

Socio-Cultural Study of *Hindu*

In the previous chapter we have discussed socio-cultural perspective in the short story collection *Dalit Brahmin*. It is about the cultural difference of dalit culture and non-dalit culture, role of education, role of caste, positions of dalits in contemporary Indian society, cultural clashes, sexual exploitation of dalit women and cultural changes taking place in our society.

This chapter revolves around the socio-cultural study of Sharankumar Limbale's novel *Hindu*. This novel is about position of dalits, role of education, conversion, political awareness, changes patterns of Indian society, controversies among Hindu, Muslim and Christians, corruption in religion and society, clashes between dalits, satire on politics, and how caste is a barrier in inter-caste marriage. Whole novel revolves around the socio-cultural perspectives of dalits. Milind, the narrator belongs to a Dalit family. He is a teacher and dalit activist. His wife Lakshmi's name is symbolic of Hindu religion that stands for peace and prosperity. There is clash of belief between husband and wife as Lakshmi believes in rituals of Hindu religion but Milind feels that Hindu religion paves the way for the exploitation of dalits and women. In this novel, Dalits are shown converting to Buddhism. This is perhaps the impact of Ambedkar's oath that he was born as a Hindu but he would not die as a Hindu.

Dalit now converted to Buddhism. They had thrown away the idols of the Hindu gods and goddess on to the garbage. Some had buried them. Dalits were now following new faiths, new way of worship. My house, though, still has Hindu idols. My wife, Lakshmi, stealthily worships them. When an activist comes to our house, the idols have to be hidden. While our drawing room

sports portraits of Babasaheb and Buddha, the kitchen belongs to Hindu gods and goddesses (Hindu 6).

Limbale shows that there are cultural clashes not only between high castes but also among the people of the low castes at many levels and the base of these clashes lies in the religion and the caste system. Dalit people convert because they don't feel comfortable in Hindu religion. The novel brings to the fore clashes between majority and minority groups:

Hindus are the majority in this country. It is a democracy of the majority. What have the minorities got? Should dalits align themselves with the majority or the minorities? Why shouldn't Bhimshakti and Muslimshakti join hands? Many dalits have converted to Islam (Hindu 4).

Milind was in favor of celebrating *Shivajayanti* and *Bhimjayanti*. But some Dalit activist like Nikam Mama and Chandrakant Ambhore are against the celebrating *Shivajayanti* and *Bhimjayanti*. Further, this novel captures the clashes among Dalit activists, though Milind tries to yoke *Shivashakti* and *Bhimshakti* together:

Shivajayanti and Bhimajayanti must be celebrated together. It is the demand of the times. While Shivaji Maharaj fought against the Mughal Empire, Babasaheb gave battle to the caste system. If Shivaji Maharaj marshaled the people of the Maval religion against slavery, Babasaheb led to the dalits. While Shivaji Maharaj's struggle was for our selfhood: our language, our religion and our rule, Babasaheb struggled for liberty, equality and justice. It is only when we synthesize the work of these two great men that we will be able to propel the movement forward (Hindu 2).

Dalit activists have different views on *Shivshakti* and *Bhimshakti*. It shows their ideological clash. Milind lives with Manikchand and Gopichand, *gharjamais* of Bankat Seth, who belong to upper caste society. They are living luxurious life. They are close friends of Milind but Milind doesn't like them inwardly. Everybody in the society tries to raise his or her status on finding the first opportunity as Milind is an activist but for social status, good food and wine he wastes no time to become friendly with caste Hindus like Manikchand and Gopichand. Limbale depicts the ambivalent state of mind of Milind:

I have come up from being dirt poor. During my childhood I did not dare to face rich businessmen. Today, I spin around with Manikchand and Gopichand in their car, use their mobile and visit their home. I liked this change. To this day, a Dalit cannot sit together with savaranas as an equal to drink water but I drink liquor with them. Could my ties with the movement be severed just because I drank with them once in a while? Was that possible? Were people involved in the movement just machines? They too have penises. Pockets. Bellies (Hindu 8).

Tatya Kamble, Dalit activist and *Jalsa* performer lives in Achalpur. He makes the dalits aware about their condition and the reasons behind their pitiable condition. Rambhau Kavale is the *Patil* of Achalpur and Tatya Kamble will be the next *Patil*, the head man of village because the seat is going to be reserved for dalits next time as per the reservation policy of the government. But people like Rambhau Kavale could not bear it and get Tatya Kamble killed because he was going to put a serious threat to their supremacy through his *Jalsas*. Patil feels upset because of the activities of Tatya Kamble: "The Mahars organized an Ambedkar festival. Your watchman's brother,

Tatya Kamble, abused Hinduism in his speech. Hindutava is the soul of this country. The village youth got mad. They must have done something” (Hindu 12).

In this novel, the communal riots take place because of cultural differences, clash of interests, struggle for dominance and efforts to break the hegemony of upper caste. This novel depicts the pitiable condition of the woman irrespective of the community she belongs to—dalit or non-dalit community. A Dalit woman named Draupadi and high caste women named Sonali suffer mainly because they are women in the male dominated society. Gopichand and Manikchand’s views about women reflect their condition in the society:

She is a woman, a young woman. And we are men. We wouldn’t have spared her even if she were from our caste. You pimp, why do you see caste everywhere, even in sex? See, how fair she is. Gopichand pushed out. I was ashamed of my weakness. Gopichand locked Manikchand and the women in the bedroom. I couldn’t break the door down like a film hero, nor beat them up. I was angry with myself. I had visited many prostitutes in Gopichand and Manikhand’s company. I never thought of their caste at that time (Hindu 20).

The novel reminds the reader of mythological references also. Draupadi belongs to the dalit community of sweepers and the attempts to rape and publicly humiliate her are analogous to the Mahabharata’s Draupadi. However, no Lord Krishna arrives to lengthen her sari of a dalit woman; rather, she is being rescued by the dalit youth who risk their lives in their attempt to rescue her from the molesters:

Draupadi put her broom near the steps, covered her head with her sari, touched the step devoutly, and began climbing up the steps with fear in her heart, while Vishnu Pujari ogled her like a starving man. ‘How scared you are! Come,

come, Vishnu Pujari grabbed her hand and started dragging her towards the back of the temple. Draupadi tried to free her hand but Vishnu Pujari's grip was stronger (Hindu 129).

This novel represents the miserable condition of women. Raj Kumar talks about Dalitwomen in his book *Dalit Personal Narratives*. He says:

Majority of Dalit women are daily wage labourers, agricultural workers, servants and unskilled workers in industrial units. They even work in hazardous work-sites such as mines and quarries. Even though the labour they put in their work is no less than their male counterparts they are always paid lower wages. Furthermore, when their men run away from shouldering family responsibilities, it is they who are responsible to run their families with a meager income (Kumar 217).

In Indian society, these types of incidents are happening even today. This is the condition of Draupadi in her village.

On the other hand, Sonali belongs to a high caste society. She was the college friend of Rohit Kamble. Rohit Kamble is the son of Tatyam Kamble. Now Sonali gets married in Achalpur, the village of Rohit Kamble. Prabhakar is the husband of Sonali and murderer of Tatyam Kamble. Prabhakar is the son of Rambhau Kavale the Patil of Achalpur. Previously, Sonali had invited the anger of high caste youths when she danced with Rohit Kamble, her dalit lover:

She had given a dance recital at the annual function of the college. The audience shouted 'once more' again and again. Her performance turned her into a college celebrity. The local papers published her photographs and interviews on their 'college world' page. Alongside her photo was Rohit's, a

dalit student staying in the hostel. A few savarna students were mad with rage when they saw the photographs of Rohit and Sonali published side by side. Sonali praised Rohit's performance in her interview, much to the dislike of those savarna students. They were very angry. 'If she was so keen to dance, she should have danced with us, they said. 'We would have danced with her. She has insulted us by dancing with a Dalit boy.' The savarna boys sent photographs showing Rohit and Sonali dancing together to her home. Sonali's father, Baliram Patil, was very much perturbed by the photographs. The idea of a Dalitboy having danced with his daughter riled him (Hindu 40).

In this novel we see the plight of an upper caste girl also. This is the punishment awarded to Sonali that she is removed from the college and married to an uneducated son of the village with a huge dowry. This is the side effect of the caste system that an intelligent and sincere girl like Sonali suffers after marrying a beastly man of her own caste. The novel also depicts the condition of another woman named Shaila Satpute. She is an educated but unemployed woman. In search of job, she goes to Manikchand and Gopichand for job and gets sexually exploited:

Manikchand called her in for an interview. 'I never want to hear "I don't want to do this" or "I don't know how to do that." You will have to do whatever we ask of you. There will be no complaining. If you are prepared to work late, then start from tomorrow.' Manikchand spoke plainly to the girl while Gopichand kept saying, 'yes', 'yes.' If we don't like your work, you will be fired'(Hindu32).

The novel explores that the culture is changing and dalits have started asserting:

Now the villagers were afraid of dalits. Dalit stopped performing their traditional menial jobs, making the villagers' blood boil. At last Dalit self-pride had awakened. If anybody tries to deceive them, they filed a police case against him. The villagers were caught in a bind. 'If Mahars don't do the work, he Mangs will. Anybody can clean the cattleshed. But how can we tolerate the arrogance of those who are meant to be below us? The whole village was united on this issue. And now that the dalits were getting new homes built of brick, the villagers' bellies ached terribly (Hindu 34).

Limbale highlights the role of education for realizing the desired changes in society. Through Tatyā Kamble, Limbale shows that perceptible cultural changes are taking place in *Jalsa* performances as unlike his ancestors; Kamble's *Jalsa* performances are less oriented towards entertainment and more towards bringing awareness among Dalit people. Tatyā Kamble uses Babasaheb Ambedkar's philosophy and quotes him in his *Jalsa*:

Why do you stay in a religion that does not allow you to enter the temple?
Why do you stay in a religion that does not acknowledge your humanity? Why
do you stay in a religion that does not allow you even water? A religion that
forbids the treatment of humans as humans is not a religion but naked
domination. A religion in which touching of unclean animals is permitted but
touching of humans prohibited is not a religion but insanity. A religion that
tells a group of human beings to not get education, not amass wealth , not
carry arms is not a religion but a mockery of human values (Hindu 50-51).

The novel also describes the embarrassing situation of the teacher Kasbe Guruji who is posted in Achalpur. One day when he was teaching a lesson about Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar high caste people reach the school and order their children to tear off

page no. 42 which is about Dr. Ambedkar. This incident caused great humiliation and insult to Kasbe Guruji. He wants to leave Achalpur. He writes a letter to government for transfer as he was not feeling comfortable in Achalpur. Godbole Guruji who is a staunch worker of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh says, “Kasbe Guruji, you will find casteism in whichever village you go. You will have to face vexations everywhere. Get used to these things and then you won’t find them so unsettling.” (Hindu 36)

Sadanand Kamble is brother of Taty Kamble. He is a servant at Gopichand and Manikchand’s house. Madhukar Kavale is brother of Prabhakar Kavale who is the killer of Taty Kamble. Madhukar comes to Gopichand and Manikchand to sort out the problems as they are the witnesses of Taty Kamble’s murder. They finalize a deal with Madhukar Kavale:

A Mahar’s life is not worth a lakh. You don’t have to spend so much. But it is a matter of life and death of eight persons. Many proofs will have to be destroyed to get them acquitted. Witnesses will have to be bought. Certain Dalit leaders’ pockets will have to be lined. Please remember that all the vultures are watching Taty Kamble’s corpse intently. We could meet again provided you are ready to spend Rs. 10 lakhs. If you can’t then don’t waste our time. We have a lot of other things to do’ (Hindu 64).

The novel describes the ways adopted by the caste Hindu exploit dalit population in many different ways and their perception towards dalit activists and dalit leaders. The upper caste dominant people are shown as the vultures waiting for the dead animal. After the murder of Taty Kamble, dalit leader and dalit activists reach Achalpur. Gopichand says about them:

Dalit activists are like vultures. They are pleased when an injustice happens against the Dalits. They immediately go to meet the victims, print flyers, organize marches and take the entire credit. They don't want the trouble to get resolved. Instead they fan the fire of discontent so that they can make a show of their leadership and get more popular. They go after the perpetrator of injustice, put a noose around his neck and get him to spit out the money. Once the termites enter the house, one might as well assume that the house is doomed. If you want us to sort out this problem of yours, pay Rs.5 lakhs (Hindu 76-77).

The novel depicts the miserable condition of a Dalit leader who is not able to assert himself and works under pressure of his high caste patrons. Sadanand Kamble has lost his brother and his family feels the pangs of terror:

Sadanand Kamble's family was ostracized by the village. He had to go to the town even if he had to buy oil and salt. Sadashiv More kept his ration shop closed and sold the rationed goods at the back door. The other shopkeepers also did not sell to Sadanand Kamble. 'If we sell something to Sadanand Kamble and he mixes poison in it and files a police case against us, what will we do?' they argued. Sadanand Kamble was in trouble from all quarters. He was caught between the devil and the deep blue sea (Hindu 71-72).

Dalit people live in *Bhimnagar* which is a separate locality meant for them. After the murder of Taty Kimble, communal riots break out. Upper caste people burn the huts of Dalit people and subsequently Government provides new houses to Dalit people. High caste people say, "We burnt down your huts and you got these new homes. Now you burn our homes we too may get new homes." Bajirao Chavan,

standing beside Narendra Patil, said: ‘you people have such fun! I wish we were Mahars too. Then the government would have pampered us as well’ (Hindu 80).

The novel presents a gloomy picture of caste-ridden society. When dalits distribute the sweets, high caste people throw the sweets after going a few steps away:

The crowd dispersed after the dignitaries departed. Villagers left for the village, holding the sweets distributed by the Mahars in their hands. After crossing Bhimnagar the villagers threw the sweets away in the garbage heap (Hindu 80).

However, this incident can be compared with Anand’s *Untouchable* where the confectioner throws *jalebis* at Bakha like a Cricket ball and asks him to put the money on the counter. When Bakha gives the money, the shopkeeper splashes some water in order to make it pure of the touch of an untouchable and then he puts those coins in his pocket. Also, there is one more incident where the housewife attends the Sadhu with great concern and on the other hand she throws the stale bread at Bakha from a height, that too, with abuse and rebuke.

Though the dalits receive new homes but they are still dependent on the village to make a living. They are yet to explore the ways to earn their living. Therefore, they are left with no alternative except to entreat the villagers. After the death of Taty Kamble (jalsa performer) dalit people are forced to do the menial works as now there is nobody to sensitise the people not to allow themselves to be victimised. His death brings the dalits to their previous position of wretchedness as—

Ambadas restarted his old business of brewing liquor. Namdev now went around the village to beg. Sandeep polke’s brother brought pigs to the village. Siddharth Pagare’s sister got some hens. Now one saw more dogs on the street

than children playing. The walls of many homes had turned black from smoke. Many doors had broken latches and some windowpanes were broken as well. The new basti no longer looked new, but more like a slum (Hindu 81).

This novel also takes up the issue of conversion. In this novel Dalit people get converted to other religions such as Buddhism and Christianity. After the conversion, their situation is not much different. Their cultural atmosphere gets changed but this change is not enough because they are still dependent on high caste people. Poverty and caste system do not leave them there also as the elites in the converted religion treat them as second grade followers. Kabir Kamble says:

We have to depend on the savarnas for our daily bread even after conversion. Our God will change, our rituals of worship will change but the questions regarding dal roti won't change. Complete transformation is not possible until the economic slavery of the dalits is destroyed (Hindu 82).

The novel vividly presents the condition of dalit people and the existential issues concerning them before and after conversion. This novel represents the distance between dalit and high caste people. This novel is about liberty, equality, fraternity and justice. Sonali goes to Rohit Kamble's house in order to console him when she comes to know about the murder of his father by her husband. Rohit's mother is afraid of another disaster when she sees Sonali at their house.

This novel not only represents the condition of Dalit people but also upper caste society. Though Sonali belongs to upper caste, she gets exploited by her in-laws. Sonali's life is shown to be as miserable as that of a dalit. Her love for a dalit boy is severely condemned by the caste Hindus. When she dares to approach her dalit

lover, the attitude of her husband's family changes. Her father-in-law and her brother-in-law discuss about her behavior:

'This girl dares to go to the Maharwada in the dark of the night. She must have known that boy from before. He was studying Pune.' 'If would be dangerous to throw this girl out of our home. She can give evidence against Prabhakar in the court. What can't any 'He gave such a huge dowry, spent so much money on the wedding. He surely knew about his daughter's angry woman do? If we throw her out and she decides to go to the Maharwada, than we will have even more trouble on our hands. Secondly, Prabhakar doesn't know anything about this business. He will think that we didn't look after his wife and threw her out because he wasn't home. Also, we won't find it easy now to find a second wife for Prabhakar as everybody in the community knows that he is in jail. And then we do need a woman to look after the household work (Hindu 88-89).

This novel also depicts social evils such as dowry system, female foeticide and the increasing population of the country. Milind broods over the problem of the population increase and desire for a male child:

How many people are born every day and how many die? As the population increases people will not have food to eat. There will be no jobs and the cost of living will keep going up. The heads of the household will commit suicide, burdened by the cost of living. Such suicides will have a damaging effect on society's well-being. An unemployed and underfed population is like a house on fire. People will come out on the streets and riot and rob. The nurse came running towards me and disturbed my train of thought. Lakshmi had given

birth to a daughter. Lakshmi had wanted a son. Pragya had wanted a brother. I too, became nervous. A girl again! I couldn't hide my anger (Hindu 91).

Woman is the enemy of woman and participates in the exploitation of woman as an instrument in the hands of the man. Lakshmi wants a boy and Pragya wants a brother. Through these types of incidents, the novel portrays the socio-cultural context of a caste-ridden society. In this novel, Limbale discusses some of the most emergent social evils like problem of female feticide, inter-caste marriage, sexual harassment, mockery of democracy, corruption in election, horsetrading etc.

In the past, infanticide was prevalent. Also abortions. Even today, girls are aborted and the number of women is decreasing because of that. The gap in the number of males versus females will inevitably lead society towards anarchy. The demand for women will increase as their numbers go down. Their price will go up. Men will have to remain unmarried. Rapes will increase. Promiscuity will increase. Sexual relation will become lax and that will lead to miscegenation. The caste system will become history and a new religion will emerge from misconduct (Hindu 91).

Dalit people are against the religion which is not based on equality. They think they are not inferior to high caste people in any sense:

Savarnas ought to examine their history. Do they suppose that only they have feelings while we don't? Our humanity was trampled upon and humiliated for thousands of years by them. We now want equal right in Hindu society. We will obtain these right by remaining in Hindu society, and, if necessary, by kicking the wretched Hindutva (Hindu 95).

In this novel, writer talks about social order. Religion is for man, man is not for religion. Stones and bricks can build temples, not nations. National unity is necessary for a nation. Brotherhood and sisterhood are also necessary for a nation. Some where the novelist seems to emphasise that no nation can flourish in absence of equality, liberty and fraternity.

In this novel, Limbale stresses the relevance of water as a vital source to connect the people but ironically the caste Hindus even discriminate against Dalits on the basis of water. Dalits struggle for water in their daily routine as they are considered untouchable. Limbale philosophises the water in a satirical tone:

O water, what is thy colour?

Touched by a Brahmin, it is nectar.

Touched by a Mahar, it's like menstrual discharge.

O water, what is thy colour? (Hindu 100)

Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar contributed a lot for the upliftment of dalit people who are otherwise destined to live a life of helplessness. For example, Sadanand, the brother of Taty Kimble who is a witness of his brother's murder also fails to provide justice to his brother or his family even after his becoming the *Sarpanch* of the village. Paradoxically, he is misbehaved and is not allowed to hoist the flag in the village on 15th August:

'Fifteenth August is next week. We will not let Sadanand Kamble hoist the national flag', Narendra Patil said. 'We salute the national flag hoisted by a Mahar? Of course not,' Bajirao Chavan added. 'He has no right to hoist the national flag. He will pollute it. It will be an insult to the national celebration', Vishnu Pujari said. How can a Mahar Sarpanch distribute sweets to the

school-boys Nobody will accept sweets from his hands. This will be an insult to the national celebration, an insult!’ Vishnu Pujari spoke up (Hindu 103-104).

The roots of the humiliation of the dalit sarpanch lie in Casteism. The upper caste Hindus don’t consider him as a deserving person for the post of *Sarpanchas*, according to them, Sadanand occupies this position only because of the provision of reservation. The novel provides a platform to debate the question of reservation in detail. High caste people are not in favour of it.

Having experienced the series of exploitative circumstances, all the Dalit people of Achalpur decide to convert to other religion(s). Through this novel, Limbale shows the tendency among dalits to consider Buddhism, Christianity and other religions as more secular and democratic than Hinduism. It is in this background that Christian missionary’s start functioning in Bhimnagar. They open a school and a clinic in Bhimnagar making the villagers feel apprehensive of their future: “If dalits convert to Christianity, America will hold their hands. If they become Muslims, Pakistan will hold them. In that case, why don’t we ourselves hold their hands”? (Hindu 137)

To their dismay, situation of dalits and dalit converts is not much better in religions such as Sikhism, Islam and Christianity. D. Murali Manohar tells about the position of dalit people in his book *Dalitand their Religion*. The younger generations who have been born and brought up as the Christians, Sikhs and Muslims do the same menial jobs as their ancestors used to do in Hindu religion. John C.B. Webster says:

In the Punjab Census there is a lot of perplexity about how to label or classify Chura religion. For one thing, there were a good number of Chura Muslims

Who were called Musallis and may or may not have been accepted by others as fellow Muslims. Similarly, Chura Sikhs were called Mazhabi Sikhs and were generally kept at a distance by other Sikhs, despite being scrupulous in their observances as well as giving up polluting work (carrying night soil) and habits (eating carrion) (Manohar 2).

This is the point of view of dalit people about religion. Bama tells about discrimination against dalit converts in her autobiography. She observes:

Far worse is the attitude within our own Church. They have made use of Dalits who are immersed in ignorance as their capital, set up a big business, and only profited their own caste. In Churches, Dalits are the most in number alone

It is only the upper caste Christians who enjoy the benefits and comforts of Church. Even amongst the priests and nuns, it is the upper castes who hold all High positions . . . and if Dalits become priests or nuns, they are pushed aside.

And marginalised first of all . . . it is because of this that even though Dalits like me. Might wish to take up the path of renunciation, we find there is no place for us there (Bama 80).

Sadanand Kamble becomes sarpanch and subsequently he becomes a Minister. Surprisingly, as soon as he becomes a Minister, his attitude gets changed and he learns the tricks of politics to the extent that he turns hostile as a witness in the murder case of his real brother in order to keep his upper caste vote bank intact. As a result all the criminals are acquitted. Disappointed over this development, Milind thinks about the Dalit movement and its condition as a sixty percent burn women. Utterly disillusioned, Milind considers himself and the Dalit movement as impotent because neither he nor the movement could bring any change in the lives of dalit population.

The novel nicely justifies Lord Axon's idea that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. The power politics gives rise to socio-cultural clashes even among dalit people. On the one side are those dalits who are educated while the other sides are those dalits who are uneducated. Socio-cultural clash among dalits signifies the clash between modernism and tradition. The uneducated dalit people are in favor of caste system while young generation is against the caste system and in favor of conversion. They think about the conversion: "We will decide which religion we want to remain in. No one can force us. Our constitution has awarded everyone the basic right of religious freedom. We have been treated as untouchables and made to live in seclusion. Why? Do you have the answer to that?" (Hindu138). This is the point of view of the dalits who are educated and are aware of their rights. This instance reminds some of Milk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* where Bakha is fed up with the pranks of the higher society that leads him to assert with a sense of revolt: "For them I am a sweeper, sweeper-untouchable! Untouchable! Untouchable! That's the word! Untouchable! I am an Untouchable!" (43)

Contrary to it, uneducated dalits uphold their traditional notions of life and believe that it is their destiny to live a wretched life. They say:

We have no complaints. We will live the way the village asks us to. We will drag dead animals, eat musaram, the scraps left on your plates, bear with the ordeal of the village spitting on us. We will not complain even if the village perpetrates injustice on us. We have to live in this village. These educated boys have lost their minds (Hindu 139).

In *Hindu* we see the miserable condition of dalit people whereas the condition of dalit women is much more serious as she is doubly marginalized being dalit and the woman. It largely focuses on the question as to how dalit culture is different from the

main stream culture and how that difference can be lessened through education. Milind, a dalit activist realises that for the desired transformation in the lives of dalits, role of education is the most crucial. Limbale seems to validate his conviction that the issues like socio-cultural clash, conversion, untouchability, corruption in religion and society, exploitation of women, dowry system and female feticide can be addressed by educating the masses.

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