

Saga of Discrimination of Girl Child in India

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Abstract: Girls in India face discrimination from cradle to grave in different forms and in different arenas of life. However, it is long survival of women compare to men (due to menopause older women free from risk of bearing children in later life and live longer (Cromie, 1998), which makes them 48% of population (Census, 2011). At every step, she is in patriarchal shackles with no opportunity to escape and fly. In society, she is equated as a commodity or a chattel and she has no freedom to make choices or express her opinion. It is because of deep rooted biases and internalization of patriarchal value. There are many underlying facts contributing the torment life of girls including female foeticide, child abuse, malnourishment, child mortality, dowry, malpractices in families etc. The present paper analyse the various discriminatory practices prevalent in India against girl child. The paper also emphasises that the innocence and sanctity of childhood must be protected and nurtured to flourish the bright future of girls in India.

Keywords: Devdasi, female foeticide, infanticide, malnourishment.

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Definitions of Key terms

1. Female Foeticide

The PCPNDT Act, 1994 provided the definition "regulation of the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques for the purpose of detecting genetic or metabolic disorders, chromosomal abnormalities or certain congenital malformations or sex-linked disorders and for the prevention of misuse of such techniques for the purpose of prenatal sex determination leading to female foeticide and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto. If the abortion is sex selective then it termed as female foeticide. (GoI, 2007)

2. Female Infanticide

Infanticide refers to the deliberate killing of a child below one year of age. Female infanticide is the intentional killing of baby girls because of the preference for male babies and the low value associated with the birth of females. The killing may be consequent to active infanticide in which fatal injuries and poisonings are the direct and immediate causes of death, and passive infanticide which involves indirect causes like sustained nutritional deprivation. The crime of infanticide is generally committed at the time of or within a few minutes or hours after the birth of the child (Mittal, 2013).

3. Malnourishment

Poor nourishment resulting from improper diet or from some defect in metabolism that prevents the body from using its food properly is called malnourishment, which can lead to starvation. Although poverty is a major cause for malnourishment; however, in a county like India, gender discrimination is also a significant factor in malnourishment.

4. Devdasi

In South India, a **devdasi** (Sanskrit: servant of deva (god) or devi (goddess)) is a girl "dedicated" to worship and service of a deity or a temple for the rest of her life. The dedication takes place in a Pottukattu ceremony which is similar in some ways to marriage. Originally, in addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals, these women learned and practiced Sadir (Bharatanatya),

Odissi and other classical Indian artistic traditions and enjoyed a high social status as dance and music were essential parts of temple worship.

Introduction

The world for children should be the world of peace, prosperity, equitable and dignified space of living for every child including girls. Childhood is a time when one is spared from the rigours of adult life, responsibility and obligations. At the same time, it is also the time when children are most vulnerable, especially when they are very young, because they need to be cared for and protected from 'the harshness of the world outside'. Society and especially parents are those care givers who protect the innocence of childhood from the outer world. However, continuing indignity of malnourishment, child marriages, dowry, violence (discussed in various heads in coming sections of per) snatching innocence of girls' childhood from future of the nation. There are compelling evidences that our whole nation and especially our girl children are exhibiting symptoms of a syndrome named "missing childhood". The purpose of this article is not to criticize the anachronistic lament on modernity and advancement or to present a negative picture of Shining India, but to present the view that natural childhood of girls is missing due to various factors viz. malnourishment, malpractices in families, lower level of employment, trafficking, female foeticide, infanticide, dowry, domestic violence and child abuse.

All over the world the population of children are 2.2 billion, constituting 26% of World Population. Girls are always taken as second choice and provided subaltern status in the society. However, with a few exceptions, the situation is almost the same all over the world in every country. Sex ratio at world level is 1.01 which shows skewed graph at global level but more skewed in South Asia. Within South Asia, the sex ratio is more imbalanced in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India.

Table 1. Global Population of Girl Children

	Country	Males	Females
1	United States of America	49.2%	50.8%
2	Russian Federation	46.1%	53.9%
3	Mexico	48.4%	51.6%
4	Philippines	50.1%	49.9%
5	Ethiopia	50.0%	50.0%
6	Vietnam	49.4%	50.6%
7	Germany	49.1%	50.9%
8	United Arab Emirates (UAE)	70.1%	29.9%
9	Denmark	49.6%	50.4%
10	Georgia	47.1%	52.9%
11	Kuwait	59.8%	40.2%

(Source: *World Population Prospect: the 2012 Revision*-United Nations Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, June 13, 2013)

If we analyse the above table, then it is clearly obvious that girl population is very much skewed in Arab countries like UAE and Kuwait. Russian Federation indicates increasing population percentage of female, which is an indicator of growth of female population. However, much consideration is required in most of the countries for the growth of female population. Milestones are a time for reflection. They provide us with an opportunity for reassessment and recalibration. The population of girls are also major milestone in terms of development, which must be concerned and reflected in true sense. India having advantage of demographic dividend (with 356 million 10-24 year-olds makes youngest population of world and followed by China 269 million young people) (UNFPA, 2014) but suffering from skewed sex ratio (940 worse than most of the countries) which means we are losing our half potential (female population is 48%) of workforce. Here, a comparison of India with its

neighbouring countries can be conducted for demonstrating the real picture of South Asia and also India in terms of sex ratio.

Table 2. Sex Ratio of India and Neighbouring Countries

Countries	2001	2011
India	933	940
China	944	926
Pakistan	938	943
Bangladesh	958	978
Sri Lanka	1010	1034
Nepal	1005	1014
Afghanistan	930	931
Bhutan	919	897
Myanmar	1011	1048

Source- Gender composition of child population, Census 2011, p. 80

At global level, the sex ratio has been decreased from 986 (2001) to 984 (2011). If one compares the sex ratio of Pakistan, Bangladesh and India, then one can see that Pakistan's sex ratio has increased from 938 (2001) to 943 (2011), and Bangladesh has increased from 958 (2001) to 978 (2011), and India has increased from 933 (2001) to 940 (2011). However, India lags behind Pakistan and Bangladesh. A comparison among India and its neighbouring countries provides a roadmap for reflection.

Demographic Analysis Girl Child for India

Children in the age group 0-6 years constitute 13.12 percentage (158.8 million) of the total population (corresponding figure for 2001 was 15.9 percent), in which males are 13.3 percent and females are 12.9 percent. In the 181 million population increase of the country, 88 percent of the increase is contributed from the children. (Census, 2011) During the period 2001-12, there is a reduction of 5.05 millions in the population of children aged 0-6 years. The decline in male children is 2.06 million and in female children is 2.99 million. Due to decline in sex ratio (as total fertility rate has been decreased from

3.36 in NFHS-1 to 2.84 in NFHS-2 and 2.66 in NFHS-3 (NFHS-3) 3 million girls (compare to 2 million boys) are missing. (MoSPI, 2012). That shows girls are not treated at par with boys in every domain of life, even for birth.

Table 3. Population (0-6 years) 2001-2011 -India

Census	Children (0-6 yrs) (in millions)			Total Population (in millions)			Share of children (0-6 yrs) to the corresponding total population (%)		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
2001	163.84	85.01	78.83	1028.74	532.2	496.5	15.93	15.97	15.88
2011	158.79	82.95	75.84	1210.19	623.72	586.47	13.1	13.3	12.9

Source: Census, Office of Registrar General of India, 2011

State wise Comparison of Sex Ratio in India

Utter Pradesh (29.7 million), Bihar (18.6 million) and Maharashtra (12.8 million), Madhya Pradesh (10.5 million) and Rajasthan (10.5 million) have the largest number of children constituting 52% children in the age group 0-6 years.(Census, 2011) As per census 2011, the State/ UTs with alarmingly low child sex ratio (<900) in the age group 0-6 years are, Haryana (830), Punjab (846), Jammu & Kashmir (859), Delhi (866), Chandigarh (867), Rajasthan (883), Maharashtra (883), Uttrakhand (886), Gujarat (886), UttarPradesh (899). The State/ UTs which have better child sex ratio (> =950) are Mizoram, (971), Meghalaya (970), A & N Islands (966), Puducherry (965), Chhattisgarh (964), Arunachal Pradesh (960), Kerala (959), Assam (957), Tripura(953), West Bengal (950). Top three states recording the highest value of sex ratio are from the southern part of India, namely Kerla (1084), Tamilnadu (995) and Andhra Pradesh (992). The data shows the structural difference of sex disparity.

If we compare sex ratio between rural and urban areas of all the states,

then it is observed that sex ratio is better in rural areas compared to urban areas, except few states such as Tamil Nadu (rural sex ratio is 993 and urban sex ratio is 998). The difference is sharper in some states; for example, the sex ratio in Maharashtra is more skewed in urban areas (899) compared to rural areas (948). The number of states/UT with child sex ratio 0-6 years below 915 have been decreased from nine in 2001 to fourteen in 2011. This shows that in the last decade, the number of girl children is decreasing and facing more discrimination. Here, the question arises that within India, why the sex ratio is imbalanced? If we analyze the trend in declining sex ratio, then we find that sex ratio as per census 2011 is lower in the states having prosperity like Punjab (895) and Haryana (877) (GDP per Capita \$ 1,081). Is this because of socio-economic and legal conditions or natural? The factors of human resource must be explored to answer this question. Any country preserves its human resources for development and progress, and if a sex is not counted as a significant human resource, then less efforts are done to preserve this human capital. Thus, first we have to understand the concept of human resource.

Concept of Human Resource

Human resources are the set of individuals who make up the workforce of the organisation, business sector, or economy. "Human capital" is sometimes used synonymously with human resource, although human capital typically refers to a more narrow view (i.e., the knowledge the individuals embody and can contribute to an organization).

Definition of Human Resource- "the sum total of all knowledge, skills, attitude and aptitude etc. available for a country". (Smriti Chand, 2015) The dimensions, attributes and distribution of population over the different activities, occupations and regions constitute human resource. In this definition dimensions refers to size, age and sex distribution of the population and labour; and attributes refers to health, nutritional, educational and employment status. Hence, human resources embrace: (1) energies (2) motives (3) skills (4) beliefs (5) knowledge (6) feelings (7) talent and (8) aspirations.

The above definition of human resource shows that human resource

development is a holistic development. However, women are not treated as valuable human capital, and that is why the system is insensible to her from womb to tomb.

1. Under 5 Mortality Rate (U5MR)

At world level in 2012, around 6.6 million children died before their fifth birthday, at a rate of around 18,000 per day. And the risk of dying before age 5 varies enormously depending on where a child is born. In Luxembourg, the under-five mortality rate is just 2 deaths per 1,000 live births; in Sierra Leone, it is 182 per 1,000. Of the 6.6 million under-five deaths in 2012, most were from preventable causes such as pneumonia, diarrhoea or malaria; around 44% of deaths in children under 5 occurred during the neonatal period. In India, under 5 mortality rate is higher for females than males, as in 2010, U5MR stood at 64 for females whereas it was 55 for males. All the larger states have a higher mortality rate for females than males, alarmingly high in Assam (83) versus the lowest in Kerala (7).

2. Infanticide

Infant mortality has declined for males from 78 in 1990 to 46 in 2010, and for females the decline was from 81 to 49 during this period. The per year percentage decline in IMR (Infant mortality rate) during the last two decades in females and males is 39.5% and 41.02% respectively. (MoSPI, 2012). If one examines the Annual Health Survey 2010-11, then it is found that the male-female gap in IMR is highest in Rajasthan, the female IMR is higher by 10 points than the male IMR and this gap is mainly because of high mortality differential in the rural areas.

3. Employment

Generally, women are not considered as fruitful and stable employees. Familial responsibilities and child nurturing are taken as their primary duty. This is a common perception that they have less intellectual capabilities than men. Women in India are engaged in employments which are of second preference nature. Engagement of women in following employment show subjugated nature of work (As only in census 2011 domestic work comes under the

category of employment otherwise it was not paid job for women). On the name of religion they are sent to temples so that they can't demand for education and property rights.

(I) Domestic Worker

The media and NGOs frequently cite a figure of 90 million domestic workers for India. However, since the great majority of domestic workers are women, some 2.2 percent of all employed women are domestic workers (compared to 0.5 percent for men). Moreover, there is a clear distinction between the types of domestic tasks carried out by each gender: most female domestic workers are employed as housemaids or servants, while men dominate in subcategories such as gardeners, gatekeepers and in the residual category of "other" occupations. (ILO, 2013). The worker participation Rate (WPR) for women was 21.9 percent in 2011-12. In organised sector, women worker constituted 20.4 percent of the country in 2010, comprising 17.9 percent in the public sector, and 24.5 percent in the private sector. (SAARC, 2013). The data shows skewed distribution of work which depict that women are always counted as second preference in organised sector of workforce.

(II) Devdasi

Lakhs of Dalit girls are being forced into the devdasi system in several states of the country. According to an estimate, around 2.5 lakh girls are dedicated as devdasis to Yellamma and Khandoba temples in the Maharashtra-Karnataka border area. (Pioneer, 2002). According to a survey carried out among 375 devdasis by the Joint Women's Programme, Bangalore for the NCW, 63.6 percent of the young girls were forced into the devdasi system due to custom, while 38 percent reported that their families had a history of devdasis. More than 50 percent of the devdasis become prostitutes. Nearly 40 percent of them join the flesh trade in cities and the rest are involved in the trade in their respective villages. A devdasi, in a way, is considered "*public property*" in the village. The devdasis who do not become prostitutes struggle to survive as agricultural labourers or maidservants. The overwhelming majority of the devdasis (95 percent) were earning less than Rs 1,000 a month. These data show the pathetic condition of girls in the name of religion.

All these factors are oblivious of Girl Child Value and her place in the system. She is denied this place and values because of institutional, structural and cultural systems prevalent in society. Obliviousness heaps on her through structure, norms, practices, tradition and patriarchy. When we talk about system, it is not confined to norms alone, but it is also legal in nature and includes values like patriarchy, customs, traditional practices rooted in history of religion and the communities we are living.

The story of a girl child is a story of elimination, invasion and exploitation. If she survives getting eliminated, she is subjected to endless exploitation – economic, emotional, and psychological. Before elaborating on this matter, the present status of her exploitation, invasion and elimination will be examined.

4. Elimination in Womb

She is eliminated before seeing the light of day. In 2011, a total of 132 cases were reported, of which the highest numbers were reported from Madhya Pradesh, followed by Chattisgarh and Punjab, and these states together reported 56% of the total foeticide reported in 2011. One of the many immediate consequences of sex ratio imbalance is 'marriage squeeze', characterised by the inability of men in marriageable age to find suitable partners. Marriage is universal in India and men typically marry younger women with an age gap normally not exceeding five years. If the already secularly declining child sex ratio plummets further, there is a probability that each successive cohort will contain lesser and lesser women relative to men. The ill effect of imbalanced sex ratio can be easily observed in Haryana, where many cases are reported due to it (According to the 2013 National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report, 24,749 children and women between the ages of 15 and 30 were kidnapped and sold into marriage across the country). (Masoodi, 2014).

5. Registration of Birth

If she is lucky enough to succeed the elimination in womb stage, then her birth is like mourning while the birth of a son is celebrated on a huge scale. The registration of her birth is not significant to her parents, and that is why her birth is sometimes not registered. The share of male registration is more than that of females. (SAARC, 2013) Her survival to basic necessities to survive is

subjected to practices loathed with discrimination, and story is not so in poor families but significantly in middle class upper middle class and affluent middle class society (In 2009, the campaign **50 Million Missing Campaign** had put up an online survey. about 64% felt that communities where there was more economic hardship, illiteracy or lack of education are the ones that would show the most bias against the girl child) (NGO, 2009).

6. Nutritional Status

According to 61st Round of National Sample Survey (NSS) (2004-05) the total calorie consumption of the bottommost quartile of per capita expenditure in rural India has consistently declined from 2863 Kcal since 1987-88 to 2521 Kcal in 2004-05. The proportion of households with calorie intake below 2160 kcal consumption per day was 62 percent for rural and 63 percent for the urban households in the bottom docile class. (SAARC, 2013) For women, the conditions even become worse when it comes to nutritional status.

Table 4. Percentage distribution of women and men aged 15-49 by frequency of consumption of specific food, 2005-06

Type of food	Frequency of consumption				Total
	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Never	
Women					
Milk or curd	39.8	15.6	33.2	11.4	100.0
Fruits	12.7	27.2	56.6	3.5	100.0
Men					
Milk or curd	46.7	20.5	25.8	7.0	100.0
Fruits	13.1	34.4	50.0	2.6	100.0

Source- National Family Health Survey 3, 2005-06.

The above table shows that milk or curd is consumed daily by 40 percent of women and weekly by 16 percent of women, but 11 percent never consume milk or curd compared to 7% of men, and 33 percent consume milk or curd occasionally compared to 26 percent of men. Consumption of fruits is less common in women, 27.2 percent of them do not consume fruits even once a week (relative figure for men is 34.4 percent) and 3.5% of women never consume fruits (relative figure for men is 2.6%). (SAARC, 2013) This wide

gap between the nutritional security of a child in general and a girl child in particular show malnutrition of girls. If we see the growth in family, community and society, then we find that she is discriminated in every aspect. In spite to her poor access to nutrition, if she is allowed to survive, then her upbringing, status, and place in the family, community and society, is reduced to inferiority and is subjected to all kinds of invasions and insecurity. In other words, she is allowed to survive without dignity. Even in her family, many discriminatory practices are adopted and consequently, degrade her status and value.

7. Discriminatory Practices in Family

In the family domain, she has a subordinate position and is subjected to various hierarchies. Her entire upbringing or in other words, survival, is based upon inculcation of values of inferiority, subordination, subjugation and many times, worthlessness. She is not allowed to speak loud, eat and sleep before her brother etc. Even the access to sanitation, hygiene and food is not equitable. Her birth in the family is never welcomed or celebrated. On the other hand, the boy's birth is celebrated like a festival and has all kinds of pooja and rituals. Her place in the family is treated like an immovable property which has to be cared and protected. She is taken either as a burden or honour of the family; if taken as a burden, then how to discharge the burden on others, and if taken as an honour, then how to protect it. It is worth noting that girls taken as a burden are disposed to others via marriage even in childhood, which brings us to the next section.

8. Child Marriage

Child marriages are the result of considering women as a burden, and thus, trying to put this burden on other people's shoulders as soon as possible. Thus, in India, 47 percent of children are married before the marriageable age of 16 and most of them are forced into marriage, compared to 30 percent in Pakistan 66 percent in Bangladesh (highest in South Asia), and 57 percent in Afghanistan. In India, Bihar has the highest number of child marriages at 69 percent. (Singh, 2012) The reason for child marriages in India is the outdated cultural practices which think that girl child is a burden and burden should be handed over to other as soon as possible. She is denied of fair education

and her health has little priority in the vicious circle of control and patriarchy. In Jharkhand, 71 percent of girls in rural areas are married before 18 years of age compared to 33 percent in urban areas. Worldwide, 60 million girls become child bride every year, of which 30 million belong to South Asia alone. Child marriage gives birth to early child bearing and maternal mortality for girls.

If the burden is not discharged in early ages, then she is taken as the honour of the family which must be protected at any cost. The cost may be her life if she tries to dishonour the family; in this case, honour also demonstrates the patriarchal values where men have control over women.

9. Honour Killing

She is the property of the family so she can be transferred from one person to another. However, money in the form of dowry can be paid for transferring property from parents to husband. There are tragedies and tragedies that happen to girl child. Other aspects of family practice is to protect the honour of the family and the girl child has no freedom of choice to marry whom she likes, and if she violates the family practice, she is killed by family members. This is not only the case of India but the scenario all over the world is somewhat similar. In 2010, Britain saw a 47 percent rise of honour-related crimes. Data from police agencies in the UK report 2,283 cases in 2010 and most of the attacks were conducted in cities that had high immigrant populations. As far as India is concerned, "honour killings" are mostly reported from the States of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and U.P. Bhagalpur in Bihar is also one of the known places for "honour killings" (LoI, 2012). A recent study sponsored by Law Commission revealed that over a period of four years, out of the 560 couples who were threatened and sought state protection, 121 individuals were killed. No one from the state has been punished for failing to protect these individuals. The Indian figures for kidnapping and abduction from National Crime Record Bureau, 2012 report show that females were the targets of 81.2 percent of all kidnappings, and among the kidnapped females, 70.9 percent fell within two very strange categories of purpose, namely, "for marriage" and "for illicit intercourse". It is also significant that 78.87 percent of all females abducted or kidnapped "for illicit intercourse" fell between the

age group of 15-30 years, 83.99 percent of females kidnapped "for marriage" were also in the same age group.

How can we understand these high figures? While some crimes of kidnapping and abduction "for marriage" can be attributed to the rising incidents of women being trafficked or purchased, namely in Haryana and Punjab, for marriage due to drastically falling sex-ratios, others may be just abductions alone. But 24,456 women and girls getting kidnapped within one year cannot be accounted for by these reasons alone. It can only be understood in the context of the cases being registered to trace couples who elope and are often sent back to their respective families by the police, even after the marriage has taken place. The crime of abduction and kidnapping "for illicit intercourse" not falling under rape is even more shocking, and is a brazen example of moral policing by force.

When this burden or so called honour is given to another family, then a large sum of money, named dowry, is taken from the girls' father. When the father is unable to pay the money, then the girls are killed. Only her family has the right to tell her what to study and what to wear. Families do live in societies and societies cannot be unmindful of the prevailing economic conditions, and thus, her survival is at risk. The burden should be discharged as early as possible because dowry is to be given. Virginity is considered to be a prime identity of women and it has to be protected and secured, which itself is a huge burden on the family. Hence, the earlier the marriage, the better it would be. She is considered incapable of participating in any decision making inside the family domain, let alone other decision makings outside the family domain. She is kept economically bonded and consequentially denied access to capacity building processes.

Discussion

Assault on childhood is visible in every version and dimension of the girl child's life. Ansley Coale (1991) also drew attention to unusually high sex ratios at birth and high female mortality rates relative to males, especially in the early years of life and for daughters with elder sisters. To give a rough approximation of the numerical impact of excessive female mortality, he also estimated the ratio of males to females in selected populations that would exist in the

absence of discriminatory treatment of females, and thus, the total number of 'missing' females. Modern dimension of girl child exploitation is visible in the form of media representation of women, where womanhood is 'enjoyed' by consumers in the name of entertainment. Here, families also willingly become a party of exploitation and put their girl children on sale (The point being made is that the families themselves play a role in the violation of childhood. Girls are portrayed in the form of commodity in media in advertisements, movies and television serials).

Conclusion

The high female death rates occur mainly in the first five years of life. In a recent study, Croll (2002) raises the controversial question of why millions of girls do not appear to be surviving to adulthood in contemporary Asia. Thus, there is an urgent need to focus attention on daughter-discrimination, family planning, girlhood, children differentiated by their gendered value, their birth order and sibling configuration, particularly in South Asia. The purity of girls must be connected to that fun and frolic of childhood which is the inherent character of the childhood. Roots must be dug more deeply to find out the real issues related to the missing childhood of girls. Only 'helicopter parenting' of issues does not justify the real cause of concern. Explaining the situation as an advancement of technology does not justify the basic problem of missing childhood of girls. There is unanimously a single view among political, social and academic world that the childhood of girls is missing. They are all agreeing that we are rising generation of 'couch potato children' leading ultimately to the 'erosion of childhood'. The goal to find out innocent childhood is the creation of a new way of life for India's children. The fundamental truth is that our misplaced intentions are shattering the childhood of our children. The issues of autonomy and freedom have regularly cropped up as an important factor in understanding the variations in the life of the children in different fields. Ending income poverty and hunger, achieving gender equality completely and improving the health and education of every child must be the duty of "We the People of India". Even today, the children around the world are living in unacceptable levels of poverty, malnourishment and without education. Calls for childhood must go beyond only quantitative targets in the form of

Millennium Development Goal or Right to Education that only aim to increase the access, but to enjoy the quality childhood for their holistic development (ASER, 2014 report says quality of education is decreasing in India). Inequality, social exclusion of children, particularly in rural areas and urban slums, and also children living with disabilities, caste, religious or cultural insecurities compound each other and weave a web of missing childhood. India being a youngest population nation requires the skilled workforce to compete at global level. They are asking not just one-off consultation, but an ongoing conversation, and to be involved in implementing the policies. A rethinking is required to understand the children, and the policies related to children should be re-formulated according to the needs of them.

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