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# THE JOURNAL OF CENTRAL ASIAN STUDIES

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# Studying Nagas of Kashmir: An Inquiry into Place Names

*Afaq Aziz*

## **Abstract**

*In Kashmir, Whether the name is from an inhabited or uninhabited place, the story of its origin is sometimes recorded in history and sometimes history remains silent. If history does not reveal place names, it is necessary to turn to the languages. In the remote past, the names used to be one-syllable. In each region, new tribes and languages were introduced, influencing the place names. New settlements and their names came into existence. The tone of the old names changed, and the name became more than one word. Therefore, revolutionary changes took place in the toponymy. In this light, this paper attempts to analyze the place names in Kashmir related to the pre-historic Naga era, on which no detailed research has been done so far. The paper is based on an examination of ancient historical texts from Kashmir, like Nilamata Purana and Rajatarangini, and is supplemented with interviews conducted by the author of this paper during field surveys.*

*Keywords: Kashmir, Nagas, Place Names, Nilamata Purana, Language, Rajatarangini*

## **Introduction**

Everything that exists in the world has a name. Trees, land, fruits, vegetables, flowers, herbs, mountains, fields, forests, Karewas, or anything else is not without a name. Streets, roads, highways, streams, springs, rivers, seas, lakes, ponds, buildings, and places also have names. If things did not have names, the world would seem deaf and dumb. Due to this, not only would there be difficulties in managing the world, but the administration of the world would be in chaos at every level. That is why names have played a key role in running the system.

A name can be a single word, compound, or more than two words. A study of the names reveals that there is a long history behind them. In order to explore history of names, experts have brought into existence the field of knowledge called Onomastics, which has two parts, anthroponymic and toponomastic. Personal names and topographical names are studied in the anthroponymic. Scholars have branched out the said subjects in order to advance qualitative research. If the names of the mountains are to be studied, the Department of Oronymy has been identified for it. Hydronymy has been designated for the study of names of roads and lanes. The names of streams, lakes, ponds, rivers, and seas are studied in Hydronymy. In microtoponymy, uninhabited places and in

toponymy, inhabited places are studied. However, scholars are convinced that amongst all the branches of the Onomastics have an indispensable relationship. For this reason, their study is impossible without mutual support. George (1986) states: “Though such divisions are possible and useful up to a point, the different categories are usually studied together as they are inter-related and sometimes combined together” (p. 17).

The trans disciplinary research concept is neither too old nor too new. For the past six decades, this research has become the center of attention in general and for forty years in particular. Trans disciplinary research is most important in modern times. This method is considered standard and authentic in terms of several aspects of research. With this type of research, the researchers should be multilingual experts and have a reasonable knowledge of more than one subject. Then, the objectives for which trans disciplinary research is emphasized will be fulfilled. One of the great qualities of this research is that it explores all aspects of a problem. And its merits and demerits are distinguished. This paper attempts to analyze the place names in Kashmir related to the pre-historic Naga era, on which no detailed research has been done so far. The paper is based on an examination of ancient historical texts from Kashmir, like Nilamata Purana and Rajatarangini, and is supplemented with interviews conducted by the author of this paper during field surveys.

### **Importance of Place Names**

There is a long story behind the names, in which historical and semi-historical elements are preserved. Uncovering what is preserved in these names is a very complex and difficult task, particularly in old place names. Place names help to remove the stigma from old monuments, reveal the migration of tribes in ancient times, and indicate ancient industry, trade, and craftsmanship. Geographical names and names of agricultural crops, plants, and flowers are memory of place names. They also provide information about different religions, beliefs, and customs, even revealing the stories of ancestors and myths related to them. By taking a critical and analytical assessment, the hidden story behind the place names can be revealed quickly. Place names are the living evidence of ancient languages, which help us to know the past. For example, many elements of the ancient subcontinent languages like Austric, Mandari, Dravidian and Pisacha appear in the place names of most Aryan languages. The place names witness when and what kind of phonetic change has occurred in the languages.

### **Principles of Studying Place Names**

1. To explore the ancient form of the names and take their historical and linguistic evaluation.
2. Due to the non-availability of written evidence related to the names, we have to study the names of the tribes living in the respective settlements.

3. In the study of names, comparative literature and its analysis, which removes the mask from similar names, are very important. The sameness and basic relationship between the two languages is revealed. However, it is necessary to be familiar with the evolution of languages because there must be a change in the tone of the language from one place to another. It is also true that two people living in the same place pronounce the same word in different tones and manners.
4. The most important principle in the study is the speedy occurrence of linguistic shades in which words, consonants, vowels, prefixes, and suffixes play a significant role.
5. While studying the names, it is important to keep in mind the evolution of cultural history as well as the geographical situation of the area.

### **Linguistic Study of Place Names**

Linguistics is a tool of study that brings out information that is impossible to find in ancient monuments and history. There are certain rules for studying place names. However, linguistic principles are more important. A good knowledge of phonetics, sound changes in language, and grammatical structure is also necessary for the study. The insertion of new letters, obsolescence of some letters in place names, and addition of prefixes and suffixes make the study more productive and interesting.

### **Place Names Structure**

Place names have a lot of natural and cultural shades in which genetic, relational, material, physical, economic, religious, and political characteristics are particularly noteworthy. It is very difficult for the study to line up these diverse groups and evaluate them with a single research rod. That's why linguists have emphasized the study of phonetic principles, including structural aspects. Some experts give great importance to prefixes and suffixes in toponymy because they divide the analysis into two and sometimes three parts—for example, Nag+ar. Nag is the prefix, and 'ar' is the suffix, which means habitation or city. Simply, one part of the name describes the attributes and the other indicates the attribute location. This system of research and analysis has been named by experts as 'generics' and 'specifics'. The study of generic and specific elements is considered very useful. As far as generics are concerned, a good number of names are associated with it. If we talk about the specifics, the Encyclopedia of Britannica lists them as nine: descriptive, incidental, possessive, commemorative, euphemistic, manufactured, shift, and mistaken names, and the last one is designated as folk etymology (George, 1986).



A careful, in-depth study reveals that many place names have lost their meaning hundreds of years ago. Still, there are thousands of names, so an interesting story can be expected. As far as the topic at hand is concerned, it will focus only on research studies of place names. Attention will be given particularly to the origin of place names and their history. If it is possible to study history carefully, this writer will have to take the help of ancient sources and folk traditions. And sometimes, the old land records have to be analyzed. However, for ease of study, place names will in all cases be treated as generics and specifics.

## **Place Names in Kashmir**

Whether the name is from an inhabited or uninhabited place, the story of its origin is sometimes recorded in history and sometimes history remains silent. If history does not reveal it, it is necessary to turn to the languages. In the remote past, the names used to be one-syllable. In each region, new tribes and languages were introduced, influencing the place names. New settlements and their names came into existence. The tone of the old names changed and the name became more than one word. Therefore, revolutionary changes took place in the toponymy. In this background, no formal research has been done on Kashmir place names related to the pre-historic Nag era.

Generally, the population of Kashmir knows that the 'spring' in the Kashmiri language is called 'Nag'. However, most people do not know that the word Nag is associated with the name of a place. Lexicographers believe that a word has more than one meaning. Some words have dozens of meanings in many languages of the world. The surprising thing is that the word 'nag' has been enshrined as a spring in the hearts of Kashmiris for thousands of years. But they have no conscious or unconscious knowledge of the association of the word Nag with the place names. There are several reasons for this. One of the main reasons is that the material that has come out about the Nagas mentioned them semi-humans, imaginary humans, poisonous snakes, dragons, barbarians, faithless, non-believers, and so on. It is certain that Nag tribes, along with their families, lived near springs. So, a person of the Nag tribe and the spring had a close relationship. Wherever there was a spring, Nag tribes used to live near it. In the same way, when the population around water reservoirs, including springs, would have increased, the Nagas turned to those foothills, valleys, and Kerawas where there were no springs. Some of the Naga tribes would have moved to Kashmir's upper and forest regions to save their ancestral religion, Nagmat, even when Buddhism knocked on their doors in the third century B.C.

It is not a presumption but a reality that Nag tribes and the places have been amalgamated in such a way that their separate identification has become more difficult. But a careful critical analysis concluded that most of the springs where the Nag chieftains

used to be abode, known by the name of the head of one or the other Nag clan, elder, chief or minor and major Nag raja. Then, it can be said without any doubt that these Nagas made the early settlements of Kashmir. Viyogi (2002) wrote: “There are several towns in Kashmir having their names after some Nagas, such as Ver Nag, Anant Nag, Shesh Nag, etc.” (p. 19). These Nagas were considered among the chiefs of the Naga clan (The Nilamata Purana, 1973). The Nilamata Purana mentions some Nagas with particularity, which perhaps indicated that such Nagas were kings or chiefs of tribes living in small settlements. Bhatt (2008) asserts:

Mention of Naga Kings Nile, Vasuki as the most important ones indicate nagas hamlets being grouped under a king. The Nile and Vasuki must have been controlling larger groups of hamlets and their own hamlets must be fairly large to enable to exert influence over other hamlets (p. 226).

Exploring and studying the ancient literary sources of Kashmir, including Sanskrit, Persian and Kashmiri, reveals hundreds of names associated with many things as well as humans and places. However, here, first of all, the names mentioned in Nilamata Purana will be discussed. The Nile, himself, was a preacher of Nagmat. The study shows that Nile was the first great king of the Nagas of Kashmir in his timeline. He was as reliable, dignified and respected King as Karkotak Nag, the King of Nepal, was considered to be at that time (Viyogi, 2002). If these names are seen from the mirror of generics and specifics, then the word Nag is generic, and the Nile is specific. The generics are usually considerable elements and specifics are adjectival elements; hence, the structure of the languages justified this kind of prefix-suffix position.

There are more than five hundred names in the Nilamata Purana that do not seem right to suspect snakes. The proof of this is found in the discussion that took place between Janamejaya and Vaisampayana. Janamejaya asked Vaisampayana that ‘the instructions which King Gunanda of Kashmir heard from Brhadhasva and which he had to follow. Tell what the Raja said in response’ (The Nilamata Purana, 1973:231). Vaisampayana replied that the Raja of Kashmir told Brhadhasva, ‘Tell me the names of the Nagas who especially inhabit Kashmir. I want to hear and know about them’ (The Nilamata Purana, 1973:231). After this, Brhadhasva tells the Raja Gunanda the names of hundreds of Nagas who lived in Kashmir at that time. If the Nagas really would have been snakes, with whom did Janamejaya, Vaisampayana, Gunanda, and Brhadhasva talk? According to the famous Nag expert and well-known medical officer of the British Army, (Oldham, 1905): “Nagas were not savage and aboriginal tribes, but a civilized people who had cities and castles” (pp. 31-32). (Oldham, 1905) further opines: “not only were the Asuras or Nagas a civilized people, but were a maritime power” (p. 58).

Moreover, in the month of Kartik, 252 B.C, when a Buddhist monk, Madyantika, reached Kashmir to spread Buddhism, he thoroughly discussed the basic principles and

values of the Buddha faith with the Nag scholars, including the Nag king of Kashmir Aravāla. After much debate and discussion, eighty-four thousand Nagas accepted Buddhist doctrine (The Mahavamsa, 1912). As soon as the Kashmiris converted to Buddhism, Madinthika immediately urged them to abandon traditional dress and adopt a Buddhist dress code such as yellow robes (The Mahavamsa, 1912). Not only this but it is also recorded in the Mahavamsa that the entire Kashmir was glowing with the application of the yellow robes of the Buddhist dress code (The Mahavamsa, 1912).

If the Kashmiri Nagas who converted to Buddhism were snakes, in what language did Madyantika converse with them? It is also worth noting what the need to argue with animals was. The surprising thing is that even after applying the new dress code, if the first and ancient people of Kashmir, the Nagas, are recognized as snakes, in today's scientific age, it can only be interpreted as bankruptcy of intellect, mind, logic and reason. Anyhow, a good number of names are listed in the Nilamat Puran, but very few have been identified by scholars like Hargopal Kaul Khasta, Charles Bates, A. Cunningham, and M. A. Stein. Interestingly, the identified names are associated with Inhabited and uninhabited places (The Nilamata Purana, 1973: 38-41).

Keeping the readers' and scholars' interests in mind, there is room for further discussion on these entries, but some light shall be thrown on a few names that do not exist at the place of identification. Such names have either been destroyed or changed, or their identity has been mistaken. There is also the scope for clarification and increasing information on the existing names. For example, the 'Ailapatra-naga' is localized by the identifiers in Nowshar Srinagar, and the 'Akshpal-nag' is the modern Achwal-nag in Anantnag. Similarly, the 'Bahrupa' has been identified as Bëru in district Badgöm, and the 'Bhima-devi' as the Brain village in the east of Dal Lake Srinagar. Likewise, the 'Chakra-dhara-tertha' was marked as the present-day 'Tsukdar/Sakdhar Veder' in Yach-brour tehsil of Anantnag and the name Devasara' with the town of Devsar in Kulgöm district. In addition, the present 'Kothir' village of Kothār area in Anantnag is the changing shape of 'Kapates-vara'. Equally, the Nārāyana-sthāna has been identified with the 'Narastān' village of Tral tehsil in district Pùlvöm, while the 'Panchasta' was related to the present 'Pānzath' of Kulgöm district. By the same token, the term 'Pöskara' was recognized with the 'Pöshkar' village in Khäg tehsil of district Badgöm and the 'Sudora-nag' was confessed with the habitation of 'Sadrbal' near Hazratbal Srinagar.

The first name on the list is 'Ailapatr-nag'. This name has been identified by M. A. Stein as being close to Vitsar-nag Srinagar (The Nilamata Purana, 1973: 38). However, during my field survey and interaction with older people on September 13, 2022, no Ailapatr-nag was found at Vitsar-nag or in its neighborhood. Instead of Ailapatr-nag, there is Dod-pokher-nag in Puj-Mohall, Nowsher, Srinagar, as reported by the 80-year-old Ab. Gani Ganaye. On October 25, 2022, I visited the area again and met some elderly locals at

Sofi Mohall, Nowsher. Among them Ab. Aziz Sofi said:

*“In my childhood, there were 21 springs at Nowsher. A canal twenty-five feet wide used to irrigate the paddy fields came from Ganderbal via Nagbal, Pāndach, Ahmednagar and entered Khushāl-sar near Pūj Mohll of Nowsher Payën—the water of the twenty-one springs used to enter into this stream. Due to the negligence of the government, people filled the springs and canal with soil, stones, and mud and erected various types of constructions on them, including residential houses. Thus, all the other springs except Vitsār-nāg disappeared. You are seeing that the Vitsār-nāg also is in very bad condition”.*

Sofi further remembered a few names of the disappeared springs like ‘Viri-wār Nag’, ‘Chitār Nag’, ‘Seki Nag’, ‘Sone Pokher’, ‘Brane Pokher’ and ‘Wal Köt Nag’. Nisar Ahmad Sofi, a resident of same area, also supported the view on the same day. According to a prominent writer A. A. Farhad, the canal that passed through Vitsār-nag Nowsher was known as ‘Pātshah Kól’.

Most probably among those twenty-springs, the Ailapathir-nag would have also been destroyed by the accidents of times. However, one ‘Ailapatr-nag’ is situated on the Afarvath hill of the famous tourist destination Gulmarg. The historian Hassan Shah Khuihām has identified the Ailapathr-nag at the upper reaches of Gulmarg (Tarikeh Hassan, 2002), while as the author of 'Beautiful Kashmir' says that ‘from Gulmarg it is a long day march to Alipathir’. The famous Kashmiri poet Mehjoor mentioned the Ailapathr in this verse:

*Gulmargi Aelpathray Nile-nag Gog-ji pathray*

*Makhmal bahār vathrāy Gulshan watan chu sonui* (Kuliyat-e-Mahjoor, 1982: 245).

(Trans: Gulmarg, Aelpathr, Nile Nāg and Gogji Pathar will lay velvet as soon as spring begins. When the flower buds begin to open, the same voice echoes everywhere that this homeland of flowers is ours).

The Aelapathr-nag is 15 Km from Gulmarg. This triangular spring of blue water is about 16,000 feet above sea level. The Nag remains frozen until the month of Hār (June) begins. This Nag is the source of many large Nallas, the most famous of which is Nalla Nengli, which travels through forests, slopes, Karewas, plains and settlements and finally joins the ‘Veyath’ near Sopore. In this regard Tarikh-I-Hassan (1998:170) mentions:

“The heart-pleasing Aelapatr-nag is situated on the Afarvath mountain. It has three branches in the south of Gulmarg. One goes to Poonch, which is called "Batāri". The other goes to Būnyār, which is known as "Haft Khai" and the third one is "Nengli", which flows from Gulmarg, irrigates the then Parganah Króhún and enters the Volar Lake near Tāzū village Sopore”.

It is also known from the Epics and Puranas that during the reign of the Nagas, the powerful Nag chiefs used to guard the four sides of the country of Kashmir. Bindu-sar was in the east, Srimadak was in the south, Uttarman-sar was in the north, and, according to

Vogel (1926), the Aelapatr-nag was the guardian of the west side.

There was a shrine of Ailapatr-nag at Takshila (present area of Rawalpindi), where the crowd often prayed for rain (Tsiang, 1906). It is retrieved from Buddhist folk stories that the Ailapatr-nag converted to Buddhism and took multiple births (Beal, 1875). This means that the Ailapatr-nag was alive when Buddhism was widespread in the subcontinent. The said Nag was also known by other names like Erapata and Airavata. Apart from those attributes, it was also a belief that he was a well-known Nag deity. It too is possible that as the Nag priest or a spiritual figure, Ailapatr-nag might have visited those places where the names of the places are similar to his name, including the Arpal of Tral Pùlvöm and the Aripanthan of Bëru Badgöm. The Arpal Nage is mentioned in a folk song in the following words:

*Āérpal kay nag radü Shahzādo prarān chas*  
*Düri vuchmakh nag radu Trësh cheān cham ābi-hayāt*  
*Chy-nai gāye-so bay-tābo Shahzādo praran chas*

(Trans: 'O spring of Arpal, the Prince is waiting, I see from afar that your water is like "Ābi-Hayāt" for me, I am eager to drink it').

It is also said that Erapatha was a Nag king of the Ahiraja-Kulani tribes (Panda, 1970). However, it is not known over which region of the subcontinent this king ruled. A superficial observation suggests that there is much similarity between the names 'Arpal' and 'Erapatha'. It is possible that the 'Arpal' settlement was settled by 'Arapath' Raja. However, it would be premature to be confident about this. It is about the difference between 'L' and 'Th' in these names, which is clear from historical observation that such mutual changes keep happening in social and historical linguistics.

When we talk about 'Akshipal-nag', whoever has written about this place, all of them unambiguously agreed that he was a king who founded Akshavāl city, which Francois Bernier, G.T. Vigne, Hargupal Kaul Khasta, Hassan Khuihami, Mohammad-uddin Fouq and others have identified as Achval or Achbal city in district Anantnag. Furthermore, in other names identified by Stein, there is no dispute to date.

Now an attempt will be made to identify some important names from the list of Nialmata Purana which have not been touched to date, including Anantnaga, Bhava, Bindu, Cikura, Chitura, Danaev, Dadhivhana, Ghasa, Gosa, Hari, Hara, Habaka, Haluas, Helyara, Indra, Khaga, Kheda, Khedima, Khadanyar, Kuhara, Kulusa, Lolabha, Malyavana, Naghamsara, Picchala, Pradyumna, Vira, Vata, Vihangama etc. In the first opportunity, the word Ananta will be discussed.

## **Anantnag**

Besides the prominent Anantnag of south Kashmir, one more spring named Anantnag emerges near a place called 'Hāpath Zel', which is located in the forest 7

kilometres away from the village of Khul (Gulshanpur) of Tral tehsil. In ancient times, a mill used to grind flour and other life items with the waters of said Nag. But the traces of the mill have completely disappeared. At present, there has been a significant reduction in water drainage. Among the famous springs of Tral are Gur Nag, Naristan, Kachmul Nag, Kausar Bal, Goph Bal, Konji Bal, Dil Nag, and Ponzi Nag, which are also worth mentioning.

## **Bhava**

From the study of ancient religious literature, 'Bhava' is derived from the word 'Bhavayanti'. This word has been used to mean gods, especially Rudra, Shiva, King, son of Kashpa, etc. Bhava was a type of temple known as 'Prasada', whose structural shape was round and rectangular. These temples were 'Prasadas' of God and dwelling places of God. In Mahabharat, Bhava is a word used for human beings and places. Scholars and critics believe that the word 'Bhū' is an abbreviated version of Bhava, which is mentioned in most Hindu, Buddhist and Jain literature. Bhava was also the name of a clan of Nagas who ruled parts of India during the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D (Viyogi, 2002). According to the Nilamata Purana, "a Nag named Bhav lived in Kashmir too" (The Nilamata Purana, 1973: 237). The oral history of Kashmir is evident that the word Bhū rather 'Bov' was used till the recent past throughout the valley. Basically, 'Bov' was the name of a place situated near the then Qasba Yār on the way from Pulwöm to Keller-Mtspur via Shajimarg. A. K. Naz, a Kashmiri Pandit resident of 'Bov', who is living in exile in Jammu, says:

Bov consisted of four mohallas, Mallapur, Bongām, Pethgām, and Batpur. There is also a spring of 'Shiv-shēt' in Mohalla Batpur. The people of Dar, Wani, Drabu, Mir and Bhat caste live here. The Zaldār, 'Haslāl-i-Bov' of the Dogra period, was the most famous and influential person of the area. It is unknown when the name of 'Bov' was changed to Rājpur. Perhaps much time has not passed about the name change because above fifty years old people still call the village Bov.

From this discussion, it can be inferred that this settlement, known as Rajpur today, would have been inhabited by a Nag named 'Bhava' or 'Bov'. The said nag could be either a chief of a Nag clan, an elder or a Kutta Raja of the area.

## **Bindu**

In the revenue records, Kokarnag's real name is Bindu-Zalingöm. Earlier, the distance between the village (Bindu-Zalingöm) and the spot spring was not more than one kilometer. But now, the area's population has spread to the peripheries of spring. This tourist place consists of four hundred kanals of land, of which three hundred and seventy-one kanals are devoted to trotting farms and one hundred and nine kanals are under the



gardens. Bindu was the name of a Nag in the Nilamata Purana. He may be the same person who built a Bindu settlement.

### **Cikura**

The name 'Cikura' recorded in the Nilamata Purana was originally 'Cikur', which is not only listed as an important name in the Epics and Puranas but also the name of a Nag king (Mani, 2015). In addition to this, 'Cikura' has also been used as the name of a settlement. There is one more form of 'Chikur' prevalent in Sanskrit and Pali as well, which most probably was a derivation of the Prakrit era. Regarding Kashmir and the Kashmiri languaged, 'Cikur' is written as 'Tsokur' and its accent is also the same. If we talk about the spotting of 'Tsokur', it is difficult to identify as there are many settlements named after it. For example, Tsokur (Chakora) Pulwöm, and Tsokur (Chakora) Patan Varmul. But it is estimated that these settlements must have been settled by the Cikura Nag.

### **Chitura**

A small village called 'Tsitur' is one and a half km away from the ancient settlement of Godsoth in the south of Damodar Veder in central Kashmir. Elderly people speak the village's name as 'Tsitud' and the younger generation as 'Tsitur'. It is quite possible that this is the name of a Nag 'Citra' mentioned in Nilamaat Purana, who would have populated the place. The word 'Tsitur' is probably derived from 'Citra' of Nilamata Purana.

### **Danaev**

Danaev is a very old village in Kolgöm district, which is similar to the word 'Dānava' of Nilamata Purana. It will not be wrong to say that 'Danaev' is derived from the word 'Dānava'. This means that the village must have been settled long back by the Dānava Nag in his name.

### **Dadhivāhana**

When we accept the theory of historical linguistics that the consonant 'D' changed into 'R' through the ages, then it is certain that the name of Nag Dadhivāhana mentioned in Nilamata Purana would have been changed into the 'Darhivāhana'. Subsequently, the name might have been 'Daravana' and then 'Darvan'. A village of this name is situated 15 km away from Tsār (Chrar-i-Sharief). There are eight hundred householders and the village's population is nearly eight thousand. Today, the area is famous by the name Darvan-nowgām.

## **Ghasa**

A village named 'Ghòs' is located on the Neu-Pakharpur road in Pulwöm district. To the west of this village is a table-land called 'Ghòs-veder' in ancient writings. The ancient Shahrah-e-Namak (or later Mughal road) passes through the center of this village, which goes towards the upper side of the west and reaches Hayatpur, Wahtor, Kralpur, Chānpur, Rāmbag and finally to Lal Chowk, Srinagar. History shows that between 'Ghòs' and Hayatpur Veder, many battles were fought among the soldiers of the two sides over the struggle for power in the pre and post-Islamic period. The famous historian Shrivar has written the name of this village as Gashika, which most probably has been derived from the name 'Ghasa' of Nilamata Purana (The Nilamata Purana, 1973: 234). One more village named Ghòs is in the Lolab area of Handvör (Kapvör). Besides this, there is another village named 'Ghòs' near Rishpur in Dòr-Shahabad (Anantnag) on the bank of Sāndran river. But it is very difficult to say that in the above-mentioned villages which one was founded by the 'Ghasu' (or Ghòs Nag) of Nilamata Purana. However, taking the topography and the reign of the early Nag tribes into account, it is estimated that the village located in Dòr-Shahabad may have been settled by the Ghasu or 'Ghòs Nag', and definitely the 'Ghòs' is an altered form of Ghasu word.

## **Gosa**

There is one more habitation, namely 'Gös', which is situated on the Tailbal-Khimar road in the Srinagar district. The name closely resembles the name of a Nag 'Gosa' mentioned in Nilamata Purana.

## **Hari**

Hari, an ancient village, is ten km from tehsil headquarters Vòntipür in Pulwöm district. From the study of history, observations, estimations and analysis, it is inferred that the village 'Hari' must have been settled by a chieftain of the Nag tribe, whose name was 'Hari-nag'. There also was a spring named 'Hari-nag' in this settlement. Over time, people polluted the spring and built structures over it. There is a village called Pērgöm in the neighborhood of 'Hari'. Its population spread to 'Hari', and the village's name became 'Hari Pērgöm' (Raina & Sadhu, 2000). Today, the population of the village is about five thousand.

## **Hara**

Historical linguistics shows that 'R' and 'L' are interchangeable in words, especially in nouns. This changing environment of consonants could not fail to influence the name 'Hara' of Nilamata Purana as well. When the 'R' consonant changed to 'L', it gave rise to a new word 'Hala', which subsequently has taken the form of the word 'Häll'



in Kashmiri language. A survey of place names in Kashmir reveals that a village named 'Häll' is located in Pulwöm district. It is believed that this village would have been settled by 'Hara' Nag (The Nilamata Purana, 1973: 239).

### **Habaka**

The name of a famous Nag Habka has been mentioned in the Nilamata Purana, who mostly probably populated a place and named it after him. When the name came into writing in the 6th century A.D., the author of the Nilamata Purana wrote it as 'Habka' according to the spelling and pronunciation of the Sanskrit language. There are two villages of this name in Kashmir. One is 5 km away from tehsil Patan (Varmul), which comprises two words 'Habak' and 'Tango' (Habaka Tango). The second one is located near Nasëm Bāgh at a distance of one kilometer from Hazratbal (Srinagar). According to my speculative opinion, the village that prominent Nag had established after his name is the 'Habak', next to Nasëm Bāgh Srinagar. The name of the village 'Habak' (Nasëm Bāgh) was changed to Rognāthpur during the Dogra period (Khastah, 1986), but this name did not last long. In the past, there were many traditional paddy mills and silk manufacturing centers in 'Habak'.

### **Halusa**

In contemporary official records, the name of a village is recorded as 'Alusa' and sometimes as 'Aalusa'. The analysis shows that both these word forms are derived from the 'Halusa' mentioned in the Nilamata Purana. The study and observation have revealed that the initial letters 'A' and 'H' of the Sanskrit words are interchanged, which is not often but sometimes happens in historical linguistics. Following this principle, perhaps the word 'Halusa' has taken the form of 'Alusa' or 'Aalusa'. This type of change is also demonstrated by the place name 'Ahirbal', known as 'Haribal' until about a century and a half ago (Neve, 1913). However, in Kashmiri society and language, it is customary to say and speak neither 'Aalusa' nor 'Alusa' but 'Ölus', which is in accordance with the Kashmiri system of phonetics and accent.

Ölus is an ancient village which is 8 km away from the district headquarters, Bandpur. This village, consisting of a dozen mohallas, is between Bandpur and Sopur. A part of the population of Ölus lives in the foothills of the NagMarg mountain in the north-west and the other part on the banks of Wolur Lake. Long ago, an incidental excavation of Nag Marg slopes yielded huge vessels that proved the historical and archaeological importance of the village. A road from Ölus passes through Manglu-Rāmpur, joins the Lölāb Valley, crosses the forests and goes to the Nēlam Valley and Sharda Pēth. The population of Ölus is around fifteen thousand. A large number of Ganaye (caste) population lives here, who are engaged in the business of making Kānger (Fire Pot) apart

from zamindari. In 1947, some Pandit families lived here. But due to tribal invasion, they migrated from Ölus and settled in Kôlus Bandpur. There was a large spring in Ölus, which was long ago obliterated due to the people's negligence.

## **Hëlyār**

History shows that most of the world's civilizations emerged on the banks of rivers and seas. The Nilamata Purana, Rajatarangani, Mahatmehiyas and other sources show that the ancient places of worship in Kashmir were built on the banks of different water bodies. The traces of this are still present near water sources and on the banks of Veyath from Vërnag to Uri in Kashmir. Apart from the material evidence, the names of worship places that existed on the river (Veyath) bank speak a lot about their remote past, e.g. the place names like 'Ganpat-yār', 'Khar-yār', etc. In both places, the suffix of the name is 'yār'. Historical linguists, Prakrit scholars and Apbhransh analysts believe that the word 'yār' is originally derived from 'Vihara'. Prof. K N Pandita, a world-renowned scholar and historian of Kashmir, writes: 'the place-name suffix 'yaar' or 'haar' is actually the corrupted abbreviation of Sanskrit vihar' (Khastah, 1986: 158).

Of course, over time, 'Vihara' took the form of the words 'Vihār', 'hār' and then 'yār'. All these words are associated with some place names to date. Then there came a time when another word, 'Bal', was added with 'Yār'. It is prevalent in the whole Kashmir, especially in areas where people live on the banks of streams and river 'Veyath'. Regarding the suffix 'Yār', it is important to mention that there are some holy tirthas of Kashmiri Pandits at these places, which are uniformly known by the same names (i.e. place and tirtha). C. L. Kaul put it this way: 'the shrines on the right bank are Shurahyar, Ganpatyar, Mallayar, Kharyar, Sapruyar, Soomyar, Madanyar, Sheshyar, Qaziyar, Kutwalyar, Razdanyar and Batayar and those on the left bank are Purshyar, Drabiyar and Sehyar' (Stein, 1979: 74).

As far as 'Shurahyār' tirth is concerned, it is situated opposite to then GB Pant Hospital, Guzarwān Mohall, Sonwār Bāgh, Srinagar. 'Ganpat-yār' is a Shiva temple in Habkadal. This temple was built by Raja Sindhimat in the 5th-century AD (Stein, 1979). Taking into account the antiquity of the temple, it was rebuilt with great splendor by the minister Pannu in 1854 during the Dogra Raj. A temple called 'Malyār' is located very close to the Ganpat-yār temple. Similarly, Söm-tirth is located on the right bank of Veyath at a place called 'Söm-yar' or anciently 'Söm-vihar' in Chtsbal (Srinagar). There is an ancient vihār 'Pursh' or present-day 'Pursh-yar' on the banks of Veyath in Chtsbal itself, where there is a tirth of the same name. According to limited field surveys and information collected from other sources, there are dozens of place names with the suffix 'Yār' in Kashmir, which includes Shäll-yār, Safri-yār, Lokhri-yār, Wani-yār, Naid-yār, Kral-yār, Moti-yār, Gasi-yār, Malik-yār, Dalhassan-yār, Zeath-yar (Mata Zeashta), Khan-yār, Seh-

yār (Jamālot, Ailkadal), Gad Yār (Zain-Kadal), Abi-yār (near Khoshhāl-sar Zadibal) and Badyar in Srinagar and in its peripheries. Similarly, there are other place names with the suffix ‘yār’ in different areas of Kashmir, on which there is scope for separate discussion, like Kha-yār (Pahalgām), Ha-yār, and Dupt-yār (Yechbeyör), Lāri-yār (Tral Pulvöml), Rai-yār Dodhpathar (Badgöm), Suras-yār Tsodur (Central Kashmir), Khe-yār (Bandpur), Bon-yār (Kapwöl), Kham-yār, Khādan-yār and Zògyār (Varmul).

### **Hocara**

‘Hocara’ is the name of a Nag in Verse 950 of Nilamata Purana. A settlement similar to this name is known as ‘Hokur’. This township is situated 11 km away from Anantnag on Kokarnag road. This oldest village is attached to tehsil Shahabad Dür. The literacy rate of this village is 88%. Larikpur, Kāba Marg, Pithbug, Bon Dayalgam and Kothar villages are in its neighbourhood. There is a close resemblance between ‘Hocara’ of the Nilamata Purana and ‘Hokur’, a settlement on the Anantnag-Kokarnag route. The Hocara Nag would have undoubtedly inhabited this town.

### **Indra**

‘Inder’ is a village derived from ‘Indra’ situated about one kilometer from the right bank of Nala Römash flowing in Pulwöm district. The village is about two and a half miles from Muran Chowk of Pulwöm. There is also a spring in the village, whose water is used for drinking. In the village is a pilgrimage of the great Sufi and poet of the Kashmiri language, Swach Krāl, where a festival is held annually. The village's name suggests that it was inhabited by the Nag Indra, who is mentioned in the Nilamata Purana. The sociolinguistics of Kashmir proved that most people speak the word ‘Inder’ as ‘Yander’. For example, ‘Inder’ near Pulvöm is called ‘Yander’. In Kangan tehsil of Ganderbal District, there is a village and forest known as ‘Indervan’. In the back of the same forest, the beautiful ‘Mohand Marg’ is located, where M. A. Stein, the translator of Rajtarangani, spent years together. It was the place where Stein heard the stories from Hatam and penned them down, entitled the Hatam tales.

### **Kanāra**

‘Kanāra’ occurs as a name in Nilamata Purana. A Raja of this name is mentioned in Pandit Kalhan’s Rajtarangani, with whom some European scholars have associated a settlement called ‘Kanaragram’ in Central Kashmir's Tsodur tehsil. However, M. A. Stein did not consider this opinion because Kalhan himself associated this settlement with a Raja named ‘Narpur’ in Shloka 244 and ‘Kanarpur’ in Shloka 274 of Tarang first. Both these names refer to the same settlement. Because in Rajtarangani, the said king is remembered by both names. Scholars like Stein have identified the city (basti) of Raja

‘Kanar’ or Raja ‘Nar’ at the Chakdar Veder of Yajbiyur, which was burnt in the thorn conflict in the past (Stein, 1979). However, the identification of the village that was settled by Kanar Nag is very difficult, but the mental axis of the research elements is still focused on the village called ‘Kāner’ located in Tsodur tehsil. The place is situated at a distance of about 9 km from its tehsil headquarters.

### **Khaga**

Khāg is situated at the foothills of Tòs Mádān, 35 km north-west of Srinagar. Khāg was given the status of tehsil in 2005, which includes 48 villages. This town has many springs, among which Ganj-nag and Nārayan-nag are famous. Apart from drinking water from both springs, they irrigate the fields. In upper Tòs Mádān of Khāg, there was the fort known as ‘Lal Khan Gadi’. Lal Khan was the protector of the north-western border crossings of Kashmir during the Afghan rule. There are ruins of Lal Khan Gadi near Drang village in the foothills of Tòs Mádān. In ancient times, Khagendar was a king of Kashmir. It is reported that he had established the two Agrharas named Khāgi and Khonamusa (Stein, 1979). The history also mentioned that another Raja Gopadtya of Kashmir built an Agrhara called Khāgikā. Of course, there is a similarity between the Khāgi of Khagendar and Khāgika of Gopadtya. On this basis, M. A. Stein has identified Khāgi and Khāgika with the present Khāg.

Interestingly, ‘Khaga’ in the Nilamata Purana is the name of a Nag, who originally was the name of either the chief of the Nag tribe or a dignified figure of the Nag population. It is quite possible that the last consonant ‘a’ of ‘Khagā’ is not part of the original word. The consonant ‘a’ would have been added to the word when the Nilamata Purana was written down some fourteen hundred years ago. Indeed, the original word was not ‘Khagā’ but ‘Khāg’, which was probably used during the Nag era of Kashmir. However, the Nilamata Purana was written in the 6th century A.D. in Sanskrit, indicating that teaching and written works were done in the same language then. Therefore, when the common familiar words were written in Sanskrit, they were necessarily recorded according to Vedic Sanskrit linguistic norms and tone.

### **Kheda**

It is difficult to say what the origin of the word Kheda is. Scholars have linked this word to Sanskrit and Pali language. According to the meaning attached to this word, a place surrounded by rivers and mountains, a settlement, or a small village is called Kheda. As mentioned earlier, each word’s suffix ‘a’ or ‘ā’ is related to the Sanskrit and Pali sound and spelling systems. It is quite possible that the Kashmiri word ‘Khed’ was suffixed according to the same linguistic system. According to the field survey, the village ‘Khred’ is located on a hillock in Tsodur tehsil of central Kashmir, some 12 km below the historical

site of Nile-nag. In the west, the village is surrounded by small mountain offshoots of Pirpantāsā. In the northern foothills of this village, the famous Nala ‘Chtskol’ (Dùd Ganga), and in the southern foothills, the Nala ‘Apzaër’ flows. Now, let’s talk about the word ‘Khred’ and how it came into being. Basically, the addition or dropping of syllables from words is an ancient principle of historical linguistics. By the addition of ‘r’ to the word ‘Khed’ of the same rule, ‘Khred’ came into existence. Such changes in historical linguistics started during the Prakrit period.

### **Khedima**

According to Nilamata Purana, a famous Nag named ‘Khedima’ lived in ancient Kashmir. The name consists of the letters K+h+e+d+i+m+a. Over time, the letter ‘D’ of ‘Khidema’ became ‘R’, and a new word, ‘Kherima’, came into existence. Another change occurred in linguistic history when the word ‘Kherima’ dropped the letters ‘e’ and ‘a’, from which a new word, ‘Khiram’, came into existence. It can be believed that this Khiram may be the settlement that Khedima Nag settled in his name. This historic village is located at a distance of six kilometers from the tehsil headquarters, Srigofvõr (Anantnag). If you have to come from Yajbeyor (Anantnag), then it is a sixteen-kilometer journey and ten km from Sangam bridge via the Mirhõm route.

### **Khadanyar**

According to Hargopal Khasta, ‘Khādanā’, one of the queens of Raja Meghavāna, ascended the throne in 91 Bikrami (34 C.E.) (Kaul, 2022), and built a Buddhist temple called ‘Khādanāvihāra’ in her name. Pandit Kalhan mentions the name of this place as ‘Khadna Vihara,’ and in Vitastāmāhatymya, its name is ‘Khadnahara’, which has been identified as ‘Khadanyar’ situated on the left bank of Veyth in Varmul district.

### **Kuhara**

In ancient Kashmir, a Nag named Kuhara lived, who perhaps had built a town named after him. From the similarity of the name, it can be inferred that Nag’s abode might have been the ‘Khore’ village located in Patan tehsil of Varmul district. It is also assumed that the ancient word ‘Kuhara’ has given rise to the village name Khòr. However, some 44 years ago, Khor was named ‘Sher-abad’ after the most stalwart leader and architect of modern Jammu and Kashmir, Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah.

### **Kulusa**

A small village commonly known as Kõlus in Kashmiri and Kalusa in Nilamata Purana is about one kilometer away from Bandpur. The Muslim and Kashmiri Pandit

population of the village is around five hundred. When the gun was introduced in 1990, Kashmiri Pandits had to leave their native village (Kōlus). However, some Pandit families were unwilling to leave their village and were living a peaceful life with their Muslim neighbors as before. There were five springs in Kōlus, four of which were filled and constructions were erected on them. Now, only one spring survived, adjacent to which an ancient Sharda temple has been built. According to the Nilamata Purana, Kulusa was the name of a Nag who might be the founder of Kulusa village.

### **Lolabha**

In the north of Kashmir, there is a beautiful valley 16 km long, 5 km wide, and 6 thousand feet above sea level in the district of Kapvör, which has been the abode of humans since ancient times. Both the valley and the settlement are known as Lolab. Some scholars have derived the word Lolab from words like Lolora, Lava, Lolava, and Lavlaha. It is also suggested that Lolab was settled by Raja Lava (Stein, 1979). But the word or noun ‘Lolabha’ mentioned in the Nilamata Purana was either overlooked or ignored as a myth or baseless view. If Lolab can be derived from the words Lolora, Lolava and Lavlaha or similarly Raja Lava was considered to be the settler of the said settlement, then what is wrong in deriving the ‘Lölāb’ word from ‘Lolabha’ of Nilamata Purana which is 100% closer to the above words and is also correct. The ‘Lolabha’ was originally the name of a Nag who would have settled the said settlement during the reign of the Nagas. There are also many ancient springs in Lölāb Valley, whose water is crystal clear and bright like a mirror. Among them, Lav-nag and Gour-nag are worth mentioning. Lal Kol also passes through the Lölāb Valley, which irrigates the fields. Historical places like Satbaran and Kalaròs Cave are worth visiting here. Surrounded by dense forests, the Nag Marg is a charming and extremely beautiful place for camping. Presently, Lölāb, 9 km from Kapvör, has a sub-district status.

### **Malyavana**

The name Malyavana is identified from the present village ‘Mālvan’ of Kolgōm tehsil. No doubt the village name ‘Mālvan’ is a derivation of the ‘Malyavana’ word mentioned in Nilamata Purana. Basically, ‘Malyavana’ was the name of a Nag in the pre-Buddha era of Kashmir, who probably had founded the ‘Malyavana’ habitation at present Malvan. The village is 10 km from its tehsil headquarters, surrounded by Qaimuh, Qāzgund, Devsar, and Kolgōm.

### **Nāghamsār**

‘Nāghamsār’ or Nāgùm is a historical place situated on the southwest of Srinagar-Tsrrar road. It is 18 km away from the summer capital of Jammu-Kashmir. Apparently,



Nāgùm is a compound word, Nāg+gùm. Nāg is the name of a tribe and the meaning of gùm is to be lost or in other words, the Nāg people disappeared. From a superficial and semantic point of view, this meaning seems absolutely correct. But among the hundreds of names listed in the Nilamata Purana, the word ‘Nāghamsār’ has a close resemblance with Nāgùm, or there is an indication of similarity in texture or Nāghamsār smells of Nāgùm. A careful study of ancient and modern history suggests that Nāghamsār might have been the head of the Nag tribe, who probably laid the foundation of Nāghùm and its upper settlements. Perhaps, this historical-linguistic environment strongly influenced Nāghamsār and this word would have been split into two parts ‘Nāgham’ and ‘Sār’. As time went by, the consonants and vowels of words should have started changing, and the differences in accents prevailed. Due to this, words started to become obsolete, and new words started to appear. In this way, two separate settlements, Nāgham and Sār (Nāgham+Sār), would have come into being. Gradually, Nāgham changed to Nagām, and later in, Nāgùm and Sār to Tsar (Charar).

In pre-historic times, there were two places in Nāgum area occupied by the Nag tribe. One lived between the villages of Buzgù and Gogji Pather, known as Nile Nag, and the residence of the other was right next to Nāgum, which is famous nowadays as Chhāne Nile Nag. According to Hasan Shah Khuyham, there was another Nile-nag on Nāgùm Veder, which dried up during 1878 AD. The author of this paper has heard from the elders of Nāgum since childhood that they heard from their ancestors that a huge gathering of the Nag people in ancient times was held in Nāgum every year, where they used to discuss their problems.

In Nāgum, a place called Tākiya, was inhabited only by a few families fifty years ago. This small settlement was adjacent to a vast field above the Nāgum. Adventurers and soldiers camped in this field and proceeded according to their engagements and programs. Common travelers breathed a sigh of relief in this field, too. On the occasion of relief from famine and the need for rain, all the people from central Kashmir in general and from the area around Nāgum in particular used to gather and pray in this field first, and then in the form of a grand gathering, they would go to Tsār where those learned men used to pray in the courtyard of Alamdar-i- Kashmir for relief from troubles. Elders of the area and especially the Bhagat families of Wahtór village played a key role in people’s gatherings by playing their musical instruments. According to folk traditions and oral accounts, Nāgùm had great historical significance from the rule of Nag nation till date. There has been no decline in the historical importance of Nāgùm during the Buddha, Brhamana, and Shivit period. The clear proof of this is dozens of cultural artifacts found during accidental excavations on the Nāgùm Veder and in its peripheries.

The critical review of history shows that on the night between 5th and 6th June 1320 A.D., a Ladakhi refugee, Renchan, took control of the government as soon as he

killed Rawan Tsander (Chandra), the army chief of Kashmir. He adopted the faith of Abdur Rahman Bulbul and became a Muslim. Then, he changed his name from Renchan to Sadr-u-din. He built a monastery for Bulbul Shah on the right bank of the Veyath along with a langar-khana, commonly known as Bulbul-Langar, where common people used to get acquainted with Islamic teachings. Renchan dedicated a few villages in Pargana Nāgùm to bear the cost of the langar (Fauq, 2003). The income that came from the moveable and immovable property of these villages was used to meet the needs of the Bulbul-Langar located in Aali Kadal Srinagar. These villages remained under the custody of said langar until the end of the Mughal era. Similarly, during the time of Sikandar Shah, Syed Muhammad Ali Balkhi made Kashmir his homeland and settled in Pakharpur, and again, some villages of Pargana Nāgùm were dedicated to his expenses.

After the death of Zain-ul-Abidin alias Badshah, his son Haji Khan alias Hyder Shah ascended the throne of Kashmir in 1531 Bikrami. He immediately appointed his brother Bahram Khan (Shah) as his minister and gave him Pargana Nagum as a fief. In 1544 Bikrami, when Muhammad Shah, the son of Hyder Shah's son Hasan Shah, ascended the throne, the family struggle for power, which had subsided to some extent during the reign of Badshahi, resurfaced. A great battle of which also happened in Nāghum Veder. Hundreds of lives were lost in this battle. Even during the reign of Sikandar Shah, Nāgùm fort became a base for bloodshed. Similarly, some of the zamindars of Nāgùm, especially Bahram and Ahmad of the Nayak family, supported Yakub chak in the fight against the Mughals. In the Afghan era, when Amir Khan Jawan Sher was the governor of Kashmir, a warrior named Lal Khan raised a revolt at Nāgùm but was defeated by the government warrior Mir Fazil Kant. Nowadays, Nagam has emerged as an important town with a dense population and a thriving market.

If all the names mentioned in Nilamata Purana are examined and judged according to the principles of historical linguistics, the dust of thousands of years will be cleared away. There will be hope for these names to get freedom from the clutches of mythology and will reveal the original form of these names. However, due to the length of the chapter, the discussion was confined to some more names and their current geographical identification only. For example:

The word 'Patna' mentioned in Nilamata Puran can be identified from 'Patan', the present town of Varmul district, while the word 'Picchala' would have given rise to 'Pichal', a village near Malangpur in district Pulwöm. The word 'Pichal' is commonly pronounced as 'Pitshal' in Kashmiri language. Similarly, the word 'Sömbûr' may be a derived form of 'Sambhara'. The word 'Sambhara' has been identified as the village 'Sömbûr' situated on Srinagar-Pulwöm highway in Pompur. The another word 'Satura' can be identified from 'Sotur', a well-known village of the Tral area where the prominent sufi poet late Rajab Hamid had its residence. Without going into their details, the words,



especially the 'Uttaripasha', 'Vihanagama' and 'Vira' mentioned in the Nilamata Purana can be identified respectively as 'Verpash' (village in Ganderbal district), a corrupt form of 'Uttaripasha', and 'Vohangām' in Bandpur district, which could be the derivation of 'Vihanagama'. Lastly, the word 'Vir' is mentioned in verse 955 of Nilamata Purana as a name of Nag. The complete word is 'Vira-nag', which has close resemblance with 'Verinag' of Anantnag district. According to the Kashmiri accent, common people pronounced the name as 'Ver-nag'. It was the abode of Nile Nag and the earliest capital or Rajdhani of Kashmir.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has analyzed the place names in Kashmir related to the pre-historic Naga era. The critical examination of the ancient historical texts from Kashmir, like Nilamata Purana and Rajatarangini, and the interviews conducted by the author of this paper during field surveys have suggested that the Naga tribes were the ancient inhabitants of ancient Kashmir who had settled cities and villages in their names, dozens of names of which still exist. Furthermore, the paper has suggested that if all the names mentioned in Nilamata Purana are examined and judged according to the principles of historical linguistics, the dust of thousands of years will be cleared away. There will be hope for these names to get freedom from the clutches of mythology and will reveal the original form of these names.

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