

Rajdhobi Sub-Division of Washerman in Bihar: A Sociological Study

Dr. Ambuj Kumar

Assistant Professor (Sociology), S.B.A.N College, Darheta – Lari, Magadh university, Bodhgaya, Bihar.

Abstract

Dhobis are recognized by the constitution of Indian as the Scheduled caste Community of India, but same part Rajdhobi they are put under other Backward community. Rajdhobi is sub-division of Dhobi. This caste is recorded at number 70 in the list of extremely backward classes (EBC-I) of Bihar state, while it is at number 106 in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBC) of the Government of India. The total population of Rajdhobi caste residing in Bihar state of India is about 30 thousand (2022). There is no sub-caste of this caste, rather these people are a sub-caste of washerman, and belong to Kashyap gotra. From the present study it has been revealed that earlier these people used to wash the clothes of kings and emperors, that is why they were named Rajdhobi. But as the kings came to an end, their traditional profession declined. When the profession declined, their income started decreasing, due to which they were forced to do other types of work like daily labor, mat weaving, animal husbandry and farming on the deserted land of Darbhanga Maharaj on the banks of river Kosi. The Rajdhobi caste, exploited and oppressed for centuries due to untouchability, is today going through a phase of rapid transition. Many problems like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, housing and displacement due to erosion of Kosi river etc. have been shaking their standard of living. While compiling the facts about this caste, it was revealed that from time to time, these people have been demanding from the State and Government of India that they should get the benefits of Scheduled Caste like the original caste Dhobi. But the hope of getting benefits is turning into disappointment.

Keywords: Dhoba, Dhobi, Rajdhobi, Chasadhoba, Sub-Caste, Sub-Division.

Introduction

Rajdhobi literally means groups that wash the king's clothes. That is, king + washerman, king washerman. These are also called Rajdhob, Raja + Dhob = Rajdhob. According to Sir William Crook, the word Dhobi is derived from the Sanskrit word "Dhav", which means to knead. In English it is called washerman, and in Hindi Dhobi is derived from Dhona (Dhona, which means to wash). In the 1931 census, the cloth washer caste group of Bihar was also called DHOBA. Even today it is called Dhopa in West Bengal, Rajput Dhobi in Daman and Diu, Dhupi in Mizoram, Dhob in Jammu and Kashmir and Dhoba and Rajak in Eastern India. That means Dhobi is known by different names in India. Rajdhobi caste is basically a washerman caste. It is a Shudra Varnas or low caste group found in Bihar, whose main work was related to washing, dyeing and ironing the clothes of the royal family. Over time, after the arrival of the British and the monarchy system of Mithila being in crisis, there was some change in their occupations. These people started working as laborers, weaving mats, animal husbandry (buffalo,

goat) and some people started working as farming and agricultural laborers on the deserted land of Darbhanga Maharaja on the banks of river Kosi.

The presented studies have revealed that the people of Rajdhobi community faced crisis when the monarchy system of Mithila was in a state of anarchy. Since in that situation it became difficult to live dependent on traditional occupation, then these people gradually started settling in small groups on the deserted land of Darbhanga Maharaj on the banks of Koshi river under the district of Bhagalpur division at that time. Some people started earning their living by animal husbandry (goat, buffalo), weaving mats and doing labour. There was enough land and forest as pasture for animal husbandry, with the availability of Pater and Moonj in the same forest, these people started the work of weaving mats and selling them in the nearby markets and in the same way, in the 17th century, the new society, culture and business of this caste was formed. Started. Gradually life continued like this for many decades, and small groups transformed into some villages, which mainly included Maura, Jahura, Dengrahi, Piprahi, Bhuliya, Aurahi, Baltharwa, Dholi, Kataiya, Dighiya, Dudhaila and Mainhi. . This village was the original residence of the Rajdhobi caste. Over time, due to the havoc and erosion of the Kosi River, some people migrated from Bhagalpur division to Purnia district in order to earn their livelihood, and later some settled there and transformed into villages. Today, Rajdhobi caste is from these original places: Bhaptiyahi, Saraigarh, Dabhari, Babhni, Saharsa, Narayanpur, Pipra, Jahalipatti, Sadanandpur, Verdah, Tengri, Karjain, Vaisi, Shivnagar, Parmanandpur, Vishanpur, Balua, Matiyari, Lalitgram, Rampura, Dinbandhu, Bhatnia. , have migrated and settled in places like Vasavan Patti, Dahagamma and Bela etc. Presently this caste is settled in Simalgachi, Simaria, Chak, Ramdaili and Sarsauni under Purnia district and also in Bangama, Garia, Kusiari village, Kodarkatti, Jagir Halaliya, Madhulata and Kurwa Lakshmipur villages of Araria district. While collecting the facts, it came to light that the groups of these castes who were displaced from their original residence and settled in the above-mentioned places are called 'Dhobia Tola' or 'Dhobiahi' In the presented study,

The population of Rajdhobi caste in Bihar is as per the following table. (Table- I)

Serial no	District	Block	Subdivision	number of houses	population
01	Supaul	Supaul	Supaul sadar	153	801
		Nirmali	Nirmali	496	2458
		Chhatapur	Triveniganj	395	2040
		Basantpur	Birpur	305	1510
		Raghopur	Birpur	362	1740
		Bhapatiyahi	Supaul sadar	580	2642
02	Madhubani	Loukahi	Phulparas	221	1279
03	Saharsa	Kahra	Saharsa sadar	09	60
04	Araria	Araria	Araria sadar	228	1008
		Forbesganj	Forbesganj	135	587
		Raniganj	Forbesganj	65	278
05	Purnia	Purnia purv	Purnia sadar	72	301
		Kasba	Purnia sadar	58	259
		Jalalgarh	Purnia sadar	155	625
Total	05	14	09	3234	15578

Source - General Administration Department, Government of Bihar, 2017.

It is clear from the above table that the maximum population of Rajdhobi caste in Supaul district is 11,191, whereas in Saharsa district the population is only 60 people. The total population of Rajdhobi caste is 15578 with the number of 3234 families in five districts and 14 blocks. But the question arises that why did these people become Rajdhobi from washerman? Which is the subject of research.

Actually, there are many reasons for this, as a result of which a washerman became a king-washer. The first thing is that this caste is not found in any other region or state of India except Mithila region. This proves that in the court of one or the other king of Mithila, the ancestors or descendants of the Rajdhobi caste used to wash clothes. The same washerman, due to his high aspirations and in order to rise above the social level of the untouchable caste in the caste stratification, used the name 'Raj'. 'Rajdhobi' was created by adding the word so that washerman could get higher respect and dignity in the society.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the presented study is the sociological study of Rajdhobi caste residing in Supaul, Saharsa, Purnia, Araria, and Madhubani districts of Bihar state. This study has the following objectives:

1. To find out about the history of Rajdhobi caste.
2. To get information about whether the washerman and the Rajdhobi belong to the same caste group or to different castes.
3. To find out whether Rajdhobi is a sub-caste / sub-division of washerman or Rajdhobi is a separate caste. To get information about whether this caste belongs to Shudra caste or not.
4. To find out in which states and districts of India this caste originally resides.

Methodology

The area of the presented study is Supaul, Saharsa, Madhubani, Purnia and Araria districts. In which 20-20 persons were selected as a sample from each district as primary data and a total of 100 persons were collected through interview schedule and quasi-participant observation method and informal gathering of the community. Facts have been collected by talking to members. Apart from this, facts have also been collected from published research materials, books, government statistical information and census, newspapers etc. in the form of secondary data.

Analysis of data:

The caste system in India has been studied with three perspectives. Indological, Socio-anthropological and Sociological. The Indologists have viewed caste from the scriptural point of view, Social-Anthropologists from the cultural point of view, and Sociologists from the stratificational point of view. The sociological perspective views the caste system in terms of social stratification in a society, and as a Phenomenon of social inequality. According to it, Society has certain structural aspects and it distributes its members in social positions. The interaction is the basis of social structures, and types of interaction along with associated norms categorize social structures. The paper largely focuses on sociological point of view.

It is not easy to give a clear-cut distinction between a caste and a sub-caste because both have similar attributes. However, a sub-caste is a sub-division of a caste. For example, Dhobi is a caste and it is divided into various sub-castes like Rajdhobi, Kanaujia, Maghaya etc.

How did sub- caste originate ?. There are two views; One they have arisen out of a fission from a Parent group (For example, Bhilala in Madhya Pradesh having emerged due to mixed origin from the Rajput and Bhil parentage, and Chasadhoba etc.) and two ,they have emerged as independent groups (Chauhan,1966). Irvati Karve (1958) has accepted the view that sub-caste are either the fissioned divisions of caste or they have an independent origin, Referring to this , she has said “The difference in religious practices and techniques reflects the separate existence and history of these entities than serves as cause for their separation from the larger units”. Risley (1915) ,Hutton (1961) and Majumdar (1958) have referred to sub-caste breaking away from the main castes to raise their status. B.R. Chauhan (1966) has maintained that the origin of sub-caste due to the process of fission may be explained in terms of mechanisms like Migration , change of customs, Political decisions, etc.

Max Weber (1960) also holds; ” Today one caste frequently contains several hundred sub-caste. In such cases, these sub-caste may be related to one another exactly or almost exactly as are different castes. If this is the case, sub-castes in reality are castes; the caste name common to all of them has merely historical significance.” The washerman into many division in India . Dhoba, Dhobi , Rajdhobi and Chasadhoba are inter-related to each other and branch of washerman .The traditional occupation of this community has been washing/ cleaning clothes. Various Scholars have made several studies of this professions . During that it has been proved that these castes are sub- division of Dhobi and this is a caste, which has also been confirmed through various records during the presented studies.

According to H.H.Risley (1891) , Dhoba ,the washerman caste of Bengal and Orissa. Dhoba caste is very widely distributed, and has in Bengal Proper been broken up into an unusually large number of sub -caste. Eighteen of these are shown in table II.

Bengal and Orissa.(Table II) Dhoba.

<p>Sub-castes;-</p> <p>1. Ramer Dhoba</p> <p>2. Sitar Dhoba</p>	}	Eastern Bengal
<p>3. Satisa</p> <p>4. Athisa</p> <p>5. Hajara samaj</p> <p>6. Niti sina</p>	}	Central Bengal
<p>7. Bara samaj</p> <p>8. Chhota samaj</p> <p>9. Dhoba samaj</p> <p>10. Rarhiya samajs</p>	}	Hughli
<p>11. Bangali</p> <p>12. Gorla</p> <p>13. Maghaya</p> <p>14. Khotta</p>	}	Manbhum

- 15. Bhulua
- 16. Jugidia
- 17. Sundip



Noakhali

- 18. Uriya Dhoba Orissa

Source - Tribe and Caste of Bengal, Ethnographic Glossary, vol.II.

The Dhobis of Behar are divided into the following sub-caste;-

Kanaujia, Maghaya, Belwar, Awadhiya. Batham, Gorsar, Gadhaya, (keep donkeys),and Bangla (Immigrants from Bengal). There is also a class of Mahomedam Dhobi Known as Turkia.

According to Risley,(1891), Chasadhoba (Brahmas washerman) really of Dravidian descent and probably a branch of Dhobas .who have taken to cultivation ,and thus raised themselves so far above the parent caste that they now disown all connexion with it.

According to W. W. Hunter (1877) Rajdhobs are also cultivators, corresponding to the chasadhobas of Bengal. 1307 in number , all found in the police division of Supaul.

It is clear from the statements of Risley and Hunter that Chasadhoba and Rajdhobi are branches of Dhobi, that is both the castes have originated from the division of Dhobi.At Present both these castes are considered superior to the washerman ,the main reason for this is that on one side the Chasadhobas consider themselves to be the washerman of Brahma ,while on the other side the Rajdhobi consider themselves to be the washerman of the King (Maharaja of Darbhanga) .Similarly ,in India there has been division from castes into sub-castes.

Form the observation and analysis of the above facts, it is clear that Rajdhobi is the descendant of Dobi. Rajdhobi was formed separately from Dhobi, this community is a division of Washerman. Ie, a sub – caste of Dhobi. which is also confirmed by Francis Buchanan book ,” An Account of the district of Purnea in 1809-10.” The following line is quoted in this book. ‘The Washermen.....,They have separated into many divisions. In the first place, a good many will have no communion with those who wash . and have be taken themselves to the plough. These are chiefly confined to the south-east corner of the district, and are all followers of the Vaishnavs .Even there, where washermen are considered Vile (Aniya), these are allowed to be only low (Nich). Another class has separated itself from those who wash, and these people call themselves Rajdhobi or Saphkar. They consider themselves higher than the washers and live by making mats and cultivating the ground.’

On the basis of the above records, it is proved that Rajdhobi is basically a washerman, whose division later led to the formation of Rajdhobi. The traditional occupation of Rajdhobi is cloth washing , Now a days many of Rajdhobi are engaged in agriculture and daily wage workers.some of the Rajdhobi families work as share cropper. The social and economic status of Rajdhobi caste is weak . Present studies are records prove that Dhoba, Dhobi, Chasadhoba and Rajdhobi communities are involved in the traditional profession of washing clothes.

Now, the question arises that for which king did Rajdhobi do the clean clothes/Laundry work.?.

Rajdhobi caste has been living in Mithila region for centuries. Mithila was a state in ancient India, which included Tirhut, Darbhanga, Munger, Kosi, Purnia and Bhagalpur divisions of present-day Bihar and Santhal Pargana division of Jharkhand state. According to Vedic sources, the Videha branch of the Aryans marched from the banks of Saraswati towards Sadanira (Gandak) in the east under the protection

of Agni and established the Videha kingdom. This region came to be called Mithila after the name of King Mithi of Videha. According to Valmiki Ramayana, there was a king of Mithila called Janak, Sita was the daughter of Sirdhwaja Janak, the last king of the Janak dynasty. After the fall of the Videha kings, there was a lack of central government in Mithila and after the establishment of Vaishali Republic around 750 BC, Mithila also came under the rule of Bajji Mahasangh. Meanwhile, around 525 BC, Magadha emperor Ajatshatru.

After the Vajji Mahasangh, somehow republican rule probably continued in Mithila. Around 326 BC, Mahapadyananda, who was called Mahakshatantrak, also ended the republic of Mithila which had survived the attack of Ajatashatra. It is also mentioned that a king named Alarka Bali also ruled in the area known as Darbhanga of modern Nanpur Pargana.

Till the time of the disintegration of the Videha monarchy and the Vajji federation, Mithila had a history of continuous defeat and slavery. Meanwhile, the establishment of the Karnat dynasty, also known as the Simraon dynasty (from approximately 1080 AD to 1324 AD), marked the beginning of the New Age of Mithila. Its first king was Nanyadev, after which Malladeva and Gangdev (from 1147 AD to 1187 AD) built a huge fort at Andharathadhi in the present Madhubani district. But due to the invasion of Muslims, the last king of Karnat dynasty, Hari Singh Dev (1303 AD to 1324 AD) fled to Nepal and the ruler of this dynasty came to an end. Here for about 30 years, anarchy and brutality continued on the political stage of Mithila. During the first Bengal invasion of Sultan Firoz Shah Tughlaq, Kameshwar Thakur of Maithil Brahmin Oinwar dynasty (Thakur) (about 1353 AD to 1526 AD) was given the governance of Mithila (Tirhut). Meanwhile, during the tenure of Raja Shiv Singh Dev, the army of Sultan Ibrahim Shah of Jaunpur under the leadership of Ghiyas Beg attacked Mithila and carried out a bloody game, ending the rule of this dynasty with the last 16th ruler Laxminath Singh (1510 to 1525 AD). After Shiv Singh Dev, the governance system of Mithila started becoming weak and there was a state of anarchy. After about 30 years of Oinwar dynasty, Khandwal clan (Darbhanga Maharaj) got the rule by the grace of Akbar. This kingdom was established by Maithil Brahmin land lords in the beginning of the 16th century. Whose ruling founder was Shri Mahesh Thakur (1556-1569 AD). Mahesh Thakur's family and descendants gradually strengthened their power in social, agricultural and political affairs and came to be regarded as the kings of Madhubani.

The rulers of Darbhanga Raj were the largest landowners in India and thus were called 'Raja' and later 'Maharaja' and 'Maharajadhiraja'. He was given the status of ruling 'Prince'. After independence, the Government of India initiated several land reforms, and the Zamindari system was abolished. The power and existence of Darbhanga Raj continued to decline. Finally, the last ruler of Raj Darbhanga was Maharaja Bahadur Sir Shri Kameshwar Singh, who died in 1960 AD without naming a successor. Thus, the rule of Darbhanga Raj came to an end.

But here the question arises whether the Rajdhobi used to wash the clothes of the above-mentioned rulers? And if yes, then is there any record or evidence available to verify the authenticity of these facts, on the basis of which it can be said that a washerman became a Rajdhobi ?

To confirm and authenticate the above facts, the researcher has tried to prove by quoting a line from the report of Census of Bengal (1872) that it was a washerman who used to wash the clothes of the kings. . Throwing light on the origin of Rajdhob/ Rajdhobi caste, Mr. Wyer writes that " Rajdhob are in Bhaugulpore and Purnia merely. What Chasadhopa is elsewhere, They have a legend that they formerly washed a certain Rajah's clothes, and that on his demise having no more clothes to wash. They took to cultivation, which they pursue at present."

He above facts prove that Rajdhobi was the washerman of the rulers of Darbhanga Maharaj .which was confirmed by K.S.Sinh;s book “Indias Communities (N-Z)” 1998. In which it is written , A Little known community of north eastern Bihar..... They consider Rajdhob as the washerman of the Maharaja of Darbhanga.

From the above line and the observation and analysis of the rulers, it is clear that the Rajdhobi caste used to wash clothes for the kings of Mithila. Who are still living under the then Bhagalpur division and Purnia districts. Since various rulers have been ruling here since ancient times. This is the reason that our caste was established in the society as the one who washes the clothes of Raj i.e. the king, ahead of the washerman, and with time, this washerman became the Rajdhobi.

When we look at the history of castes, there are many such castes, due to the economic and educational improvement of the lower castes during the British rule, their self-respect got awakened and Shudras also started trying to get respect by associating themselves with Brahmins or Kshatriyas. Some tried to link their caste with the great men of the Puranas and religious scriptures. As a result of which they made some changes in the names of their castes, like Bhar - Rajbhar, Jogi Jangirn, Hajjam (Barber) Sharma, Mallah Kevat, Kalwar Jaiswal etc. But in the Indian context the most important characteristic of caste is based on birth. That is, the caste in which a person is born is called that caste. In their social system, there is no change in the superiority and inferiority, rather an attempt was made to prove itself superior to the untouchable castes by changing the name of the caste or by adding it back and forth. The same situation prevailed among some washerman, who after making some changes became Rajdhob or Rajdhobi from Dhobhi. But this change did not happen among the washerman of the entire state, it happened in limited groups of washerman and these washerman started considering themselves superior to other groups of washerman and higher in caste hierarchy, because these people used to be the personal washerman of the royal family. Here, in the language of sociology, the process of de-culturation begins among these washerman, that is, this washerman group starts losing the elements of their culture for higher aspirations, and starts adopting the elements of external culture.

Adopting this, he starts considering himself higher. As a result of this process of deculturalization, the Rajdhobi caste, considering their professionalism superior, started distancing themselves from the traditional occupation of the Dhobhi caste and this is where the transformation into a sub-caste begins.

Krickpatrick (1912) has explained that sub-caste ,which are the fissioned groups of castes, were earlier formed as the result of Migration and Political and Social factors but today they are the result of attempts by the well-to-do elements in a despised caste to cut adrift from their humbler caste brethren and raise themselves in the social scale by finding a new name and a dubious origin ,and associating themselves with same higher caste ,like Rajdhobi did.

G.S. Dhurye the founder of Indian sociology, has said in his book” Caste and Race in India (1932)” that sub-caste is a division of caste. There are two opinions about this, first, that the sub-caste has been divided by the division of the same group and second, that it has emerged as independent groups. Dhurye believes that sub-castes and castes can be differentiated mainly on six grounds - (1) Territorial separateness (2) Mixed origin (3) Occupational distinction . (4) Some Peculiarity in the technique of the occupation. (5) Dissimilarity of Customs and (6) surnames. or due to Nicknames.

On the basis of the above distinction, there was regional separation in the Rajdhobi caste, in the words of Max Weber, caste often forms a community at the regional or local level. It was due to this separate regionalism that the Rajdhobi community was formed. Professional superiority i.e. considering oneself superior among the washermen (washer of the king's clothes) and some disparity in their methods and

customs like surnames Das, Prasad, Raut (all three are still prevalent as the surnames of washerman), Majhi, Bishwas, Rajdhobi became a sub-caste due to types like Isar, Mandal, Kharga, Logi, Sant, Paik, Gami, Parihasht, Adhikari etc.

According to Dhurye, when a sub-caste is formed, it mainly performs three functions. First, ban on marriage, second, ban on food, third, behavior and community controlling life.

The Rajdhobi caste also played an important role in the creation of a sub-caste, banning the above three activities. For its authenticity again Mr. It would be appropriate to mention the statement of Wyer (1872). Mr. Wyer writes that after the end of the political system, these people became short of clothes and they started doing other work to earn their living. After this, according to Wyer Saheb, Rajdhobi, as a sub-caste, also banned the three main activities, i.e. marriage, food and community life and behaviour. But here Mr. Wyer Saheb has also written that those who wanted to eat and marry the washerman, did so. That is, these works were not completely banned and are seen even today.

On the basis of the above characteristics, Dhuryes accept sub-castes as real castes. Although a caste is usually divided into several sub-castes. Since there is no sub-caste of Rajdhobi caste. This also proves that the sub-caste of washerman is Rajdhobi. Every sub-caste is endogamous. This division is probably the result of a long historical process, under which groups continued to divide and disintegrate. As a result of this long process of development, many such endogamous groups were formed, which generally flourish in one geographical area. Each of them maintains a sense of uniqueness within itself and is related to other similar groups. Traditionally, this is the smallest group that establishes endogamous unity, and such small groups are distinguished from other similar small groups. All the members of the group are engaged in similar occupations or in certain occupations, like the Rajdhobi, along with washing clothes, are engaged in labour, agriculture, animal husbandry etc. Its members eat food prepared by each other, have a similar culture and in most cases they are governed by the same caste- Panchayat.

According to Wester Marck (1891) also, the caste in which a person is born, he remains in the same caste throughout his life. Each caste is divided into sub-castes, and each sub-caste has a law to allow its members to marry within their own sub-caste.

Rajdhobi caste also came into existence as a sub-caste by adopting the practice of endogamy. They also have a different culture, customs and a caste panchayat. From the analysis of the facts obtained, it is known that Rajdhobi caste is a sub-caste of Dhobi caste, which has also been confirmed by Dept. of General Administration, Govt. of Bihar, during the "Ethnographic Study of Rajdhobi Caste of Bihar". (2018).

Well, the work of the Dhobhi caste is the same as that of the Rajdhobi caste, but the only difference is so much so that the washermen have been washing the dirty clothes of all castes, and the Rajdhobi or Rajdhobi has been washing the clothes of only the kings. But their ancestors undoubtedly used to wash clothes of all castes. Over time, he became the king's washerman as a traditional and separate washerman of the kings. Whereas in the royal families, like the castes providing service in other service professions like gardeners, potters, cobblers, carpenters, masons, dyers etc., the caste which was called Rajdhobi by adding the prefix 'Raj' in front of 'Dhobi' who washes clothes, was not considered as 'Dhobi'. In fact, Shudra caste washerman and Rajdhobi are the same, but despite belonging to the same caste group, today both are listed in different reservation categories.

Conclusion

Rajdhobi caste is found only in Madhubani, Supaul, Saharsa, Araria and Purnia districts of Bihar. Here it is called by the names Rajdhob, Rajdhobi, Dhobia, etc. and it is a sub-caste of Dhobi. Also, this caste is situated at the lowest position in the social caste system. Despite their ancestors calling themselves Rajdhobi, their social and educational backwardness is clearly reflected due to untouchability. These people used to do the work of washing clothes of the kings, and with time due to the monarchy being in danger/ending, they gradually started getting involved in other professions besides washing clothes. While compiling the facts, it has also come to light that before 1978, this caste was considered a sub-caste of washerman and got the facilities provided to the Scheduled Caste. But these castes do not have the information about when, how and why they were put in the extremely backward class. These people are struggling with many problems like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment, superstition, floods, landlessness and displacement. The surprising thing is that today, despite being backward compared to most of the Scheduled Castes and having such a low population, it has not been included in the list of Scheduled Castes, which is a matter of concern. Even today in the 21st century, the Rajdhobi caste is struggling for its social, economic and educational development, so that it can get constitutional status and facilities like the original caste Dhobi. But, the ray of rise of Rajdhobi caste seems dim.

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