

Historical Review of Medieval Feminism in South Asia: Amir Khusrau's work

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ABSTRACT

Literature is considered an important source of history. Different types of historical literatures were produced in India during medieval period. Minhaj Siraj, Hasan Nizami, Fakhri-i-Mudabbir and Zia-ud-din Barani were the professional historians who revealed the political history of medieval India. In medieval tradition of historiography, historical works could be written in a special style and might combine the oratory and poetry. Amir Khusrau (1253-1325 A.D) was a multifaceted, multi-talented poet to whom the term "renaissance man" genuinely applies. His poetic version described the minute details of political, social and cultural aspects of Indian life; even he criticized the public activities of women.

Amir Khusrau was associated with three dynasties of Sultanate period in Hindustan. Amir Khusrau integrated into his vast poetic output, many perspicacious observations about contemporary Indian mores. His work is valuable not only as literary source but also for historical, social and political insight. Amir Khusrau is also known as the harbinger of the cultural synthesis between Hindu and Muslim civilization. His work is a defining moment in Indo Persian literature as it makes available crucial insights into his intellectual heritage and cultural intricacies of his age. Amir Khusrau was a known poet of his age, acknowledged as "Tuti-i-Hind". His primary concern was to demonstrate his literary works. He gained lasting reputation and got the reward of his literary performances. His work including his five Diwans and Masnavis such as Ijaz-i-khusrawi, Nuh-i-Siphar, Hast-Bhaist, Matla-ul-Anwar, Khazain-ul-Futuh, Qiran-us-Saadain covered many aspects of Sultanate history. Amir Khusrau narrates political, religious and social life of medieval period through his poetry. Amir Khusrau's work also depicts the moral standards of that time regarding women. Khusrau addresses various issues of women through his masnavis. Although, his work is an alternate source of history but it is remarkable in portraying the real face of feminisms in Middle Ages. This article basically encompasses those literary works of Amir Khusrau which dealt with the status of women during Sultanate period.

Key Words: Purdah, Medieval, Sultanate, Isami, Singar

Morality

According to Amir Khusrau, purdah (veil) provides integrity and elevates the morality of women. Corroborating his verdict the poet narrates:

گر نہ ہر ڈر صد فنقا بشدے قطر بآب آرز آبدے

If the shell is devoid of covering, the water drop inside the shell would have remained unnoticed and ungracious. (Hast Bahist, p.204).

Purdah is a compulsion even in the presence of nearest relatives. It is better for a female and if she does not follow this verdict she may face many problems. Purdah is so necessary that a female should not expose her face before sun and moon (Matla-ul-Anwar, pp.227-228).

رومنما گر همه خالت بود بر که بجز جنت حالات بود
 تانیود سایه بمت بمقدم روے بتاب از مه و خورشیدیم
 بر که بخلوت جز شویر بود خاص مکن گرچه برادر بود
 مطلع الانوار ص 258-257

First Khusrau mentioned the importance of woman and persuaded the Indian society to accept female child. Women were expected to lead pure and virtuous life. They were supposed to remain pure in their thoughts and words. He conveyed these standards in his poetry. Khusrau advised his daughter in these words:

گرچه خردی کنوں و بی تمییز روزی آخر بزرگ گردی نیز
 تا بود در بزر گیت دستور خرده ای چند گویمت دستور
 از عروسی شوی چو برسر تخت عصمتت خواهم اول آنکه بخت

You are my little child now but one day you will be grown up, it is a tradition of elders that they give some advice to their young ones. So, I want to give you some advice. As a bride it is your first responsibility to safe guard your modesty. The activities of women should be confined to the house only. They should not peep around; aimless wandering is shameful for women.

The one who roam about are not women but bitches. (Hast Bahist, p.209)

گرچه زر با شدت فراخ نه تنگ تا نداری ز دوک و سوزن ننگ

دوک و سوزن گزاشتن نه فن ست کالت پرده پوشی بدن است
 از عروسان خزینہ داری بہ راست گوئی و راست کاری بہ
 مرد اگر یک قراضہ کار کند زن بہ کد بانو یی بزار کند
 دل نگهبان رخت باید داشت گرہ خویش سخت باید داشت
 چون ز شو خرچ زن فزون باشد حال سامان خانہ چون باشد

Khusrau enjoins upon the wives to keep themselves within the limit of their homes, have watchful eyes in all resources of the house, have privacy with none except husband, remain engaged in their domestic duties, look after the income and spend it very carefully. If the husband is poor and without means of subsistence the wife shouldn't mention it before him. In short Khusrau tried to cultivate moral values. (Hast Bahist, p.211)

Isami also appreciated the tradition of Purdah among Muslims. He criticized Sultan Raziya for she publically discarded Purdah (Futuh-ul-Salatin, p.130). Amir Khusrau also commented about Raziya Sultan in these words that the good natured Raziya decorated the throne..... for some months, her sun- like face was concealed in the cloud of veil..... at last she discarded the veil, her might and prowess compelled brave men to bow before her. (Amir Khusrau of Delhi, p. 24)

بادپیچو دفکہ بلعیز نست بروے اینچیز استو آنر سناست

فتہر بانگمی زند در پوست
در نہایتصلاے بادببود

دفشانی ہراسدشمنودوست
آنکہاولسروسادببود

According to Amir Khusrau, beating drum, riding swings and singing songs are considered evils for noble women. It is merely an entertainment in the beginning but in the end leads to vulgarity. (Hast Bahist, p.210)

سیمپاشی و پیکر آرای
از سفیدبسیابروے شدند
نقد عصمتفناد ورششونج
بارضاے حلاہستحلال

در ز نارد و فتہر سوای
بسروساں کہفتن جوے شدند
چونشدی بہر بفتونہدرانج
اینہمفتنہہاکہہستویال

Certain ethical codes were set up by Amir Khusrau which ought to be followed by a virtuous woman. He considered "eyes" the chief cause of evils and out let of one's desires and intentions. He advised woman to keep eyes low and preserve them from collyrium.

کتشودار سرمہمہروسیاہ
سرمہبروستوسپیدہ بچشم

سرمہبچشمخود از انسان مخواه
در خوران زن کہدر شگشت یشیم

You should not glaze your eyes with collyrium. Due to excessive use of collyrium you will opt those activities which result in defaming you in your society. It is better for you to become blind before doing so. (Matla-ul-Anwar, p.194)

Wine became a popular drink amongst the various sections of society in Sultanate period. It was unknown to the ordinary females. Amir Khusrau vehemently opposed the consumption of wine especially for females. According to khusrau drinking of wine is the root cause of bringing destruction to the family. (Matla-ul -Anwar, p.194)

خانہخرا باتشداو خراب
بویہمہمسایہ اسانہ پیام

وانکہفرو رفت پسیلشراب
گرچہ کہدر حجریبود در جام

Seclusion

Those women who were involved in drinking to the extent of intoxication destroyed their homes. The regular use of wine especially the smell of wine, reaches everywhere and even their neighbors know her activities. Amir Khusrau devoted one Maqala of Mata-ul-Anwar to women. This Maqala is comprised of varied advices for women such as:

1. Women should be secluded in their homes. They should not laugh in the presence of the male members.
2. Complete obedience and unconditional loyalty towards husband, Amir Khusrau warned women that on being alone they should not sit near anyone except her husband. They should avoid having conversation with males.
3. Complete prohibition of aids of beautification for women. He presented women as a symbol of integrity and respect of the family. (Matla-ul-Anwar, pp.193-195)

Amir Khusrau views about the females of his time may be conservative and the preservative. He was the advocate of the old traditional principles and practices. He highlights the figure of father as he highlights the figure of women like; the birth of Messiah from the sinless Maryum was without a father. He also supported the idea that without mother nobody speaks of anyone to have been born.

Amir Khusrau exhorted his daughter never give up her work on the spinning wheel; never to indulge peeping from behind the door or the curtain, or caste her looks in different directions, never to forsake the women's spindle (duk) and the needle (Suzan). Also he gives his view that when the expenses of the wife exceeded from the income of the husband, the affairs the household would become topsy-turvy.

So far as the marriage in term of an institution is concerned Khusrau gave all rights to the family of female to choose a suitable match for the girl, keeping and purchasing girls, polygamy and divorce have been frequently alluded to in rhetorical language. (Rasa, il 4, P.314)

There are many references, in Ashiqa about Dewal Devi Khazir Khan, their marriage ceremonies, ornamentation of the bride like Mashshata (bride dresser), Takht-i-Arusi (bridal throne) and Hajla (the bridal bed with mirror and ornaments). A woman should honor her husband's bed. They possessed their own property besides the irrefutable claim bridal gift from her husband, an essential element of marriage; irrespective of all possessions of women have inferior position and subordination. He says

عروسی را که پیسفر بالنها کنند بیخست حاجت نیست

On the eve of his friend's marriage Khusrau warned the male, not to submit his will before his wife, for yielding and submission might turn ease and comfort into pain and affliction. When one allowed one's hands to be clenched with that of his wife's like henna (Mahandi) it would not be strange if one's hand become bloodstained. If an old man gives ear to and submitted to the sermons of the woman, the woman would turn into man. Let not the Arus or bride become the shah or king. (Rasa, il 2 .p.60.) Incompatibility and infertility lead to the separation of the couple in the shape of divorce. A man possess two bags of dirham (one who has two wives) is in the view of the women a double shelled discs, a woman who has entered twice into matrimony, deserves in the opinion of man, three divorces. Although a man may be water and fire (tears of grief and anger) the women will have an upper hand because of the weapon of the tears she has in hand (i.e) Maher or the marriage portion settle upon the wife before marriage). It serves as the chain binding the neck and throat. But Maher may become a bond of affection for both. Amir Khusrau was not in the favor of marriages with widows. He writes

آنکوز نکم پیوسته از نخواهد در خانهاو خاسته زن نباشد

One who takes a widow as his wife, in the household, then everything happen as desired and wanted by the women. On the other hand he appreciated the sacrifice of Hindu women in these words

چون زنهندو کسی در عاشقی دیوانه نیست

سوختن برشمع مردبیکار هر پروانه نیست

A love- stricken Hindu women was unique in that she dashed herself to death like the moths at the candle.

هستعجیمر دهنده و بی وفا

مردنشاز تیغوز آتشبہجفا

Ib-n-Battutah also mentioned women during sultanate period sacrificing their life in order to maintain their chastity. This is popularly known as Sati and Jauhar. (Gibb, pp.191-192)

Slavery

Amir Khusrau mentioned two types of female slaves. One totally confined for pleasure and enjoyment and other virtually serving as a maid servants doing domestic work like drawing of water and grinding the corn.

Bibi (the wedded wife) treated them harshly and kept them half strived under her watchful eyes. (Askari, p.140) For the purpose of serving, Indian slaves girls were considered best, and for pleasure and enjoyment Turkish and Chinese girls were popular during sultanate period. Khusrau mentioned Indian slave girls having dark complexion, soft and cool by nature, ready to perform difficult tasks. (Askari, p.142)

Public women

Amir Khusrau described the beauty and charm of public women.

سیبیز نخلالزنج تجمسیب
روی نماگشتہ چو آہے بے چاہ
کردبیبیکغمر بجہاں خراب

غمز بزنانے ہمہ مردم فریب
چابز نخر و شنوصافی چوماہ
پردہ پراندر ختہماز آفتاب

Mohammad Shah, a famous musician of that period played melodious music and beautiful dancing girls Fathua and Nusrat Khatun sang, bringing the birds down from the air and robbing the hearers of their senses” while the graceful charming motions of Nusrat Bibi and Maher Afroz, their coquettish gestures and charming motion split a salt mine on every side. (Wahid Mirza, p.79). In the absence of any restriction imposed by the state the number of these public women swelled by the region of Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khalji and even reached to the extent of explosion. Amir Khusrau mentioned many prostitutes and their activities about public attraction .Bibi Tabha received a humiliating reception at the hands of Amir Khusrau. (Ijaz-i-khusravi, Vol.5, p151)

برا زخفتہ ز نرابہشت خزر انپیش
کہخربد آمدبیبینی بہخفتہ ز نخویش
زہی مواعظتاتحکیم دور اندیش
بخونگر یستنامدجو کونخر از ریش
ناچار بی بی تیار ایردمسپالانکرده
برخرنشاندمودر ہمہشہر تشہیر میگردم

The poet placed her on an ass and took her around the city to investigate as to whom she belonged. It was surprising that no one came forth to claim her. Thus Amir Khusrau finally took her to Hakim to punish her for her undesirable acts. (Ijaz-i-Khusravi, vol.5, p.152). The people who were considered knowledgeable were also in the habit of visiting public women.

کیفیتیزرگاتانایجانبیرینجملباستوماجرءعلماءآنجانبچناناشنودبشدکهمولانای شمساسدیدر
ینوقتکههنگامغروبشنزدیکرسیدباستظلمتشانآنچهبودبچونسایهبنمازدیگر یکی بدو شدبومستی
شهو تدر سر شافتاده.

Maulana Shamus Asadi who had acquired respectable position in religious field also visited the house of public women to satisfy his lust. (Ijaz-i-Khusravi, vol.4p.206). The activities of Mujtahidian and Abahitiyan during the reign of Sultan Firoz Shah Taghluq illustrated the extent to which the moral standard of the society (no doubt of a particular sect) had fallen. (Khaizan-ul-Futuh, p.11)

لنکخاتونکیتپیکشنیبودوشنبیکنانگشخرامی
میمودوخطیبکمحرابکوبانگشترنمقدشکجمعهبانجاستخاتوندستخطیبکرازما بعدبماقبلردوظرفی زمانی
روانداشتکپسیتدرجمعهبیسچندکنی مایههمبصرف.

Lank Khatun was short in stature. It happened that a man visit her on Sunday and Monday. Once he visited her out of turn on Friday. This amazed the woman and she refused to entertain him. (Ijaz-i-khusravi, vol.5.p.130).

درپیشگهمجلسارغونخاتونکسببیطریقمر فیلا یکیشکهایر
یشانهدوختنوازبرگیستانتنبولخوردبوازشکهای
گرهبمشکینغیریدرگلوآویختهباکفشدوزکگنبدبهنیوسهبازی میکرد.

Amir Khusrau referred to a prostitute Arghwan Khatun who was seen in her attire decked with ornaments and jewels. There was a necklace around her neck and Bandi on her forehead. She was fond of betel leaves but her excessive kissing created a smell in her mouth. (Ijaz-i-Khusravi, vol5.p.127)

Amir Khusrau has given vivid details about dancing girls. The poet says that mostly these women had pleasant personalities. Their long hair even touched the floor, big eyes, high breasts, juicy lips and sweet voice, all added charm to their beauty. These women wore costly garment decked with ornaments. A black spot on their cheeks was placed in the belief that it would protect them from evil. (Waheed Mirza, pp191-192)

Amir Khusrau highlights the efforts of Sultan Ala-ud-din Khalji by saying that all prostitutes who with their locks under their ears had broken their chains and stretched their feet had now lawfully married. (Khazain-ul-Futuh, p.11)

The Nuh-Sipihir again tells us of Indian girls, with their forehead decorated with sandals and jewels, the parting of their hair being filled with pearls and diamond pendants, wearing a nose ornament and clad in the Devagiri garment. At the end of fifth Risala, there is a satirical reference of some public women of the south. One of them is Didi Miskin of Devagiri who made her black face with white powder as she is coming out of flour mill to cast glamorous side to the people. There was a matron named Uchhaldi, a typical representative of Nayakas of India. She and her fellows always looked youthful amongst men; her ears were like water

– drawing buckets hanging down the wells, her lips were like raised sides of the drain. On one side of her nose, a pearl was suspended from the nostril, while on the other snout (neta) having frozen on the account of cold breeze looked like a hanging pearl. Her nose made her much self-conscious. He says, a bad women never changed herself except she died and this death might correct her deeds.

زآب شود بر تن آلوده پاکپاک نگر دو زن بد جز بخاک
مطلع الانوار ص ۲۳۰

Ideal women

Amir Khusrau's conception of womanhood as a mother, daughter, wife and his ideas of correct role of women in society, her interests and activities, deserve more than a passing notice. He says that the mother is "the symbol of the mercy of God", and "The paradise is under her feet". The rights accruing from the pains of pregnancy and child birth that she bears are obligations on her offspring, a load or a burden. A very small particle of that suffering will suffice to weigh down the scale on the Judgment Day. Even if a son offers 30 cities to her for carrying his burden and sucking him during the period of 30 months he cannot render her all her dues. (Ijaz-i-khusravi, vol.2 p.164 p.325) The long sermons to his daughter and to "all the women" in Hasht Bahisht and Matla-ul-Anwar would lead one to think that the great poet was extremely orthodox and conservative in his attitude towards the fair sex. In one of his verses he seems to lament the birth of his daughter; but he immediately offers his thanks to God for the gift and says that his father had also a mother; the later was also a daughter; Messiah was born without a father; but there was no case of anyone being born without mother.

Addressing his seven years old daughter, Mastura, Khusrau told her that now she was seven years old and had no idea what would happen when she would attain the age of seventeen.

سال تو بفت است ز آئین زیست
حال پس از بنده شناسی که چیست
مطلع الانوار ص ۲۲۳

He says "although your brothers like you are of good stars disposition they are not better than you in my eyes". He further says that when she enters her into a wedlock and herself yourself for occupying the Sedan he would wish her first to be chaste and continent and then wealthy. His first counsel to her is that she should exert with assiduity in her devotion to God and remain under the arched place of worship like her eyes. There is no better ornament for her than the rosary. "Seek good name and character through your own body by being chaste and be friend of purity. For women of bold conduct and deliberations, needles and spindles are spears and arrows. Even if you have enough of gold, don't feel ashamed of which is of iron. It is not sagacious to give up the spinning wheel spindle and needle, as these are the means of covering the body. If you want to be at ease and free from all calamities, keep your face towards the wall and have your back at the doors".

South Asian Studies 31 (2)

The secluded ones are applauded and those who wander about in streets are disgraced. The women who run in streets are not women but bitches.

مرد شستا بان به و وزن بادرنگ آرد نخیز دجو بجنبد دو سنگ

مطلع الانوار ص ۲۲۳

The swing and tambourine which the women play upon are no better than pillories and ropes for them. Songs and melodies appear at first to be simple affairs, but when carried to extremes they serve as a virtual invitation to drunkenness. The real Jalwa (meeting of bride and bridegroom) is not that to look like a bedecked idol or fairy before the husband, but to be bashful, modest and fearful. A woman should be seen behind the curtain mounted with fringed of the veil.

Our author enjoins upon the wives to keep themselves within the limits of their homes and have watchful eyes on all the resources of their houses; have privacy with none except husband, even with brothers and nearest relations. They should remain engaged in their domestic duties rather than being busy with the combs and mirrors; He advised them to treat the husband face as a mirror; avoid being quarrelsome, harsh-tongued and short-tempered lest they might annoy the husbands, and drive away domestic attendants; behave well towards the female servants; consider contentment as their ornaments, if the husband be poor. In short, it is her duty to cultivate such moral excellence as to make him feel proud of being the father of a daughter, hoping to be remembered as such, through her, after his death. There are many devils in the city so, they should lock their door and stay in home. (Matla-ul-Anwar, pp.222-230)

شهر به غوغاست ز دیو پلید قتل به در برنه و گم کن کلید

مطلع الانوار ص ۲۲۶

Dress

The garments of women consisted of Naqab ,Maqna (a veil worn over head) Durrah'a (tunic; upper garment with buttons and loops),Pae-cha(drawer or trouser), Chadar (scarf), Qasb (women's headgear)Izar or Khishtak (drawer), Pairahan (loose or close- fitted shirt from the neck to the naval),Reshaha-i-Damani(women skirt mounted with fringes) Sangchi—Zanan (sina posh or breast-belt), Gulban (neck cloth) and Chirin Baf (a piece of cloth of delicate kind of texture). Izar and Fido were worn by both men and women. They parted their hair just in the middle of the head i.e. a teak made just in centre of head .They used also cosmetics like Ghaza, Gulguna, Sandal, and many other perfumes. They had Gulala (locks) of hair, Jaad (ringlets of curly locks). Double Jaad and Masma (dye made of leaves of wood or indigo used by even the males. (Rasa,il,vol.4p.856) . Amir Khusrau mentioned that bright colours and transparent stuff for clothes were

normally used by the public women. Paicha-i Shalwar, Khastak-i- izar, Niganda, Dotah, kulah, Dastar were very popular dresses among females.

Malik Muhammad Jaisi also gave a detailed version of the ornamentation of females in his epic story of “Padmawati” (Padmawati, p.103). In Matla-ul-Anwar we get a line

هفتونہشکر دہچو ماہتمام

جلوبکندر نظر خاصو عام

Beautification (Solha Singhar)

According to Amir Khusrau Purdah and chastity are the best ornaments for women. Seven plus nine or sixteen refers here to “Solah Singhar” or the sixteen ways of embellishments or ornamentation of the Hindu ladies. The same thing has been referred to in a line addressed by the poet to his daughter Mastura :

نقد عصمتتاد در ششوپنج

چونشدی بہر ہفتونہدرنج

“If you feel grieved for the lack of seven and nine, the current coin of chastity will fall in six and fives (distress)”. The references are to the article of ladies ‘toilets dresses and ornamentations started from , henna, Wasma (woad), Surma (colloymium), Surkhi (lipstick) Ghaza (face powder), Safidab (white paint), Ghalia (civet), Sar-aweza (head dress or veil), Gushwara (earring), silsila (chain), halqa-i-bini (nose ring), Guluband (necklace), Bazuband (armlet), Dastana (bracelet), Khalkhal (ankle ornament), Angushtar (ring), etc.

مخدراتموی زفر قراستراستکرده

The veiled ladies divided their hair in a straight line at the top of their heads; this is called Mang in Hindi. Amir Khusrau permitted women to use mirror, if the husband could afford to purchase it, otherwise the eyes of the husband were enough to see the beautification of his woman. He prescribed the use of mirror in a specific manner. A woman should place the mirror on her legs, bent downward and look into the mirror in such a way that no one could observe her. (Hasht Bahist .p, 31)

Amir Khushrua narrates two epics of love and affection in the categories of Ashiqa or Ishqiyya Laila Majjnu and Deval devi khizar khan.

گفتم قدمی زدن توانم

پی پر پی او چنا نکہ دانم

تسلیم ہمان جریدہ گشتم

از شیوہ خود رمیدہ گشتم

بر دم زمین تکلف خویش

چیدم بقلم نمونہ پیش

بستم بسلامت روانی

آرائش پیکر معافی

از شیوہ من برون برہ نام

کان مایہ کہ صنعتی بودخام

Devaldevi Khizar khan described the characters of two women, Devaldevi and the mother of prince Khidr khan .She disapproved their love and persuaded the king to send Devaldev to a different residence in red palace. She at the same time arranged Khidr’s marriage with her brother’s (Alap Khan) daughter and the marriage was duly celebrated in spite of disinclination of the prince. The prince could not forget Deval devi and pained for her. His mother alarmed at his grief at last consented to his marriage with his beloved and they were united. Deval Rani

supported her husband through thick and thin. She nursed her husband when tyrant Kafur khan blinded him and her grief and sorrow for his sad plight was unbounded. After the assassination of Kafur, Mubarak Shah ascended to the throne of Delhi, he soon managed to get hold of a base excuse to end the life of Khidr khan –the letter refused to hand over to him his wife Deval devi. The prince fell beneath the sword of a monstrous slave to be wept and mourned by his aged mother and his devoted wife. Khidr was buried in a tower in the fortress. Khasrau was silent about the fate of Deval devi.

Elliot and Dowson narrate Deval devi was wounded while the other ladies of the Harem were slaughtered .Khusrau concluded the story with the verses in which he moralized the affairs of the world and spoke wistfully of his own life spent in the pursuit of poetry.

Conclusion

Amir Khusrau's life, his career, the informative influence on him and operative principles which might have guided him looks very conservative. However, it would not be fair to judge the past with the yard stick of present standard. Amir Khusrau categorically portrayed the women in middle Ages. He describes the characteristic of private women and appreciates her seclusion through various methods. He even uses the metaphor of the advice which he has given to his own daughter. Khusrau condemned the public women and gives justified reasons of her lower status in the society. Amir Khusrau as musician had the idea of these public women that's why he drew a visible line between virtuous lady and those women who were sitting in the bazaar at that time. Purdah was a traits followed by the modest ladies at that time. Indian society was patriarchal so all choices were given to male even to decide the fate of female. Amir Khusrau's work has a significant contribution towards the cultural traits of women i-e (solah singer), ornamentation and beautification of women. He glorifies the folk story of Laila Majnoon and narrates the feelings of Deval devi and Khizar khan. Amir Khusrau's poetry is multidimensional .This paper explore one social aspect of his work where as other are beyond the scope of this paper.

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