

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: A NEW INTERPRETATION OF RTA

(Conference on World Views on Nature at Pune, October 2012)

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I

Introduction

Concern for environment is comprehensively revealed in an interesting way from the traditional Indian perspective (philosophical). The psycho spiritual perspective focuses upon Nature- man relationship, man's responsibility towards Nature in context to Dharma (righteousness), Rta (Cosmic order) and Rna (debts). These dimensions explored and extended to human being since five thousand years ago are appropriate even today. They are not simply pertinent from the epistemological approach but also from the pragmatic standpoint. The need of the hour is to study and apply its strong value based perspective to minimize the intensity of environment crisis. Transformation in attitude will significantly improve man's conduct towards Nature. This will not only help human life in the future but most importantly safeguard sanctity of Nature.

Harmony within will lead human being towards happiness. Dutiful approach towards others will make life purposeful as well as progressive. It will indeed benefit the society.

The paper emphasizes on the aspect of environmental crisis from the standpoint of Rta [cosmic order]. The most substantial aspect of this research paper is exploration of the unexplored dimension of debts towards Nature [Nisarga Rna]. An attempt is made to suggest solutions to reduce environmental crisis in the future from the Indian philosophical perspective. Thus, this paper is an academic social pursuit. Effort is made to analyse the philosophical pragmatic dynamics of wisdom in ancient text that reflect upon dimensions of cosmic order, dutifulness and quality of life. It emphasizes on human concern towards self-development, social progress and protection of environment.

II

Principle of Rta

Rta implies order, system, harmony as well as rule in nature. Rta is regarded as an eternal order which does not become chaotic notwithstanding any distraction in the world.

“The gods observed the vow of that from which Sun rises and in which he sets. It is (followed) today, and it will be followed tomorrow” (Madhavananda, 2004)

Rta has originated since the creation of the Universe. It reveals man-God relationship. Man can be the destroyer or the protector of cosmic order. He has a choice- to uphold the cosmic order or abolish it. Thus, it is most important to familiarize human beings to grasp the significance of cosmic order so as to prevent its destruction. This will train human beings to be more disciplined and less destructive in thought and action. It is essential for man to be always duty centric so as to experience the quietude of life. It is only by being duty centric but not right centric that human beings can appropriately maintain cosmic order. This will encourage human beings to be proactive and make life for others progressive as well as purposeful. Being selfish, pleasure oriented will always direct man towards destruction and disturb the cosmic order.

Rta can be viewed from two perspectives- cosmic as well as empirical:

1. Rta- cosmic significance

Rta as the order that is involved in the proper expression of man’s relation to God. Rta is originated from God – Rig-Veda 10.190.

Everything lives and moves only in obedience to the eternal laws. Rta as a cosmic order initiates harmony in the universe. It regulates the Universe in diverse ways. It is all pervading and unseen and viewed as Rta Brhat-the cosmic law of regularity and harmony in universe.

“As Hamsa (Sun) he dwells in heaven, as vasu (Air) he dwells in the sky, as fire he dwells on the earth, as guest he dwells in a house, he dwells in men, in gods, in truth, in ether. He is born in the waters, he is born in earth, he is born in sacrifice, he is born on the mountains, and he is true and great.” (Sivananda, 1998, p105).

Rta implies orderly nature of Universe as realized by Rgvedic thinkers. It is manifested in the harmony revealed in Kala chakra — the inbuilt cyclical arrangement in Nature focused in dimensions of day and night, occurrence of different seasons.

“He saw the presence of orderly functioning in nature i.e. adherence of vrata (meaning observance of vow) in the regularity of day and night, the yearly rotation of seasons, the

process of growth in plants in successive stages viz. the leaf, flower and fruit, fixed period of gestation in animals and in man ." (Joshi, 2001).

2. Rta- empirical significance

Significance of Rta at the empirical level is distinctive. It initiates progress of the individual and directs harmonious order in the society. Thus, Rta reflects on maintaining the sanctity of Nature. The eternal dimension of Rta reveals its value based framework. Its concern is to value and endorse the virtuous in man.

Rta revealed in Nature.

Rta reveals righteousness and self-restraint. Fantastic order in Nature's manifestations cannot be denied in any way. In-built order in Nature facilitates its smooth functioning. Each aspect of Nature is important in itself. It integrates interconnection and mutual dependence. Human person is born with the natural order. Except human being, no other species has the ability to bring about change in the universe- either positive or negative. Human being alone has the capability to make life more progressive or destructive. Suitable ethical training can help human beings to distinguish between good and bad, right and wrong, what is necessary and what is sufficient for oneself. It can also direct human beings to discover the essence of freedom and help them to recognize the importance of responsibility towards oneself, others and Nature. This can gradually direct man to maintain cosmic order in an effective way.

Thus, it is always necessary to remind human beings about the quintessence of cosmic divine order which is within and outside. Man's moral life must align with the cosmic order. Maintenance of cosmic order is possible only if human beings respect the moral order. It implies following an ethical and dutiful life for development of oneself and welfare of all. Man's overtly selfish pursuit has not only made him greedy but violent towards Nature. He is often tempted to exploit Nature and to seek pleasure in life. It is crucial to instill duty centric approach in human beings so as orient human beings to respect Nature as well as all others in this Universe.

Rta guides human beings to understand the moral order in the society. Many human beings are vulnerable to vices and are hedonistic. They disturb the cosmic order and are not concerned about its disturbing consequences. Rta encourages people to be righteous, objective and seeker of knowledge. It inspires people not to just know about the importance of duty centric approach but to practice it wherever and whenever possible. This approach can enable man to fulfill duties towards Gods, ancestors and human beings. "Ethical or moral harmony and social harmony were the aspects of cosmic harmony i.e. Rta. It is dharma i.e. Rta as social and moral harmony." (Joshi, 1995).

Rta controls universe and directs human actions. Realization of the true purpose of life- the Ultimate Truth is possible if an individual follows the moral path. By being 'good' in the ethical sense-the individual follows the moral order. Rig-Veda states that wicked and the vicious do not tread the path of eternal laws.

The secret of human happiness is to explore and follow enriching aspects of Rta. Man has to discipline himself to maintain the cosmic law. This is a very important human responsibility. It is only by being duty centric that the future of man can be progressive and peaceful in itself.

Man's duty centric life can be regulated by reflecting on repayment of Rna –debts viz. Matru - Pitru Rna, Acharya Rna, Deva Rna and Manav Rna.

II

Dynamics of Rna

Rna implies debt. In the philosophical context, it implies obligations an individual is expected to fulfill. It is interesting to note the diverse dimensions of debts an individual has to repay. This aspect of Rna not only helps the individual to be dutiful towards others but trains him to express gratitude to all in the universe in direct or indirect ways. The Satapatha Brahman mentions four rnas viz. to gods, debts to seers, debts to ancestors and debts to fellow beings.

“Rna means obligation in a very comprehensive sense connecting an individual with the entire world past, present and future.” (Balasubramanian, 2009, p313).

Study of the four kinds of Rna helps us to know the aim and approach of human life. Repayment of debts will gradually help human beings to make life more meaningful and help society to develop for better. The four important Rnas are as mentioned below:

1. Obligation towards ancestors and parents [Pitr Rna]

This debt implies obligation towards human being has towards ancestors and parents [mother, father and our forefathers-our ancestors]. Human dignity becomes relevant due to human birth. Human birth helps man to make life more purposeful. Human being alone has the capacity and capability to become divine one day if one aspires and works in that direction.

Fulfillment of Pitr Rna implies being grateful to our ancestors as well as our parents. This is possible by repaying debts by performing certain duties.

“Marriage is not for sexual enjoyment. It is a sacred duty toward the forefathers and the society. The family line is kept up by marriage. The departed souls get their offerings uninterruptedly. Further, the strength of the society is maintained.” (Sivananda, 1998, p288).

It is through marriage that procreation becomes more meaningful. The role of parents is crucial is not only in the process of procreation but also in nurturing them. It is essential to inculcate basic human values in children so as to help them to become duty centric. This is essential for development of the individual and for social development. It is indeed an appropriate way to repay one's debts towards mother, father and ancestors.

Being indifferent, aggressive towards children is not only harmful to the child's development but also for the family and country's progress. It is essential to prevent children from becoming violent and aggressive. Individual development, development of good families is most necessary to emphasize the dynamics of duty centric approach. This is most essential to maintain the cosmic order and become happy.

2. Obligation towards sages and teachers [Rsi Rna]

Fulfillment of Rsi Rna is possible by exploration, sustenance, enhancement and protection of Knowledge. Exploration of knowledge is essential to grasp the essence of life. Sustenance of knowledge is necessary for development of knowledge. Protection of knowledge is necessary for sharing it at the appropriate time and also for future learners. Most importantly; it is with the help of knowledge that individuals can be oriented to become duty centric, ethical and moral. This will inspire an individual to develop oneself, guide family members to become duty centric and focus on the wellbeing of the society. The cosmic order will be harmoniously maintained if knowledge is used for altruistic purpose. Knowledge has the power to enrich human beings to refine thoughts and reform actions. This will gradually enable human beings to be less selfish and more selfless towards the other in the future.

3. Obligation towards Gods [Deva Rna]

The beauty of Mother Nature reveals God's unique creation. Benefits from Nature acquired by man are only possible due to God's generosity and care. Man's need for food and survival is taken care by God's fantastic arrangement. It is not completely possible to fulfill Deva Rna. However, debts towards Gods can be repaid by performing Yajnas [offering]. They symbolize offering and emphasize being duty centric. It is only through selfless offering that one is able to receive the benefit of it. Performance of Yajnas is essential not only from the religious perspective but also from the spiritual perspective.

Debts towards God can also be fulfilled by recognizing the divine purpose of human life. It is essential to lead a virtuous life and avoid vices. This will encourage man to be duty centric and more concerned about his fellow beings as well as Nature.

4. Obligation towards others fellow beings [Manav Rna]

Man is unique and has best capacities within. He has the potential to not only transform himself but to contribute his efforts for social development. Every individual is connected with the society. Different individuals and institutions help human beings to progress and prosper. It is every individual's duty to serve the society in some way- by being dutiful, selfless towards his fellow beings. It is essential to help the poor, weak and sick human beings. Respect for human beings should be nurtured in every individual. It is interesting to note that apart from the four Rnas –debts-explained-the Upanisads also mention an individual's duty towards animals, birds and insects. It includes taking care of animals, feeding them and protecting them. Thus, an individual is expected not to just live for oneself but for others.

“The Vedic tradition holds the view that duty by its very nature is other- regarding and that it is not restricted to human society alone. It includes in its purview all beings, sentient as well as insentient. It is necessary in this connection to pay attention to the deeper significance of Panca-maha Yajnas-which are binding on every human being, who is endowed with moral consciousness and is capable of deliberate action.” (Balasubramanian, 2009, p314).

III

Nisarga Rna

Duty centric approach in human beings makes them aware about true purpose of life. It guides human beings to realize the significance of oneself and others in the society. It also helps man to realize his meaningful relationship with Nature.

Study of four Rnas [debts] reveals relevance of one more important debt- Nisarga Rna which is explored by the authors and explained in this section. Technological development, human greed and many other factors in many ways have adversely affected the sanctity of Nature. Duty centric approach towards Nature can help man to explore Nature and not exploit it further.

Nature has been the best care taker of man. It has not only made human life meaningful but has helped many species to co-exist in this world. It is difficult to repay debts towards Nature since dimensions of Nature are so vast and its generosity limitless. Nisarga Rna implies debts of human beings towards Mother Nature. Every human being enjoys the charms of Nature. It is our prime duty to repay our debts to Mother Nature. It is essential to be the best care takers of Nature, more concerned about it throughout our life. It will be difficult to enjoy the order of Nature if we merely take Nature for granted. It is more necessary to nurture gratitude and respect towards Nature. This will guide people to protect Nature in diverse ways.

1. Gratitude and Respect towards Nature

Indian scriptures and philosophical texts mention prayers to express our gratitude towards Nature. For example- Prayers to express forgiveness is mentioned in sacred holy books. The prayer reflects an apology to Nature for stepping feet on Mother Earth. For instance, Samudrasane devi Parvatastam namaste Vishnu Patni Nastubhyam Paadparshamavame. Salutations to the wife of Lord Vishnu, Vasundhara [Earth], who's Vastra [Apparels], are Samudra [oceans], and whose Stana [breast] are the mountains. Forgive me for the sin, by putting my feet upon you.

Special prayers to express apology towards plants for plucking flowers is mentioned in Indian scriptures. This not only reveals concern for Nature but also in some way conveys gratitude and respect towards Nature.

2. Care & Duty towards Nature

Love for Nature is essential and should never be overlooked. Exploitation of Nature should be avoided. Defective agricultural practices, use of excessive pesticides, destruction of natural habitat for commercial purposes should be prevented. Nature care initiatives exist in India since many centuries. Maintenance of sacred groves is one such initiative.

Sacred Groves

“Sacred groves are the tracts of virgin forest that were left untouched by the local inhabitants, harbor rich biodiversity and are protected by the local people due to their cultural and religious beliefs and taboos that the deities reside in them.” (Khan, Khumbongmayum and Tripathi, 2008, pp277-91).

In India, sacred groves are found at many places but mainly in tribal dominated areas. These are managed by local people who are spiritually connected with the physical environment. Biological diversity is largely maintained due to presence of sacred groves. However, due to urbanization, exploitation of natural resources is rapidly taking place. Thus, sacred groves in India are apparently threatened today.

“Ecological services rendered by sacred groves needs to be highlighted and people should be made to realize that the conservation of groves is crucial for their sustenance.” (Khan, Khumbongmayum and Tripathi, 2008, p285).

Dynamics of Nisarga Rna not only convey the essence of Mother Nature but reflect upon initiatives necessary to repay debts to Nature. It is essential to orient human thought to grasp the value, worth and richness of Nature. This is necessary to maintain the sacredness of Nature.

This will not only help to protect future of man but also educate man to live a harmonious balanced life. This is most required for health and happiness to prevail in the human society.

IV

Nature & Human Person

Purusartha implies goals of human life. The four Purusarthas are Dharma (Righteousness), Artha (Wealth), Kama (Desire) and Moksha (Liberation). Purusarthas guide human beings about what ought to be. Artha and Kama should be directed by Dharma. Material well being is essential but spiritual upliftment is necessary. This approach is essential to discipline human life and be dutiful towards Nature.

Man's greed to seek more and more has often forced human being to exploit Nature. This is not only harmful but dangerous for future generations. Thus, hedonistic tendencies should be appropriately controlled in human beings. If this is not done-it will lead to exploitation of Nature and may threaten human existence. It is essential to harmonize the relationship between human being and Nature. Human beings should be oriented about sanctity of Nature in general and conservation of natural resources in particular. Respect towards Nature is necessary to prevent its damage. Ethico-spiritual well being should be accomplished gradually between Nature and human being. This will indeed help to enhance well being and harmony between them.

Indian scriptures mention dimensions of eco-centrism. This focuses on harmony between man (Vyasti), society (Samasti) and Nature (Srsti). Any kind of imbalance can be dangerous to human life, society and Nature. Nature and human being's relationship is holistic. Nature's concern towards human life is revealed in its diverse manifestations. Duty centric approach towards Nature was reflected more often in the lifestyle of people during olden days in India. For instance, gratitude and respect towards Nature was appropriately expressed in India since many centuries. Some important dimensions of the same are as mentioned below:

1. Gratitude towards trees

Many trees in India are worshipped. They have particular significance. Most of these trees have religious and medicinal importance. For example:

The Banyan tree of life symbolizes long life. It energizes life and purifies air. The Banyan tree is called Kalp Vriksha meaning wish fulfilling divine tree. In India, it is worshipped on specific days to offer thanks and for other purpose. For instance, married women worship this tree. The

ritual on this auspicious day called Vata savitiri symbolizes request for long life in context to their husbands.



Ocimum Tenuiflorum, also known as Holy Basil, Tulsi, is a sacred plant normally found in traditional Indian households. It is worshipped daily with water. It has religious as well as medicinal importance. It has been used by Ayurveda experts for effective treatment.

2. Gratitude towards animals

Dimensions of Indian culture always reflect care, concern and love not only towards human beings but also towards animals as well as insects. Gratitude and concern towards the other is the most essential for peaceful co-existence. For instance,

Vasu Baras is an auspicious day in the year which is devoted to the worship of cows. In rural India, the cow represents motherhood. Cow is also perceived as the exclusive economic source by many families in rural India. Special worship is performed for the well being of cows.

Pola festival is celebrated in India by farmers to pay respect to bullocks. Agriculture is the main occupation of many Indians. Farmers use bullocks in the farms. On the day of Pola, farmers clean the bullocks carefully and worship them. The bullocks are given special food to eat. The bullocks are decorated by flower garlands, putting ornaments. All the bullocks are taken to different parts of the village in a procession where farmers play drums and other musical instruments.



3. Respect towards rivers

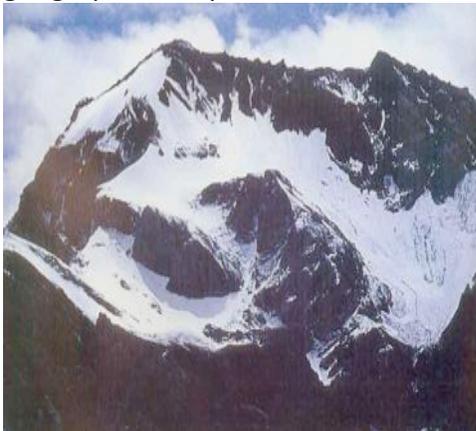
Rivers are accepted as holy by many in India. Hindu mythology mentions the sacredness of rivers. Thanks are also conveyed to rivers through different verses in religious texts. Rivers play a very vital role in the lives of Indians. It supports livelihood and helps human beings in diverse ways. Indians take holy bath in sacred rivers and offer the following prayer:

I pray you to enter,
This water meant for my bath,
Oh, holy river Ganga,
Oh, holy river Yamuna,
Oh, holy river Godavari,
Oh, holy river Saraswati,
Oh, holy river Narmada,
Oh, holy river Sindhu



4. Sacredness of Mountains

The sacredness of the Himalayas, Mount Kailash is known to Indians as well as many others from different countries. Different thinkers, seers have praised the mountains and developed verses to convey the same. The richness of Nature is reflected through the gigantic mountains where many seers continue to meditate even today. Mountains in India do not merely have geographical importance but also religious as well as spiritual importance.



5. Forests-Mother Nature

Many Indians have identified themselves with Mother Nature. Many people especially from rural background are already connected with the forests. Many consider the forest to be a Mother. The forest helps human beings in several ways. It is not only a source of income but it helps people to live in a healthy atmosphere.

The famous Chipko movement in India is one of the most unique movements in the world. Women hugged every tree in a forest in India and did not allow people to destroy trees for commercial purpose. Women considered every tree to be one's own mother. Thus, women did not allow men to cut trees in the forest due to affection and gratitude towards trees.



6. Gratitude towards machines

Gratitude towards animate as well inanimate objects is expressed by Indians since many years. Thus, gratitude towards machines is expressed on a particular day in a year. Machines are not mere machines. They are made with the vital elements prevalent in Nature.



Rta: Realisation & Relevance

Excessive materialism has made man impulsive, reckless, selfish and indifferent towards others. This has not only estranged his relationship with himself, his fellow beings but also with Nature.

Lack of duty centric approach has gradually disturbed the cosmic order. It has affected man's relationship with himself, his fellow beings and Mother Nature. Efforts should be taken to respect Rta. Some suggestions are mentioned below:

1. Change in mindset is essential

Human beings are largely affected by the changes taking place in the modern age. Today it is not so common to meet duty centric people. Many are hedonists. Many consider materialism as the means and the end of life. Right centric approach has given rise to disharmony as well disturbance. Pleasure oriented lifestyle has influenced human person's thought and action. It is essential to steadily change the mindset of people. Thus, it is essential to nurture gratitude and concern amongst people towards Nature. People should be made aware about the essence of the cosmic order and its relevance to future of man. This can be made possible through experiential learning exercises. For instance, dimensions of empirical evidence of man's reckless behavior towards Nature and its consequence should be appropriately conveyed to the learners. This should be followed by an elaborate discussion and analysis program. This will enable learners to respect Nature not as a means to an end but respect Nature as an end in itself.

2. Duty and not Right

Exploitation of Nature for fulfilling one's needs is dangerous. It is not our right to use Nature as and when required. It is essential to nurture gratitude, concern towards Mother Nature. Duty centric approach is necessary to maintain the cosmic order and make life purposeful. It is necessary to educate man not to just live in the present but also be concerned about the future. Examples of natural disasters and its impact on man's future should be very often discussed through the media. This will caution man and prevent him from destroying Nature. Nature care initiatives should be integrated with everyday life. This should be expressed, pursued and monitored appropriately. This will guide human beings to maintain harmony.

3. Value based approach

Dynamics of Indian culture reveal the relevance of basic human values. In diverse ways, respect towards oneself, others and Nature is conveyed through stories and important instances. Efforts should be taken by parents and teachers to nurture value based lifestyle amongst young learners from the Indian perspective. Basic human values of respect, gratitude, co-operation, Truth should be appropriately nurtured in them.

Value education should be integrated with life experiences. This will help young learners to be duty centric and responsible towards development of oneself and the society. It will also help them to be more concerned about Nature and sensitive towards its vital functions.

Primary course in Ethics and Environment should be made mandatory in schools. Dynamics of environment as represented in every tradition can be compiled and developed into compact study material. This will benefit every learner to relook at Nature and respect it. It will educate many to maintain the cosmic order.

4. Man, machine and materialism

Machines have enhanced material progress in several ways. It has definitely made man's life materially more comfortable. But it has not necessarily made his life more meaningful. Destruction of Nature may have given man some temporary benefits but it has gradually destroyed the possibility of a happy and healthy life.

To maintain the cosmic order- human being has to control the over use of machine and restrict materialism. Thus, human being has to explore environment friendly simple ways to lead a more meaningful life. This is possible through serious contemplation and spiritual orientation. "Spiritual knowledge does not arise in the mind of man so long as it is morally impure." (Ranganathanada, 1993).

Spiritual orientation of human beings is essential so as to grasp the essence of need and discriminate it from greed. This will enable man to conserve natural resources and help man to begin living for the future. Teachers and students can be appropriately trained to be effective care takers of Nature. In the next section, a learning module for the teachers is shared. This module attempts to extend guidance to teachers to become effective caretakers of Nature.

VI

Effective caretakers of Nature: Module for Teachers

This module is primarily suggested for teachers so that dynamics of Nature care can be extended in an effective way to the students. This will guide teachers and students to maintain the cosmic order.

Objective: To nurture gratitude as well as concern about Nature and inspire teachers to be effective caretakers of Nature.

Design

Theoretical as well as pragmatic framework of Nature [from care and concern point of view] should be discussed for the benefit of the teachers by experts.

Theoretical approach:

Lectures to convey the dynamics of Rta (Cosmic order) and Nisarga Rna (debt towards Nature) [by an expert in the area of Indian philosophy] should be conducted for two hours every day for seven days. These lectures should focus upon changing the mindset of the teachers. Efforts should be taken to develop duty centric caring mindset towards Nature. They must be trained to express gratitude towards Nature.

Practical approach

Activity based initiatives to focus on the concept of Rta and Nisarga Rna. Some activities :

- (a) To enlist dynamics of Rta –cosmic order and focus on the pragmatic dimensions of Rta.
- (b) Conduct a survey to explore man's behavior towards Nature.
- (c) Collect information about rituals that express gratitude towards Nature in different countries in general and India in particular.
- (d) Screen films to promote protection of environment
- (e) Project work to develop effective study material for students to become effective caretakers of Nature e.g. eco friendly initiatives prevalent at the global level
- (f) Nurture gratitude and feeling of apology towards Nature through dance dramas and other cultural programs.
- (g) Group discussion on dynamics of cosmic order and the role of man in it. Teacher participants can be encouraged to participate in discussions based on the above mentioned theme.
- (h) Exhibitions should be organized in schools and colleges that emphasize importance of dimensions of cosmic order, important aspects of Mother Nature as revealed through festivals, nature care activities with reference to India.

Benefit

This module has global, national and local benefit. It is cost effective and relevant module which is easy to apply.

Limitations

The module can seriously fail if the trainer or the participants are not eager to bring about any change in their approach to protect Nature.

VII

Conclusion

Dimensions of Rta are eternal. It is crucial to understand the relevance of Rta so as to respect life and protect Nature. The need of the hour is to spread the essence of Rta-cosmic order to different groups of people in the world through formal and informal education. This will definitely enable them to become best care takers of Nature. Nature will thus be protected in a genuine way. This will not only help the present generation but it will also benefit the future generations. It is only with awareness that awakening to live and let live can thoroughly manifest.

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