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## Soccer (Association Football) In West Bengal: Its Survival And Revival Under Globalization— A Social Cultural Anthropological Approach

Dr. Abhijit Das<sup>1</sup> & Debjani Bhattacharya<sup>2</sup>

1. Associate Professor; Dept. of Anthropology, West Bengal State University; Barasat; North 24 Parganas; West Bengal, India.
2. PG student, Dept. of Anthropology, West Bengal State University; Barasat; North 24 Parganas; West Bengal, India.

### **Abstract:**

*Soccer* (association football), popularly known as *Football*, presently becomes one of the major global sports in West Bengal. It is a culture trait-complex creating its frenzied popularity in modern West Bengal. The trait that once has introduced in the Bengali core by culture contact has gradually become one of the most popular spectator sports in the state with enormous amount of primary and secondary involvements in and around it.

Now-a-days, millions of people, irrespective of caste, class, creed, as well as ethnic boundaries watch televised football. Because, football is of great interest to the people of West Bengal has an age-old ethno-history and presently is a unifying cultural trait-complex that merits attention and special interests in Social-Cultural anthropology. It manages to attract participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds, regions, religions, political parties, professions, social status and strata, levels of wealth, and genders. The popularity of professional football depends directly on the mass media, especially television and news papers' coverage. Many corporate honchos companies looking football clubs with greater interests because of the footballing standards have been raising in recent years. Their money is spent on training, tournaments, telecasts, tours, players and team, and training sponsors, and so on.

Finally, a well-defined global network of institutionalized authority structures, management, sentiments, mass media influences, spectator unrests, diversified divisions of 'labour' (specializations) and roles are found in the football, the major sporting event, under globalization in West Bengal.

Present study highlights a holistic observation of the sport along with its local and global issues and also analyses its changing aspects in the wider gamut of socio-cultural milieu of West Bengal under globalization.

**Keywords:** Soccer, Football, Globalization, Sports, Cultural trait complex.

### ***Preamble:***

As social complexity, industrialization, and urbanization spread globally, anthropologists increasingly study these processes and the social problems they create. Urban anthropology, which has theoretical (basic research) and applied dimensions, is the cross-cultural and ethnographic study of global urbanization and life in cities (Kottak, 2002). The state, like West Bengal, has become gradually a popular arena for urban anthropological research on sports, like ethnicity, poverty, class, and sub cultural variations. Sports, being one of the leisure time recreations have become a typical subculture in present day urban West Bengal.

Urbanization is the movement of people from rural to urban areas, and the result is the growth of cities (Dasgupta, 2012). It is also a process by which rural areas are transformed into urban areas. People primarily move into cities to seek economic opportunities. Urbanization, therefore, summarizes the relationship between the population and its urban component. The concept of urbanization has a dual meaning—demographical and socio-cultural. Both are equally important and significant for the present study from the perspective of social-cultural anthropology. Socio culturally, it refers to the behavior or way of life, institutions, and material things that are identified as urban in origin and use. In other words, it is a socio-cultural process which is the cause and consequences of a change in the man's way of life both in the rural and urban areas.

Urbanization is a complex socio-economic process intimately connected with the scientific technological revolution and it exercises a growing influence on all aspects of society's life affecting the nature of economic development as well as the demographic, ethnic, and many other socio-cultural processes including sports. One of the most striking features of urbanization of West Bengal is its long tradition and this is reflected in the professional and amateur sports as one of the most popular culture in the of West Bengal.

The prime aim of the present study is to analyze and understand the by-products of institutionalized sport soccer (locally and popularly known a football only) which has to be framed in the cultural context of urban West Bengal along with its rural counterpart, under globalization. The rapid urbanization and allied cultural influences like immigration, industrialization, transportation, and communication, education, and intellectual.

Change is coming on the emerging by-products of the commercialized Soccer (Association Football) in West Bengal. As immigrants poured into the state and industries developed in and around the mega city like Calcutta (presently Kolkata), the population of West Bengal inevitably shifted from predominantly rural to predominantly urban. Whereas, folk games and other sporting activities might sustain the leisure needs of rural population, new activities like sports of western in origin had to be developed to meet the entertainment needs of an urban population concentrated in the city of Calcutta and the wealth produced by industrialization were also necessary forerunners for the development of professional sports in West Bengal.

Play, games and sports are integral aspect of human culture. This is the primary significance of studying these in anthropological literature. Social-cultural anthropologists try to study game or sport as specific 'culture trait'<sup>1</sup> as soccer also possess a theme, structure, function which are conceptual and symbolic, while attempting the structure of and diffusion of a given society (Kroeber, 1936; Herskovits, 1956; Bose, 1961). Each game or sporting event, being a culture trait consists of participants, rules, symbols, technologies or material equipment, institutions or organizations, sponsors etc. along with joy or victory, mainly found in urban contexts which finally makes it a 'culture trait-complex'<sup>2</sup>. The importance of Soccer or 'Football' in the present-day society particularly in rural and urban areas is two-fold. Firstly, these are value-oriented and, therefore, become a carrier of 'folk' or 'little' and 'urban' or 'great traditions'<sup>3</sup> respectively in a civilization (Redfield, 1956), like India. And secondly, the ethics as followed in games and sports are the normative aspects of the fore-mentioned value judgments which

when put together, reflect the overall value systems of a particular society. The tremendous importance of football in our own society is due to the fact that they provide regular opportunities for interaction within habitual techniques, using well-known symbols, ordinarily learned in childhood, and thus provide a constant framework in a society where changes in interaction rates are imposed by the technology and the institution. Within the framework of the interaction afforded by different types of games and sports, characteristic patterns of interaction are developed for each people and thus these are related to social systems.

### ***Statement of the Problem:***

Problem per se in the present context is to look into the culture trait that represents football both in the rural and urban contexts of West Bengal. Though football as means of pastime recreation in West Bengal are found to be propagated in rural and urban backdrop, each have its own distinctive tradition in terms of 'trait elements'<sup>4</sup>. The rural contexts (i.e., the villages) in most cases revealed that the indigenous folk elements of football still exist with their orally transmitted folk elements in the form of texts, equipment and enactment. These are just pastime recreation without competition, tension and rivalry. These are passed across generation, mostly through children of different age-groups in almost pure oral tradition with no reference to print or adult guidance, whatsoever and these are mainly found to be played in the interior villages.

On the contrary, the urban areas are patron of modern institutionalized football as organized by numerous club-like associations and organizations. Through competitive tournaments mostly in the form of spectacular events, training, academics, etc. the urban sports are well-linked with the cities. Cities are the abode of modern football. The variegated trait-elements (unlike the rural) like their international rules, material equipment as well allied technologies, trainings, clubs houses, concerned officials and members, spectators and various other hi-product elements like sponsors, political platforms, advertisings, media coverage, rivalries pre and post-match ceremonies and rivalry, violence as well as law and interference of court, etc. are part and parcel of the city football.

The commercial or economic milieu with professional make-up, corporate sponsorships, and mass media influence— these three are the major components that have a long hand in creating a halo around the major sport football which form trait-complex today in the cities. These new by-products have been introduced when games and sports became a part of the global great tradition in this regard.

During the post-independence period due to the growth of national sentiments along with the process of urbanization through developed system of communications, the culture contact or 'acculturation'<sup>5</sup> (Redfield, Linton, Herskovits, 1936) made the exchange of traditional game elements of both contexts. The rural areas organize modern sports like football locally through clubs. Thus, borrowed traits are getting popularity day by day due to the rapid urbanization. The city plays the prime role in the formation of a linkage as well as 'rural-urban continuum'<sup>7</sup> (Redfield, 1941) through games and sports in West Bengal.

Therefore, by itemizing those traits and trait-complexes of football, the linkage and differences between the two contexts (rural and urban) along with the changing trends through the rapid impacts of global urbanization can be brought out in the present study. It will also be obvious that the trait- elements distribution in different spatial background may be alike and akin in the adjacent areas of similar 'cultural ecology'<sup>8</sup> (Steward, 1955). The present researcher has undertaken the problem anthropologically and hopes to arrive at results that may illuminate the study in so far as the socio-cultural significance of games and sports are concerned.

### ***The Settings: Venues of Observation:***

With regard to the above problem two different contexts comprising of three spatial poles (villages, town, and city) have been taken into consideration. The villages, as considered for the rural part of data were twelve in number (namely, *Sendanga, Natni, Putia, Kajla, Banbania, Magurkhali, Sabdalpur, Iswarigacha, Suria, Sahara, Kamarpur, Rajibpur*) and these are situated in the District of North 24 Parganas, West Bengal. The villages of the District of Burdwan (namely, *Hatsimul, Kathalgachi & Jamtara*) Birbhum (namely, *Erangi*) and East Midnapur (namely, *Khadalgobra, Jagadishpur*). With regard to urban pole, the District Sub-Divisional Town, Barasat has been studied as a medium of interaction between the rural and the city primarily. Finally, the city, *Calcutta* (renamed recently as '*Kolkata*') has been selected for the purpose. It lies on the Hoogly distributaries of the Gariges. Mainly clubs and similar organizations and participants (players, trainers or coaches, organizers, club-officials, sponsors, spectators and finally general people of respective exposures), have been selected and investigated and probed as venues or locales of the present study.

### ***Aims and Objectives:***

The present study offers a new dimension for anthropological understanding of football (soccer) as part of the total socio-cultural domain of West Bengal, which has the proposed objectives and aims in a nutshell to view—

- (i) The general patterns of sports in the rural and urban contexts of West Bengal
- (ii) The distinctiveness of traditions in football in both contexts and their linkage
- (iii) The urbanization in the spheres of football, its impact and changing aspects in the forms of by-products of city sports
- (iv) The role of city as a changing agent of rural and urban pattern of football.

### ***Methodology of the Present Study:***

For this study, a longer duration (one year i.e. December, 2015 to November, 2017) of fieldwork has been carried out to reach the proposed aims and objectives. After completion of data collection at the villages as mentioned, data were collected from the Sub-Divisional town, Barasat and Kolkata one after another. The study is basically ethnographic and qualitative one. Hence, the established method of anthropological ethnography, like Participant Observation along with the Intensive Interviews (Structured), Case Studies, Questionnaires, have been used for the collection of empirical data. Furthermore, for collecting records, the textual data from the printed materials like books, magazines, newspapers, internet-sources, etc. were also utilized. All data as collected in this matter are likely to yield results with regard to the main problems of games and sports under urbanization and its socio cultural transformations.

### ***Findings and Interpretations:***

#### **(I)**

The football including other major sports as culture trait particularly in West Bengal have certain specific elements. One of these is the utilization of leisure which had its origin and growth in the cradle of agrarian economy of the pre-British India. The informal folk games in the rural culture were marked by lack of institutionalization communication. These indigenous folk games as pastime recreation have been played around the Bengalese core within the narrow cultural circles of the then rural societies of West Bengal for long time. The spirit of those traditional games was mere satisfaction of recreational activities, where participants only got the pleasure while in general there was no special role for recreation leaders and spectators, and therefore, it worked as a way without reciprocation or encouragement.

The British came in India with their new form of economic, educational, and cultural norms. In Bengal, the important urban center like Calcutta was purposely selected by them for trade and commerce. The new city Calcutta as introduced by the British in Bengal had its impact on the traditional pattern of recreation including football and games, sports and allied activities. This may be defined as a new type of induced institutionalized games that altered to a large extent the passive non induced games and sports of the earlier era.

For instance, one of today's popular sport events of West Bengal, Football, had been brought to India by various groups of Englishmen like civilians, traders, college teachers, military personnel and above all the Navy. The first recorded organized match in this regard in Calcutta was between Civilians and the Gentlemen of Barrackpur. These kind of friendly matches were organized amongst the European clubs within themselves initially. These matches and clubs have given impetus to the elites of Bengalese in the city to establish institutionalized sports clubs composed of Bengalese in the localities for making the new sport as a regular activity. By this way, the Calcutta Football Club (1872), Trades' Club (Dalhousie Athletic Club, 1878), Naval Volunteers (1884), Howrah United Armenian Club, etc. had been established. In 1889, Calcutta's first knockout football tournament was held. The enthusiastic Bengali elites were interested in this newly competitive game. It was the students of the then Bengal Engineering college, Medical College, St. Xavier's College, La Martiniere, etc. who founded the first of today's open clubs in the 1880s and 1890s to enable them to go on playing football. Similarly, the oldest cricket club outside the British Isles dates back to 1792 (Chowdhury, 1990). After establishing such game clubs in Calcutta, football and cricket matches between such club teams began to be played fairly, joyfully and regularly. Its devotees moved from one plot on the *Maidan* (the large and dominant sports-center in Calcutta) or the Esplanade to the other parts of the city and finally to the suburbs as well as hinterlands. Thus, started a new era of institutionalized major sports in Calcutta and gradually in West Bengal (Sengupta, 1976; Chowdhury, 1990). In other words, this was the beginning of an era where the sports as culture trait along with its two important traits i.e. football and cricket began to diffuse in the rural and urban spots of West Bengal due to the course of urbanization.

In general, the institutionalized football (soccer) of European origin were widely accepted, organized and played by the people of the state. After independence the National Government as well as Sports Ministry patronized those sports began to spread in the adjacent urban and moffusil towns through the development of communication.

Such is the story in brief, of the first encounter of two major sporting events in West Bengal. Culture is ever changing and transitory. With passage of time it undergoes evolution and transformation. So, the sports of Bengal have undergone various cultural transactions is very much evident. Due to this intermingling, the foreign sports have become inseparable part of Bengali way of life, and in many cases these seem to be native sports of Bengal, too.

## (II)

In the rural areas of West Bengal, some indigenous or folk elements and some borrowed patterns of elements of football are played by the children and youths. The borrowed elements during play are mostly Western in origin as introduced by the British in Calcutta and came into the villages by culture- contact. Both categories of games are played side by side, but it is worth mentioning here that frequency of borrowed modern games are large in the surrounding villages of urban spot and it decreases in the interior villages. This is due to the fact of physical and cultural communication and hence, the degree of urbanization. Those traditional element of football are far less formal than modern urban football. The rules of them are relatively simple, unwritten, legitimated by custom, and sometimes revised to fit the circumstances of the moment. The play text as well as rules prevalent in one locality or village often differed sharply from those with another. Those patterns are passed from player to player in almost pure oral

tradition with no reference whatever to print and probably with negligible guidance from trainers, parents, or recreation leaders. No bureaucracies or referees' supervision is required.

It has also been observed and mentioned earlier that some urban based modern elements of football have been borrowed are played mainly by the rural boys and youths. Although those patterns are getting popularity in the localities due to culture contact with the urban spots. During investigation the modern sport like football, is the most exciting team-sports of the rural boys and youths. But due to certain socio-economic conditions, most of the rural performers (including few junior and senior girls) generally play up to their entry into the bread earning status of the families. Very few of the skilled performers of excellent repute can achieve in the mainstream 'sportsworld' in urban areas as well as in the city through tournaments, training and services.

It is important to mention here that the borrowed patterns while accepted have become 'parochialized' by the rural participants in the form of their rules, equipment and dress or uniform. This is due to their economic insufficiency as well as ecological factors.

Very few enthusiastic players from football, take part regularly in the nearby urban club teams and training centers. Few of the outstanding players of the villages are playing in the city teams also. Similarly, the players from the urban town participate regularly in the city based local, sub-divisional as well as national and international tournaments. This is the great reason of gradual popularity of modern urban-based sports in the villages. Achievements of rural football, players of both sex in Barasat and Calcutta are considerable. A large number of rural players take football as more ideal form of sport to achieve in the city, mainly because of its simplicity of rules and low finance in it. They also show much interest for getting jobs in the Eastern Railway, Accounts General of Bengal, Food Corporation in India, Income Tax offices and so on. The simple traditional pattern of game when become organized and institutionalized with formal written rules, thus reveals a sound process of universalization.

The rural clubs actually inactive in organizing football properly for its informal members as well as local players. Recently very few senior club members and local youths organize leagues and knockout tournaments in football. The players and conductors (referees, linesmen, and umpires) from nearby urban spots like Barasat and Calcutta sometimes participate and represent in the rural teams as hired participants. As the competitive attitudes, awareness, as well as participation for gaining these as profession are increasing with the gradual popularity of modern sports in the villages, sporadic cases of post-match tensions, rivalries or unrest around the success and defeat of the local teams have also been observed during investigation.

### (III)

The District Sub-Divisional Town, Barasat is an area of modern sports, including football. It is situated at the Western part of the District North 24 Parganas. The inhabitants of Barasat are actually more nearer to the city of Calcutta. They always dream to come closure to the daily life and culture of the city as it is well-communicated with it through the Eastern Railway and Calcutta- Jessore Road, existing in parallel. A number of local trains of Sealdah- Bongaon, Sealdah-Barasat, Barasat- Bogaon, Barasat- Habra sections run regularly by which peoples from rural areas of the district and also from Barasat can make these convenient for strengthening the rural-urban-city linkage. The buses and similar other conveyances are also plentiful. This well-developed physical communication system helps to make possible of cultural communications, too.

The football as modern as well as global sports took a new shape in Barasat with various clubs and organizations. During investigation very few peer-group children of age-group (6-10) years were found to play football in rare occasions. The junior boys of (16-25) years and youths of (25-35) years and onwards and also a few number of girls engage themselves in popular

modern sport like football, cricket, volleyball, badminton, table-tennis, kabaddi, athletics, karatte, carom, and chess regularly in respective season.

The government registered (Sports Registration) sports clubs in Barasat organize different sporting events. Those clubs are also affiliated units to the supreme body, like Barasat Sub Divisional Sports Association (B.S.S.A). The B.S.S.A conduct leagues and knockout sports events for the clubs seasonally. The clubs also arrange sports for local competitions. The outstanding players of Barasat participate or represented Calcutta clubs in different national leagues and knockout tournaments. Mainly the players from outside areas or clubs file their names for other clubs at the time of players' recruitment against money and sports-kits. The comparatively upper-income clubs always get opportunity to recruit players from Calcutta and other areas. Therefore, money around sports is a common feature in Barasat. It has also been observed that numerous prizes as well as awards through cash money are given in most cases in lieu of shields, trophies, cups, medals. This tendency has entered in Barasat recently. The use of 'logo' in the team uniforms as sponsored by companies is also very recent introduction.

The football, like other major sports in Barasat, show certain inextricable and unavoidable activities which sometimes interrupt recreational spontaneity through sports. Certain city norms are found around sports situations recently in Barasat. As like the complexity of urban life, the intricacy in the form of competitions, the pre- and post-match tensions, rivalries, supporters' beatings, quarrels, etc. gradually curtail the original appeal of sports in the area. Those unexpected incidents are generally happened on the wrong decisions of sports conductors, judges, team or club officials, organizers, and so on.

The evidences of political attitudes in sports are not uncommon today in urban spots like Barasat. The inter and intra-club rivalries and corruptions as well as politics around sports events are generally in concealed form, but in some cases the disputes among club officials, working members or *karma-kartas* and players become exposed. Sometimes settlements of disputes go to the local court also. The players, club-officials, and many other sports related personalities are often interrelated with state politics, too. Their political interferences are exposed in the form of campaigning, pestering, attendance in meetings, etc. for political parties before parliament and assembly elections. At the same time leading political leaders come to interfere in sports in order to gain their political as well as social images keeping attached with the sports arena. They are also invited to different ceremonial inauguration and final matches of big-budget tournaments.

Calcutta is the most important urban and industrial center of West Bengal, deserves special mention as regards to its modernity in every sphere of life and culture. It has long been an attractive spot for age-old sports milieu. It is the abodes. of modern institutionalized popular culture including sports like football and cricket in West Bengal. Sport like football itself took a particular shape here in terms of its structural and functional uniqueness. The situations around football are so diversified socially and culturally that it finally forms a specific sub-culture in the city.

The football is mostly organized by various government recognized and autonomous associations consisting clubs, federations, academies and so on. The club tents are found to be erected in and around *Maidan*, the age-old dominant sports center in the city. Besides, the open and well-fenced grounds, the important matches are performed in the indoor and outdoor stadia of the city, like Eden Gardens, *Yuva Bharati Krirangan*, *Ravindra Sarovar Stadium*, Netaji Indoor 'Stadium, Howrah Stadium, and Barasat Stadium also. The upper, middle and lower-income clubs which are also affiliated units of the governing bodies (e.g. IFA) conduct the recruitment of the players for the clubs seasonally. The players as represented the clubs for the season usually come from different suburbs, moffusil districts, villages as well as countries also. Recruitment of players from other countries is not the recent feature in Calcutta, but it is increasing in every year. Spectator centeredness encourages the increasing growth of

bureaucracies, specialization and the placement of administrative concerns rather than players concerns. To succeed at the highest levels, especially in individual sports youngsters begin to specialize at a tender age. This tendency is also found in the spheres of football also. They also begin to engage in systematic and scientific training by the age of five or six as the training centers and academies are recently available in the city. Even professional trainers as well as veteran players of good repute from other countries are invited to train in Calcutta. Modern equipment or technologies are available due to globalization which assists this endeavor along with the extensive media coverage in the sports. Data show that the sports in the city also have some inextricable relationships with economy, politics, and status quo. The economic or commercial outfits are fully exposed in the spheres of sports including football in Calcutta. The economic analysis demonstrates that the boom in sports spectatorship has depended on the increase of leisure time for the mass population. The present sophistication in football is depended mostly on the sponsorship of corporate business magnets, media-advertising agencies and hence going to be fully a professional activity. Each and every active and passive participant tries to make money from it, which attract the participants from rural and urban areas in the background of global urbanization. Moreover, the vital national or international matches are hard sell with massive advertising in print and electronic media, high profit making and expensive tickets. Money also plays a role among the spectators in the gallery on winning and losing of favorites. The sports stars earn money not only as participants but also through modeling, acting, anchoring, gambling etc. Hence, football in the city are now an important as well as one of the pervasive modes of professions among large number of people involved primarily and secondarily in it.

Politicians recognize the socio-cultural pervasiveness of football and make every effort to use it for their political gain. The club platforms are utilized by the leading politicians to utilize their impact on the mass. The political parties also use sports participants for political propaganda.

Thus, relatively informal, unorganized, institutionalized and participant oriented rural pastime tend to become organized, institutionalized, commercialized, and highly specialized forms of industry with mass communication in the urban spots as well as in the city. The global urbanization and industrialization have proved of paramount importance in changing the nature, extent and forms of sports as well as football in West Bengal. Urbanization serving the goals of modernization and all-pervading globalization brought new structural changes and innovations in the football world in the state as well as the country.

#### NOTES:

1. N. K. Bose (1961) defined culture trait as “...an intimate assemblage of certain actions, sentiments, attitudes, and beliefs...”

Herskovits (1955) defined a trait as “the smallest identifiable unit in a given culture”.

2. Bose also viewed culture trait-complex as “....Furthermore, each of a given culture when contributes to a larger unities are termed then as complexes”.

Kroeber (1936) defined culture trait as “minimal definable element of culture. Each trait along with its multifunctional elements contributes to the larger unities; they may be termed as culture complexes”.

3. Terms employed by Robert Redfield (1956) in his study Peasant Society and Culture, in order to contrast the formal literate tradition of the urban elites with the largely oral and informal tradition of the rural peasant community. The great tradition is maintained by the urban-based elites and the little tradition by rural peasants.

4. According to N.K.Bose, “... Each of the isolable unit which enters into the composition of a trait is called element. ...”.



5. The US anthropologists, Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits (Social Science Research Council; 1936) defined acculturation as “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into first hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of both groups”.

6. McKim Marriot (1955) viewed that the process by which the elements of the Little tradition, indigenous customs, deities, and rites circulate upward to the level of the Great tradition and are identified with its legitimate forms is ‘universalization’.

7. Anthropologist Robert Redfield developed the idea in order to account for the differences which he observed among various Mexican communities to study the interrelationships of folk and urban society. A continuum was also conceptualized as an account of social forms, from the simpler to the more complex.

8. An area of anthropological enquiry firstly proposed by Julian Steward (1955), also called ecological anthropology, which focuses the relationship between human populations and their environment, and attempts to provide a materialist explanation of human society and culture as products of adaptation to given environmental conditions.

9. Robert Lipsyte used the term ‘Sports world’ in the book entitled ‘ Sport in American Society : Its Pervasiveness and Its Study ‘(1980), to conceive the pervasiveness of sports and its ubiquity with economy, politics, religion, media, education, and so on in the present day society No one can be escaped from it.

10. Marriot (1955) also conceived that “the process of limitation upon the scope of intelligibility, of deprivation of literary form, of reduction to less systematic and less reflective dimensions”. It is the downward devolution of great traditional elements to the little.

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