

Marxism in *Moth Smoke*: A Macro Analysis of Pakistani Society

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Abstract

The story of suppressed and subjugated finds voices for advocating its cause in the ideology of Marxism which pleads their case by rejecting and refusing the power, control and might of bourgeoisie in the economic, political and capitalistic sphere, granting the proletariats a sound situation for survival-and-stepping-forward in a classless society. The study aims at exploring the socio-political and economic conditions as portrayed by Mohsin Hamid in his novel Moth Smoke. It goes on to explore the reactions of the characters and the possible vision preached by Mohsin Hamid in his work. Marxism serves as the theoretical framework and Fairclough's approach of Socio-cultural practice marks the method of the study. The findings of the paper suggest that socio-economic and political system strengthens the bourgeoisie and breaks the back of the desolate and distressed. The solution lies in toning down the intense accumulation of power and control in the centre and restoring balance by incorporating periphery in the socio-political and economic centre on equal footing.

Keywords: Bourgeoisie, Proletariats, Ideology, Power, Socio-Cultural Practice

Introduction

The ideology of Marxism speaks for the economically down-trodden and marginalized segment of the society. It advocates the social change by challenging the authority and ideology of the bourgeoisie, leveling all mounds and mounts of power, control and class system by the proletariats themselves. No savior is expected from the far reaching heavens. The wretched and the wrecked themselves have to take up the cudgels to sweep the society from the ills and evils of capitalism.

The paper is an attempt to scrutinize *Moth Smoke* by Mohsin Hamid keeping in focus the following questions:

1. How do socio-political and economic systems and circumstances affect the characters in the novel *Moth Smoke*?
2. How do the characters in *Moth Smoke* affirm or resist the bourgeoisie values?
3. Does Mohsin Hamid propose some form of utopian vision in *Moth Smoke* for the solution of social and economic problems encountered by the characters?

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Moth Smoke is the story of a Pakistani society placed against 1998 political backdrop. It relates the social and economic upheavals which some of the characters deal with while others contribute in the construction of that chaos. Marxism frames the theoretical background of the paper whereas Fairclough's approach of Socio-cultural practice has been used to interrogate and dissect the above mentioned concerns.

The study contributes positively by highlighting the cause of the poor and the distressed, tracing the roots of their troubles back to the unjust and unfair social and economic system which helps strengthening the hands of bourgeoisie in weakening and manipulating the marginalized sections of the society by widening the gap between the centre and the periphery through their hegemonic control and rule.

Literature Review

Marxism, also called "Scientific Socialism", is the name given to the "ideas" of Karl Marx (1818 – 1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820 – 1895). These ideas provide a complete "theoretical basis for the struggle of the working class" with the ambition of attaining "a higher form of human society – socialism" (Sewell and Woods, 2000). Marxism is looked at as an ideology which offers "explanation for the causes of human exploitation and misery". It is also viewed as "a strategy for social change". Marxism opposes "the dominant ideology of the bourgeoisie" (Eyerman, 1981: 48). Marxism has the emancipatory project according to Dickens (1990). All exploiting classes justify their class rule morally, specifying it as a natural form of social development. They distort the truth to disguise their system of oppression and exploitation.

Singh (1989) alludes to Marx that his "new principles for the world" were developed out of "the principles of the existing world" (P. 2421). Singh's opinion states clearly that Marxism has the ability to challenge the power which hinders its way. Its target is to bring a better change in the society. Ree (1997) turns to Lenin who is of the view that Proletariat needs state for two reasons. One is to strike down "the resistance of the exploiters" and two "for the purpose of leading peasants to socialism" (P-31). Proletariat can put an end to bourgeoisie rule by their collective effort that fails to offer any comfort and consolation to its victims.

Marx and Capitalism

Marx directed his criticism to Capitalism for its irrationality and inhumanity in politics, and lack of justice and morality in ethics. It facilitates the exploitation of proletariats as its main concerns are centered on profit maximization and extreme expansion of the material world. Profit maximization distorts the system but capitalism values it as it is considered the driving force of social progress. Expansion of the material world results in its utmost oppression of the human world. Marx was of the view that permanent and highest value should be given to human world. The material world turns into evil when it assumes power as an instrument to oppress humanity. Another reason of opposing capitalism by Marx is its irrational social system that is constructed on the foundation of highly private ownership. Those-who-have compel have-nots into oppression and enslavement. This practice aggravates social splits and sharpens class contradictions and

struggle which ultimately paves path for a revolution, sowing a seed for a new society (Ouyang, Liu and Zhu, 2006).

False Consciousness & Ideology

Eyerman (1981) discusses Marx and Engels' focus on the concept of ideology, which to them, refers to the distorted beliefs that the intellectuals cherish and hold about society and the power of their own ideas. Those who are involved in producing ideologies suffer from false consciousness i.e., they are deceived and misled about their own beliefs.

Marx, Engels and Lenin – Classical Marxism – incline to associate false consciousness and ideology with the writing or the unconscious actions of intellectuals and capitalists. The actions and consciousness of working class are excluded from the discussion as they are not part of superstructure. Rikowski (1997) opines that political and legal superstructure arises on the base of material means of production, distribution and exchange. Superstructure is a cultural world constituting of ideas, art, literature, law and religion. Eyerman thinks that this problem of ideology and false consciousness is imprisoned to the realm of the superstructure, cultural form and the state. The working class does not include in this frame of superstructure as its social existence is limited to economic activities which are termed as the base social practices by Eyerman.

Exclusion of the working class from the established political processes and high culture makes it realistic as it does not harbor any illusions about its existence whereas for the bourgeoisie, the case is reversed. Marx and Engels pointed their cannon of false consciousness towards those intellectuals who produce a distorted picture of reality in their works which serve the interest of the dominant classes whereas Gramsci, as indicated by Eyerman, brings the concept of false consciousness down to the working and rural classes. Working class, according to Gramsci, does not have a delusional false consciousness in a total sense. There are the fits and starts of insight or rationalization also. False consciousness refers to the culture and life practices of social group along with an internalization of ideologies like that of religion. Supporting reformism in working class is a sign of its false consciousness.

Power of Proletariat

The proletariat is looked upon as the only class capable of carrying Socialist Revolution to a conclusion. It is disciplined in factories and compelled to contribute in the productive process. Its organization into trade unions and independent parties along with the supporting theories and ideology of Marxism helps it achieve its task of overthrowing capitalism. The Peasantry, lacking concept of unity or internationalism and the middle class following the footsteps of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat fail to play a leading role (Sewell and Woods, 2000). Marxism and Leninsim's concept of the state "withered away" (Ree, 1997: 30) would be achieved by the proletariat as state is a tool of oppression in the hands of bourgeoisie so it should be destroyed and the working class would construct its own state by involving "masses in the running of the state and society" (Sewell and Woods, 2000).

Marxist Literary Criticism

Marxism is criticized for not addressing many radical issues of the world of today such as women's rights, nuclear war, and environmental destruction. This poses a challenge for Marxist Theory to integrate the concerns of these movements without neglecting class relations and economic structures as Dickens (1990) puts it. Spitzer (1983) criticizes Marxism as it confines itself only to a critique of capitalism. Singh (1989), however, somehow seems to see clear commitment of Marxism to truth and finds it more worthwhile when compared to other theories.

Literature is the part and parcel of superstructure. It is produced by the forces which play their role at the base of the society. It reflects and envisages the base and carries meanings and message hidden between the lines. A Marxist critic reads between the lines to break through the surface for revealing what lies at the bottom, to make the absent present.

Erdrich (1988), an American Indian writer, traces the US government efforts to replace tribal communalism with the capitalism by snatching lands from the American Indians in her novel *Tracks*. They have become an easy target because few of them understood the writings on the papers as Nanapush, the narrator and the tribal elder tells the reader. Their lands are taken away with the signs of thumbs and crosses. Some are given meager amount of cash for land whereas others like Fleur are deprived of their lands because taxes are unpaid on their own lands. Peterson (1994) views the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 as a key element in the government policy which made the division of the land formerly held communally on reservations relatively easy along with its allotment to individual Indians. This was an effort to replace the native communalism with the individualistic and capitalistic economy.

Erdrich (1984) takes up the issue of capitalist exploitation in her another novel named *Love Medicine* where Lulu, an Indian woman, is expelled out of her land by the government-Indians who act as a toy in the hands of capitalist bourgeoisie to facilitate the process of oppression and hegemonic control over the native people.

The subject of capitalist brutality has been dealt in *The God of Small Things* by Roy (1997), an Indian writer. It also depicts failure of communism in eradicating class system, class consciousness and inequality from the society due to strong caste system, a legacy of Indian culture and traditions. Velutha has to suffer greatly despite being a supporter of communist cause due to his low, near to negligible position in the society.

Nevertheless, Marxism fails to answer who would dismantle the power of proletariat and their state in case if they tend to be oppressive after acquiring the seats of sovereignty and once they start walking in the corridors of autonomy and authority. The picture is beautifully delineated by George Orwell (1945) in *Animal Farm* when all are equal turn into some are more equal than the others.

While reviewing the novel, Rachel Aspden (2011) reads clash of cultures in *Moth Smoke* and finds it switching between narrators as unnecessarily tricky. Hamid's parallel between Daru and Ozi with the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan's fratricidal sons Aurangzeb and Dara Shikoh – doesn't really hold for Aspden. The prince Dara Shikoh is defeated every time he tries to attain the throne from Aurangzeb whereas in the novel Dara is a catastrophe who fails to achieve what Ozi has and is misled by Murad Badshah who directs him to the path of violence and aggression that completes the process of his disintegration and failure. In history, the prince Dara Shikoh is betrayed by Malik Jiwan who paves the way of his destruction by handing him over to Aurangzeb who eventually gets him assassinated. The parallel is subtle but the links can be traced even further down through meticulous reading.

Method for Analysis

Fairclough's approach of critical discourse analysis has been used as a method for the analysis and interpretation of the selected novel to point out power relation, class consciousness, social inequality and economic injustice. Fairclough's three part model places the text first. The text analysis stands for the linguistic analysis. Next comes Discourse Practice consisting of institutional process and discourse processes (Sheyholislami, n.d.). Third dimension of the model is Sociocultural practice.

Socio-Cultural Practice

Language, for Fairclough, is an integral element of the material social process. Social life is made up of social practices of varied sorts such as political, economic, cultural etc. (Wodak and Meyer). Fairclough includes the examination of these three aspects in this category of language as a social discourse: i- Economic ii- Political (i.e. power and ideology) iii- Cultural (issues of values) (Sheyholislami, n.d.). This approach is problem based, for Wodak and Meyer, with emancipatory objectives. It concentrates on the problems of losers, the poor and socially excluded etc. along with spotting the diagnosis of the problems as well as the obstacles in resolution of those problems.

I have dwelled upon the third dimension that is socio-cultural practice of Fairclough's approach. Ideology and power are the main constructs used for the study. Ideologies are socially shared ideas for van Dijk (1998). The second most important construct is power which is characterized as one's own will even against the resistance of others. Fairclough approach helps to explore the discourse of those in power who are responsible for the existence of inequalities in the society (Wodak and Meyer, 2001).

Analysis of *Moth Smoke*

The story in *Moth Smoke* opens in the summer of 1998. Setting is Lahore, a city of Pakistan. It is a time when India makes show of her nuclear assets through the explosions in May of 1998 and Pakistan follows in her footsteps to keep abreast with her nuclear progress and as a manifestation of her military power and also to prove her at par with India. The novel depicts the social and economic circumstances of the upper and middle classes before and after this official measure.

Effects of Socio-Political and Economic System

Darashiko – Shehzad is a main actor in *Moth Smoke* who gets kicked out of the bank job for displeasing a rural landlord, named Malik Jiwan, with half a million USD in his account. Mr. Jiwan gets offended for his check yet to be cleared and threatens Shehzad of throwing him out on the street which he does eventually. Political figures with strong economic standing have power and positions to move anyone and everyone in the society. The manager cannot afford to displease the bourgeoisie and tells Shehzad that he is fired. The society legitimizes and recognizes the ideology and authority of the rising sun by kneeling in front of its wish and command. Feudal domination being at the centre deprives the weaker from his right shoving him further to the periphery of the society. Binary relationships which make up the society emerge fully in this confrontation.

Murad Badshah owns rickshaws and represents lower class. He deals in drugs, supplying it to Daru and others like him. He is the one who introduces Daru, first of all, with the culture of snatching and violence by showing him a silver revolver and later on buying a gun for him. Deprivation and disappointment culminate in ending up Daru and many others like him in the dark pit of abhorrence and aggression.

Daru is a man of middle class, initially having good terms with bourgeoisie class. He is very class conscious and feels repulsive when Murad Badshah puts his arm around Daru while informing him about Charas and heroin. Daru always wants to maintain a distance from the people of class below him as a way of compensating the rude behaviors of the upper class which he has to face after his loss of job.

Daru's job hunt goes unsuccessful despite his degree of a master and a fair amount of experience because he lacks connections. Until and unless he knows "some rally big fish", he won't be hired in the banking sector (P-53). Experience and ability are unworthy in a system controlled by bourgeoisie where economic and social footing and connections are the only means to get posts and positions. This purposeful discrimination, in view of Hirschman (1985), is one of the agents of inequities in the hands of capitalists.

The economic condition of an underdeveloped country like Pakistan is very tight, falling short to offer any work. These unfavourable circumstances only enhance the distress of already depressed segment of the society. Murad Badshah, having a degree of M.A in English, is also the product of unfair class system and exploitation and oppression at the hand of his family members. He cannot find a job and is driven out by his uncles from his father's home and gold business before even he is born. Hirschman (1985) puts forward the argument that restrictions on acquiring such resources such as education and job skills bounds the consumers in the low standard of life and this is what we observe, happens with Daru and Badshah in the narrative.

Daru suffers from economic depression after his repeated failed attempts of finding a job. His electricity is cut due to non-payment of bills. Loss of electricity and air conditioning symbolizes the loss of social status for Daru. He feels that he has lost his power with the departure of money from his life that renders him more insecure. Rising power prices,

thanks to privatization and the boom of guaranteed profit in addition to imported oil fired electricity projects, add miseries and pain to the plight of people at periphery. The poor and middle class crumble under the weight of capitalism, finding it hard to draw necessary oxygen from the suppressed and suffocated environment of capitalism.

Daru becomes conscious of his social and economic position since his childhood. He feels bad when Ozi tells other boys in school that the clothes Daru is wearing are given by his father. The consciousness of his place and position grows big with the growth of Daru. He notices the difference in the sounds of slamming car doors: the deep thuds of Ozi's pajero and Pickles' land cruiser seem superior to the nervous cough of his Suzuki that pronounces the difference of their social and economic circumstances. The fact that Ozi manages to get away with everything by the dint of his money makes Daru full of complaint and complex at the strong social and economic position of Ozi. It also reveals the ease and facility which falls in the lot of bourgeoisie who nourish themselves by sucking and snatching from the proletariat and poor. Ozi kills a boy by hitting him with his Pajero and does not bother to stop or feel guilty, proclaiming to take care of the victim's family with compensation. Poor are a commodity for the rich whose lives can be exchanged and bartered with material things. While in a strong repulsion, Murad Badshah turns out to be a person who enjoys the distress of the rich due to their hegemonic control over resources.

Professor Superb talks of two social classes in Pakistan. The first class is large and sweaty commonly known as masses while the second group is collectively called the elite. The distinction between the two groups is based on the control of important resource: air conditioning. Elites enjoy the luxury of winter in summer while the masses get baked and roasted in the heat of glaring summer sun. Control of resources is the outcome of power as van Dijk (1988) equates control with power.

Working of false consciousness is extremely pronounced and visible like the screaming summer sun in Chapter 12 where Aurangzeb presents the distorted ideology of being corrupt out of necessity. He forwards his arguments by stating the ideology of making hay while it shines. When system is unchangeable, it is better to be a part of it instead of challenging it: "there's no way to stop, so there's nothing to be guilty about" (p. 185). He names many more money launderers to justify the money laundering of his father. In the process of presenting his false ideology forcefully that his father has done nothing wrong, he brings out the vicious face of capitalism in chapter 12 where elites are concerned with money making and profit production at the expense of wretched ones.

There are references to the national and International political scenario and the way it affects the lives of common people. Daru's father dies as a prisoner of war camp near Chittagong in 1971, the tragedy that makes him dependent on Khurram uncle. Ozi comes with the news of "the neighbours have gone nuclear" (p. 87) to Daru. Both discuss the future possibilities in a light heart manner as Ozi feels safe with an option of fleeing and flying away from the place of danger on the wings of his dollars.

Murad Badshah has a special feast with his drivers and mechanics at the night after explosion. They all sit together in a circle on the floor of the workshop to celebrate the news. Lower class culture exhibits itself in this small social gathering which is full of food and gossip but no drinks, whisky or beer. Murad Badshah shows his real concern about the nuclear race which is no joke. It is good to be at par in might with the enemy but rising prices, schools shutdown and hospitals with no medicine are the factors which jolt the already deprived entirely and push them into the pitch of deprivations and problems. The political condition affects masses more badly.

The novel portrays rich bourgeoisie culture in detail. Rich have the bottle of Black Label for normal drink because they can afford the good stuff. They travel in Pajeroes which add authority to their powerful personas. There is description of parties: packed dance floors and too many people getting drunk at the bar. Men and women share smoking pot mixed with hash and enjoy rolling a joint. The police also honour the bourgeoisie and don't stop the driver when the riders are in Pajero. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989) view such specimens as literate elites and their "primary identification is with the colonizing power" of the past (p. 5). They feel pleasure and pride in this identification. It is also a manifestation of their complexed nature that suffers inferiority complex at what is their native heritage and feels superior in the imitation of their colonial masters. It also hints at the mental slavery of the colonized people who find it hard to breach and eradicate what is instilled by their colonizers. By following in their footsteps, the complexed personalities feel the same air of power and control that they themselves have undergone. Bourgeoisie's culture is a hybrid culture with the glimpses of their colonizers from whom they adopt the practices of drinking and dancing. It is mimicry of the colonial culture once in power and at centre on the parts of the bourgeois with a desire to be like them and be them. The remixed song from London for the party speaks of the musical appropriation by the centre that is a source of pride and honour for bourgeoisie. The party proves a smashing success with full display of "Tattos, pony tills, side burns, navel rings abound" (p. 82). Elements of hybrid Culture are very vocal in these parties. These parties are also desperate expressions of social climbing and enlisting oneself with centre that can afford paradise on earth.

Daru tells Ozi that "its' not my crowd", his instantaneous reaction is "because you can't afford it" (p. 85) which stings deep down in the heart of Daru. It is a reminder of his broken economic condition which ultimately decides his social identity, his social circle and his social situation and possible social exclusion from the centre. Economy, profit maximization and money are pivotal in the capitalistic world. When the person fails to contribute on these lines, he loses all his value and power. Material world and not human world decides the significance of the person.

Mohsin Hamid admits the culture of periphery by taking the reader to Heera Mandi along with Mumtaz. Dilaram tells her story of exploitation and oppression by the landlord of her area who threatens to kill her family to get his way with her. He keeps up his evil practice and lets his sons and "his friends" rape her as well. Later on, one of his friends brings her to Lahore on discovering her pregnancy and transports her to Heera Mandi

where a series of unending exploitation starts for her as a life time legacy of the feudal hegemony.

The Landlord succeeds in abusing the poor village girl due to her weak economic and social positions. The poor depend on the bourgeoisie in the feudal system and don't dare to challenge their authority and might. Later his friend makes her work in Heera Mandi by filling her with the assumptions that she has lost her "honour" and "the villagers would not accept" her (p. 51). He pushes her further into the swamp land by his argumentations and ideology which sound weighty for an uneducated girl like her. The fear of rejection by the society and the family shoves her further into the abyss in which she spends rest of her life.

Reaction in Affirmation or Negation

Daru tries to affirm the bourgeoisie values and culture initially by desperately adopting their life style, rich habits and moving in the same circle. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin call it "mimicry of the centre" which builds up "from a desire not only to be accepted but to be adopted and absorbed" (p. 4). But Daru finds himself comparing him with others and concluding that it is he who deserves the better and the best. This comparison develops a complex in him. Daru tries to incorporate and internalize the values of upper class in his life, deeming it would enable him to be the part or one of them but this is the working and a sign of false consciousness on the part of working class.

Murad Badshah does not affirm, at all, the values of the bourgeoisie rather he feels happier at the distress of the rich. He feels that "redistribution of wealth" (p. 104) can break the barrier between the rich and the poor. He resists all those who are above him even in a slight degree. The arrival of the yellow cab devastates his rickshaw business. People start preferring cabs over noisy rickshaws. Murad Badshah takes his revenge by "robbing yellow cab drivers" (p. 63). He does not feel guilty for this practice of stealing, snatching and stripping others away of their possessions rather shows his pride at this knack of his. The subjugation of the working class stems from their inaction. The proletariat instigates the bourgeoisie to take advantage of them by their silent surrender in the views of Badshah. Badshah justifies "his piracy campaign against yellow cabs" which are equipped with "air conditioning" (p. 104) that symbolizes connection with the bourgeoisie culture for Badshah and he can't tolerate Bourgeoisie culture corrupting his business.

Daru's deprivation of economic means results in his separation from the bourgeoisie culture and values and his exclusion from the centre. Rikowshi (1997) rightly maintains that it is economy that determines all social relations and forms. Daru hates guns but comes "to accept that he would have to use one" (p. 109). His reaction leads from affirmation to negation to violent rejection to annexation. He starts selling the stuff to his bourgeoisie friends – the stuff "mixed with charas" (p. 136). So, finally he comes to adopt the strategy of Badshah. When he fails to be one of them, he starts snatching their good sense and sanity by making them drug addict.

Badshah encourages Daru to join him in *the entrepreneurial venture* [pun intended] of robbing the high-fashion, exclusive boutiques to carry out their revenge on “the soft underbelly of the upper crust” (p. 214). The talent of the country tragically enough guises himself as a robber with a gun and enters in the boutique to satisfy his hunger, quench his thirst and enlighten his house with the money of the rich, the powerful, the dominant group of the society. The responsibility of the transformation of Daru into a robber ultimately making him a murderer when he shoots a boy in the boutique rests on the shoulder of the unjust social and economic system and its perpetrators.

Authorial Vision

Mohsin Hamid does not propose any form of utopian vision in his work for the solution of the social and economic problems of his characters. Rather, he puts his voice in the mouth of some of his characters, sounding vocally and sanely, in their ideologies. Murad Badshah believes firmly in the ideology of equality and equity that demands the need for a large scale redistribution of wealth. It seems somewhat an idealistic desire to spread financial harmony and balance as a solution of people’s problems, but nonetheless herein lingers the solution of the problems created by the unjust system.

Mumtaz opposes the use of air conditioning. The wastefulness of a privileged few makes the entire country suffers. She sounds logical and her words can be taken as representative of the author who believes in slow and steady wins the race instead of spilling all resources in one jot. If elites also start salvaging and reflecting instead of squandering and hoarding, most of the problems can be resolved which is a very pragmatic ideology.

Conclusion

Socio-political and economic conditions, as portrayed in the novel, topple the lives of some characters upside down affecting them appallingly. Daru’s loss of economic footing results in his social marginalization. He is excluded from the bourgeoisie centre of which he is very frantic to become a part. He feels the stings of humiliation and insult in the remarks of his elite circle at the social gatherings. Political circumstances become boon for some characters like Khurram who makes best out of them by reaping a rich harvest of economic gains after 1971 war as a civil servant; whereas some lose their lives like Daru’s father in the same war, adding to the trials and tribulations of their families in a system which kneels down and accomplishes the ends of the powerful-centre, only neglecting the periphery completely.

Daru primarily affirms the bourgeoisie values by desperately mimicking their life style, rich habits and moving in the same circle but he finds it hard to maintain his social level due to his economic depression. He is very class conscious and keeps at bay those who are inferior to him socially and economically. Badshah takes pleasures in the distress of the affluent and also robs them. It is his way of contesting their established hegemony and control in the society. The injustice of capitalism and bourgeoisie push both Daru and Badshah in adopting the culture of violence and threat.

Though Hamid does not present some utopian vision for the solution of the economic and social problems encountered by the characters, he has identified some very practical options in the events of the story which can be useful if implemented seriously otherwise the society should get ready to harvest the rotten fruit of its disparities and discrepancies in the form of threats, violence, crime and loss of peace. Ever seeping oppression and exploitation of the destitute by the wealthy should be wiped out to maintain the balance and harmony in the society.

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