

GENDER ISSUES IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the gender issues in human resource management in Nepalese economic sector. The study observes that the government has not pursued an employment policy that promotes gender balance. Despite of various constitutional and other measures been introduced to address marginalization and discrimination against women, evidence presented in this paper shows that women still continue to face these issues. This paper also focuses that most of the women working in different sectors hold lower-level positions and also do not have easy access to the skills, training and resources which is needed for better and more stable jobs. Data were obtained from government websites mainly of public service commission, central bureau of statistics, Nepal Rastra Bank and Nepal Census-2021 online report. Beside these, articles of different scholars related to human resource management were

reviewed too. Over the past 9 years, women's access to literacy, health and education has been increased, inequalities between men and women, ethnic groups and castes have still remained. Thus, the result has been clearly noticed in different sectors in the Nepalese economy and many more. The paper shows that in recent year's women participation in different sectors has been increased. Mainly in the politics women participation has been great but in other economic sectors and in public service of Nepal it is still very low. This paper argues that, equal opportunity is not enough, affirmative action is needed to make it a reality for minorities and women. It also concludes that different government institutions must create policies to ensure the equal opportunities for women to contribute for national development.

JEL Classification: J16, J24, J71, M12

INTRODUCTION

Most of the people believe that economic equality between men and women is must for the overall development of the nation. Kofi Annan, The Secretary General of the United Nations, has argued that (MDGs), including eliminating poverty (United Nations, 2005). This article is about women's representation in different sectors of Nepal. Nepali bureaucracy is represented by its civil service employees who work towards implementing the public service delivery policy of the state (Shrestha & Paudel, 2019).

In the changing scenarios, the government and different stakeholders' roles and priorities have been changing. Government has initiated various efforts to shifts its role directly from simply "feeding people" to "enabling the people". With the changing socio-political change in Nepal, several agenda including inclusion (and exclusion) of different groups have been witnessed across social institutions (Dhakal, 2019). In recent years, for the improvement of governance and structural system of the government several efforts have been made.

Gender issues in human resource management has not being given serious attention.

Despite of lot of research been conducted and being written on gender issue as an important academia, the focus in gender studies has been shifted to political content, which has resulted the issue of gender bias in public sector for recruitment, selection, training and promotion. Thus, the extent to which gender issues reflect in human resources planning in public service is a matter of academic concern (Squirchuk & Bopierke, 2000).

Gender equality is all about ensuring women to live with dignity, free from poverty and fear. Furthermore, empowering women is a crucial driver for both development and organizational success. Women had struggled hard for the gender equality and so for voting rights. The signing of the 20th amendment in 1920 gave women the right to vote (Elmuti, Lehman, Harmon, & Lu, 2003). Nearly about a century advancement of women, there still exists a high level of discrimination comparing to male in terms of leadership opportunities, higher level positions and payment. Thus, it is imperative for Human Resource Managers to alleviate this lingering quandary (Kaifi, 2013).

Women and different marginalized communities have faced historically inadequate representation public sector of Nepal. So, there is a strong advocacy for inclusion of women, aadibashi, janajati, madhesi, Dalits and other marginalized groups in public institutions, bureaucracy and politics have been increased in recent decades. As a result, the constitution and other legal frameworks have introduced certain provisions to promote inclusion of such marginalized social groups. Recently, the agenda of inclusion has gained currency in politics, public discourse, development practitioners, and the academicians alike (Dhakal, 2019; Gurung, 2019), which responds to intersectional exclusion (Hasan, 2009). This development has directed to greater emphasis on women participation.

Gender issues have been at the forefront of international summit and the agitation for the emancipation and total liberation of women across the world which according to Chafetz (1981) has attracted the interest of many scholars. In 1970, the United Nations General Assembly's aim of involving women fully in global development efforts has resulted the declaration as International Women's Year in 1975.

Progress of women in politics, education, economy and society over the past decades have been advanced significantly. Many traditional barriers to the advancement of women have gradually diminished. Large number of women have entered the paid labour force. Even when entering fields traditionally dominated by men, women seldom hold the same roles or perform same tasks as their male counterpart. Adepoju (1994) pointed out that the systematically inferior position of women inside and outside the civil service and household point to the necessity of treating gender as a force of its own in sustainable development issues in the nation. The historical status of women has been an important concern in every culture. Across the world, societies have shifted their attitudes from passive sympathy to assertive feminism. This is part of the democratic movement, which generally began with the French revolution, which altered the law of inheritance in favour of daughters (Ukonu, 2004).

After the restoration of democracy in late 1990s, many acts and policies related to the liberalization, privatization and employment were developed. The primary objectives of those policies and acts was to promote developed economy, improve standards of living, to fulfill workforce needs and reduce unemployment and underemployment. From the perspective of human resource management, this policy is designed to empower the citizens to freely choose their employment.

The Second amendment of Civil Service Act, 1993 in August 2007 ensured the reservation system. 45 percent of civil service vacant positions are to be filled through open competition and, remained vacant positions are regarded as a total 100 percent.

These reserved seats were fulfilled from competition among different six categories: Women (33 percent), adibasi janajati (27 percent), madheshi (22 percent), dalit (9 percent), persons with disability (5 percent) and backward areas (4 percent). This reservation policy aimed to uplift the marginalized communities by providing different opportunities by the state.

Hence, policies like reservation and inclusion are to integrate women into mainstream.

Scholars assume that organizations that respect women are more likely to foster an inclusive work climate (Greenan, Lanfranchi, L'Horty, Narcy, & Pierné, 2019).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the different sectors of Nepal, whether it is private or public institution representation of women and minorities has continuously attracted significant attention. Inclusion provisions have been a way to minimize the gender inequality. According to Roch and Pitts (2011), the concept of inclusion is used to “consider whether a public organization employs a bureaucracy that matches the general population or salient indicators of diversity, such as race, ethnicity, or gender”. There are not many chances for women in the workforce in Nepal because of societal conventions and cultural beliefs that typically favour male leadership and decision-making (Subedi & Joshi, 2021).

Second Constituent Assembly has recently amended the new constitution for Nepal- “Constitution of Nepal, 2015”. This constitution has preserved many constitutional rights for women, minorities and indigenous groups. Robert (2004) observes that women in the civil service are characterized by limited and insecure employment opportunities and marked substandard wages, poor work conditions, unstable hours and disadvantageous employment contracts. A significant number of women are mostly confined on low paying jobs and small-scale business involving repetitive manual production.

Despite of some support from the government for women, there is still quite hard for women to break the glass ceiling in Nepalese civil service. Nepalese women are still struggling to break the glass ceiling in the civil services. Representative bureaucracy is a key idea in public administration which characterises a civil service mechanism that embodies the demographic configuration of the society (Jamil, 2019). The government of Nepal focuses to create Nepalese bureaucracy which is highly representative and more inclusive believing that this high degree of diversity will improve service delivery performance.

Nepal is a highly diverse country in terms of gender, culture, language, caste, religion, and its geographical terrain.

Nepal is a highly diversified country having diversity in various terms such as culture, religion, language, gender, caste, and geographical ties. There are 142 caste and ethnicity, 124 mother tongue, 25 second languages spoken and followers of 10 religions (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Reservation is one of the key instruments of inclusive policy, primarily aimed at fostering representation through employment of marginalized and diverse people in government.

To ensure female representation, Nepal's legislation sets 33% of parliamentary seats for women. Furthermore, Article A-86(2) (b) states that President Nominate three members, including at least one woman in Upper House as per the recommendation of the Government of Nepal. Moreover, the constitution also envisages formation of a powerful National Women Commission under A-252 read with (R/W) A-253.

Joan Acker, a Feminist scholar in a seminal 1990 paper critically revised that gender is a foundational component of organizational structures, not merely a quality incorporated into them: "To say that an organization, or any other analytical unit, is gendered, means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity, are patterned through and in terms of the distinction between male and female, masculinity and femininity" (Acker, 1990). Over the following decades, the theory of gendered organizations has been added through several analytical dimensions, mainly incorporating intersectionality. This has led to a substantial and robust body of research examining how gender operates within organizational settings.

Gender issues have been at the forefront of international summit and the agitation for the emancipation and total liberation of women across the world which according to Chafetz (1981) has attracted the interest of many scholars. The 1970 UN General Assembly resolution emphasizes to integrating women into all overall development process, believing that there should be gender equality in terms of economy for the growth of

the economy. Kofi Annan, The Secretary General of the United Nations, has argued that (MDGs), including eliminating poverty (United Nations, 2005).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper has followed descriptive method. When a particular phenomenon is under study, the research is needed to describe it, to clarify and explain its inner relationships and properties (Huczynski & Buchana, 2007). The descriptive research outlines a precise profile of people, events or situations highlighting current issues or problems (Fox & Bayat, 2007) and it further “explains the conditions and circumstances of the cause” (Loeb et al., 2017, p. 1). When the focus is on cause-effect relationships, the study can be explanatory explaining which causes produce which effects (Yin, 2014). This study sheds light on the current issue of gender inclusion in various sectors of Nepalese economy by examining the representation of women in Nepali civil service.

The study is based on the secondary data collected from annual reports of Rastriya Kitab Khana (2022), Public Service Commission (2022, 2023,2024), National and Population and Housing Census (1991,2001,2011, 2021) and publications of Ministry of Federal Affairs and General Administration Nepal (2008 and 2016). A range of various published reports, journals, books and online literatures based on gender equality are deeply reviewed. The data is tabulated for analysis. Although the paper recognizes that level of representation alone is not enough to measure the participation of women but this paper solely describes the patterns of representation of women across different sectors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Economically active population by gender

Indicators	Census				
	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021
Economically active population (%)					
Female	46.2	45.2	55.3	46.8	60.4
Male	83.1	68.1	71.7	62.5	71.3
Percentage of female engaged in agriculture	63.4	45.0	48.1	51.5	53.6
Percentage of female engaged in non-agriculture	14.3	20.2	34.4	28	13

Sources: (1) Population Census, 2001;2011 & 2021 (2) Population Monograph, CBS 1995

Table 1 show that there is still the less economically active female population comparing to male. In 1981 it was 46.2%, where in 1991 and 2001 it was 45.2 % and 55.3 % respectively. In 2011 and 2021 it was 46.8% and 60.4% respectively. Education has become an important reason for increase in economic activity of women in Nepal. In recent decades, the country has observed a significant improvement in attaining education by women. Literacy rate, which climbed from 9.15 percent in 1981 and this figure rose to 42.8 percent in 2001 and reached 57.4 percent in 2011 and 69.4 percent in 2021. This increase in literacy rate has encouraged more participation of women in the workforce.

Another factor behind increasing woman's economic activity is the growth of the Nepal's service sector. According to the Census 2021, the service sector has become the second largest source of female employment after agriculture, fisheries and agriculture with approximately 309,944 females being employed. The expansion of service sectors like tourism, hospitality, education, healthcare and information technology has opened up

additional opportunities for women.

There still exists a huge gender gap in relation to job. Women comprise only 24.5 percent of employers and out of total employee's 36.2 percent of all employees were females. Females hold less than one-third of government jobs. However, in financial corporations, approximately 44.9 percent of the workforce are female. Among individuals participated in household work as economic activity, 51 percent were females.

Table 2: Female participation in the cabinet under the Constitution of Nepal 2015

Presence of female in the cabinet under the Prime ministership of KP Sharma Oli (2018)					
Post	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total
Ministers	19	86.4	3	13.6	22
Ministers of State	1	33.33	2	66.67	3
Asst. Ministers	0	0	0	0	0
Total Ministers	20	80	5	20	25
Presence of female in the cabinet under the Prime ministership of Sher Bahadur Deuba (2021)					
Ministers	18	81.82	4	18.18	22
Ministers of State	2	66.67	1	33.33	3
Asst. Ministers	0	0	0	0	0
Total Ministers	20	80	4	20	25
Presence of female in the cabinet under the Prime ministership of Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) (2024)					
Ministers	18	81.82	4	18.18	22
Ministers of State	0	0	1	100	1
Asst. Ministers	0	0	0	0	0
Total Ministers	18	78.3	5	21.7	23
Presence of female in the cabinet under the Prime ministership of KP Sharma Oli (2025)					
Ministers	18	85.71	3	14.28	21
Ministers of State	2	66.66	1	33.33	3
Asst. Ministers	0	0	0	0	0
Total Ministers	20	83.33	4	16.66	24

Source: Office of the Prime minister and Council of Ministers/ www.opmcm.gov.np

In Table 2, it shows the percentage of female participation in the cabinet of minister. Here in the politics also there is very few numbers of females included in the cabinet of minister. The new constitution of Nepal has secured the 33 percent seats as the parliament members. This provision has also been enacted in the civil service.

Table 3: Situation of Women representation in the central committee of main political parties

S.N.	Political Party	Total member in Central Committee	No. of female in central committee	Percentage
1	NC	166	54	32.5
2	NCP (UML)	348	115	33
3	CPN (MC)*	236	66	27.9
4	RSP	62	22	35.48
5	RPP	251	88	35.05
6	CPN (US)	355	107	30.14
7	JSP	466	145	31.11

Source: Election Commission Nepal/www.election.gov.np

*Central committee members of Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) are not finalised

Note:

NC:	Nepali Congress
NCP (UML)	Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist and Leninist)
CPN (MC)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)
RSP	Rastriya Swatantra Party
RPP	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
CPN (US)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Socialist)
JSP	Janata Samajwadi Party

In the Table 3, according to the data of interparty network, 2023, the number of females in central committee of ten leading parties of Nepal was quite less in number before the enactment of Constitution of Nepal 2072. But new constitution of Nepal has secured the minimum 33 percent in the central committee. This has been a revolutionary change in the participation of the women in the politics also.

Table 4: Women representation in Parliament in different elections

Year	Percentage
2015	0.92
2048	3.41
2051	3.41
2056	5.73
2064	33
2070	29.9
2074	32.83
2079	33.45

Source: Legislature Parliament Secretariat

Table 4 shows the women representation in the parliament in different elections. In the early beginning in 2015 it was less than 1 percent, just 0.92 percent. Similarly, in later elections in 2048, 2051 and 2056 there had been some increment which was 3.41 percent, 3.41 percent, 5.73 percent respectively. But after the peoples' movement in 2062/63 there has been tremendous increment in the representation of the women the parliament. The first Constitution Assembly had 33 percent representation of the women where as in the second Constitution Assembly it was 29.9 percent. So, we can say that there has been encouraging amount of women representation after 2062/63. Now new constitution has secured 33 percent mandatory provision which is revolutionary scenario in the South Asia.

Table 5 : Civil Servants in Nepal

Year	Total	Male	Male%	Female	Female%
2003	75151	69134	92.0	6017	8.0
2010	75064	65265	86.9	9799	13.1
2015	80107	67923	84.8	12184	15.2
2020	89367	65719	73.5	23648	26.5
2022-23	85520	61,426	71.82	24094	28.17
2024-25	85,328	60,736	71.18	24592	28.82

Source: *Rastriya Kitab Khana*

Table 5 represents the women participation in the civil service in Nepal. In 2003 total number of civil servants was 75151 where 92 percent were male and just 8 percent were female. Government's reservation policy has increased the female numbers in civil service has been increasing. In 2015 out of total 80107 civil servants' 84.8 percent and 15.2 percent were male and female respectively. It has been significant increment in the number of females in civil service up to 2024-25. 28.82 percentage were female but it is still quite low in comparison to male which is 71.18 percent.

Table 6: Literacy Rate (Percent)

Area	1991*	2001*	2011**	2021
National	39.6	54.1	65.9	76.2
Male	54.5	65.5	75.1	83.6
Female	25	42.8	57.4	69.4

Source: *National Population and Housing Census, CBS*

*: Literacy rate of six years and above population

** : Literacy rate of five years and above population

Table 6 shows the literacy rate of male and female in Nepal. Here in this situation also women are far behind than the male number in literacy. The literacy rate of male in 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021 census were 54.5 percent, 65.6 percent, 75.1 percent and 83.6 percent respectively. Whereas literacy rate of women in 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2021 census were 25 percent, 42.8 percent, 57.4 percent and 69.4 percent respectively.

From these above data we can say that women participation either it is in politics, agricultural and non-agricultural activities, civil service, and in getting the education women are quite few in number than male.

The above table shows that women participation in different sectors either it is in politics, civil service or in different professions it is still very less in number comparatively with male. According to the annual report of Department of Civil Personnel Records, 2024 women's representation in civil service very low (28.82 percent) while men's representation is (71.18 percent). Reservation policy of Nepal 2007 has been a key instrument to increase the women's participation in in civil service. As a result, women's representation has been increased in civil service from 8 % in 2003 to 26.5 % in 2020.

This data shows that despite of having the more than 50 percentage of total population in Nepal still there is very a smaller number of females in civil service. This makes us to feel that there is much smaller number of women in policy making and implementing authorities. Still there are many challenges in many areas for increasing the female numbers in policy making, increasing the capacity of the existing female civil servants, approaching the reservation to the targeted groups.

Major Differences between Male and Female: Statistical Review

The lives of women have been shaped and controlled by others in many ways. Raising of boys and girls is completely different. Girls are more watched and protected than boys. Girls do more household doings such as cooking and cleaning and boys do outdoor work such as construction and yard maintenance. Girls are traditionally taught to wait for boys

to be asked to call them, to be invited to dance, on date and to get married. Moreover, after marriage women lose their name. Throughout 20th century women mostly were under male authority. A daughter was under the control of her father until she got married., once she got married, control was transferred from her father to the husband. Although some of these customs and traditions have been changed, many still exists, which reflects the gender difference in pay. Women have been raised up to be passive and discouraged from advocating for their own needs directly.

“Men are thought to be assertive, dominate, decisive, ambitious, and self-oriented, whereas women are thought to be warm, passive, nurturing, emotional, and friendly. These are gender stereotypes” (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Difference between male and female can be explained from biological part. women on average retire earlier than men. This points out that not only do women have less continuity in the workforce they also have less years in the workforce compared to their male counterparts and helps explain why they earn less than men (Gayle et al., 2008).

Men often get quick promotion as they are easier to move for work and society finds this more considerable in moving the family for the job of the husband. Men can work more hours as their wives usually take care of their children and home. The main role of male is often seen as not more than financial. As a result, men have more work life balance than female. In short, men usually have a wife, while women do not. When it comes to men and women in high level executive positions the majority of men are married with children but on the other side over half of the women are single and do not have any children (Elmuti et al., 2003).

Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action

Poor women participation in different sectors was not taken seriously but now a days it has been the more cover lines in the national and international Medias. Recently, attention to the impact of gender and ethnicity on public institutions has focused largely on perceptions of discrimination, the notion of representative bureaucracy and equal

opportunities policies (Robert, 2004). As observed by Olojede (2007), since 1970's global attention has focused on women's rights, International and National Women Civil Societies have drawn world attention to the continued subordination of women to men in all spheres of life.

This situation has supported and encouraged also to governments to implement affirmative action policies to improve status of women in public administration. Equal employment opportunity according to Berkley and Rouse (2004) means that no person should be denied the opportunity for employment because of discrimination based on race, colour, religion, sex, national origin, or physical disability. Equal employment opportunity reshapes the definition of a merit-based system which emphasizes that recruitment, hiring and promotion should not only be based on ability but also ensure that the workforce reflects diversity of all the workforce.

World Bank (1997) report pointed out that when women are not offered equal opportunity in the civil service there is the danger that some skills in a nation will be wasted. Merit based human resource functions like recruitment, selection and promotion than on some particular criteria can increase employee morale, performance and satisfaction to higher level. A growing concern with the representatives of women in the public sector has affected reform efforts that put stress, human resources management issues such as capacity - building, participatory management styles, constant innovation, entrepreneurial initiative, teamwork, strategic thinking and planning as crucial (Robert, 2004).

Affirmative action is an active concept while concept of equal opportunity is a passive one. Affirmative action plan serves as an important tool to implement equal opportunity for minorities and women. Affirmative action is defined as actions undertaken to overcome barriers to equal employment opportunities and to remedy the effects of past discrimination (Berman et al., 2006). While Nicholas (2006) sees it as a policy that argues for the hiring and promoting of members of disadvantaged groups on the grounds that jobs should open to as many people as possible.

To Rosenbloom and Goldman (1999), affirmative action entails the establishment of goals and timetables for the hiring, promotion, and/or job training of members of certain minority groups and women. Affirmative action plan helps to address and remove discrimination whether it is past and present which are based on colour, gender, race, religion, or national identity. This policy tests managers from public sector and employees too, but it also increases government bureaucracies' representation. It raises attention of real and potential women discrimination and discrimination faced by disabled employees and minorities. The prominence of affirmative action plan subject matters increases the understanding of workplace discrimination.

Proponents of affirmative action generally argue that at the very least, those who have been discriminated against so rampantly in the past should be entitled to special, compensatory treatment effects of past practices that have been eliminated (Rosenbloom & Goldman, 1999).

Based on this, to resolve problems facing women to enter in Nepal's Public Administration Government of Nepal has also formulated specific policies to resolve. NijamatiSewa Ain-1992 states that out of total posts 45 percent of the total post is under reservation. Out of 45 percent, 33 percent is reserved for women. This study, though a small addition to the field of public sector management, has introduced a new perspective for examining how gender issues and human resource management are connected and overlap. It is truly said that beauty of the nation lies in the equality of male and female (Adeleke, 2003). Adopting reservation policy, there has been significant increase in the presence of women in the civil service of Nepal. It has increased from 8 percent in 2003 to 28.82 percent in 2024. Though this provision has increased the women representation in civil service (28 percent only) but it is still low while comparing to their male counterparts.

Although there is increase in the rate of female applicants, women's number in civil service has not been significantly amplified (Table 5). This is because of structural hindrance of our society. For example, comparatively early age marriage of women than men (Maharjan, Karki, Shakya, & Aryal, 2012), compulsion in engaging household chores,

caring of children if she has etc. been some constraining issues that Nepali women are facing (Baidya, Dhungana, & Kattel, 2006). As Hasan (2009) opines, low-merit and low productivity are not the causes but the consequences of such exclusion. From this, we can agree that removal of such structural hindrance is much needed to make women more competitive and capacity enhancement.

The bells of 'New Nepal' are ringing in the vicinity. However, all of us need to realize that that will not be possible until women's participation is secured at all levels in all sectors of the country. Learning from past mistakes of discrimination against women and adopting success stories of women empowerment from around the globe with youth at the forefront of the crusade could bring about this most-hyped transformation.

Now days there are more number women than ever in the workplace. Over the last 15 years, women's involvement in education and profession has been increased. This has resulted to make workplace better. As a result, women entrepreneurship has been grownup more significantly.

One of the key intents behind representativeness is to ensure democratic and inclusive characteristics of bureaucracy (Jamil, 2019) so that it reflects different interests of the community (Selden, 1998; Shrestha & Paudel, 2019). Representativeness mainstreams the ethnic groups which are excluded. It also mainstreams gender and back warded societies and enhances socio-economic condition of all as well.

Despite of participation of women in different sectors has been increased, their representation in higher post in low number shows really a depressing picture. It means women civil servants do not have access to decision making and policy making level yet – they need to fight a variety of odds to advance in their career (Kabir, 2013). It has same scenario in the cabinet and in the central committee of political parties too (Table 2).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

It is absolutely true stating that the success of any state remains in the public service performance which are efficient and effective, but public administration has been highly affected continuously due to political and economic instability of the nation. The study has highlighted and expanded the gender issues in human resources planning in public service of Nepal. While considering the socio-ethnic diversity of Nepal in making major national decisions, different interests of social and ethnic groups could be brought together and balanced.

Several controversial issues have been raised by this study which could create more insights in the study of gender of public service in relation to human resources planning. Women's call for social justice necessities ensures more equal opportunity for them. Empowerment of women is only the means which lift them up from subordination and belief of being inferior. In this decade, productivity of women will be enhanced. Acknowledging and appreciating the role of women is necessary for the sustainable development of Nepal. For this sustainable development of the nation gender issues are to be recognized and should have proper attention in human resource management in the public service.

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