decay is embedded within ordinary experiences in Pakistan. Ultimately, Awais Khan's work emphasises that environmental degradation in Pakistan is an ongoing issue, not only linked to the ecological crisis but also to humanitarian and ethical crises that demand urgent awareness and action.

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