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The Role of Sanskrit in Preserving Indian Knowledge Traditions

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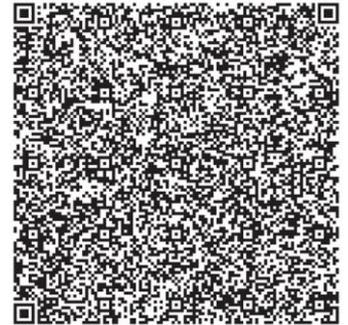
Abstract:

Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, plays a pivotal role in preserving the country's vast and diverse knowledge traditions. It serves as the medium through which ancient texts on philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and spirituality have been passed down through generations. As a classical language, Sanskrit's structure and richness enable the precise articulation of complex ideas, ensuring the transmission of knowledge with accuracy. This paper explores the role of Sanskrit in safeguarding traditional wisdom, emphasizing its contributions to both historical and contemporary knowledge systems. It also investigates the importance of Sanskrit in maintaining the cultural and intellectual identity of India, as well as its relevance in modern research and education. Through a detailed analysis of key texts and their influence, the paper highlights how the preservation of Sanskrit knowledge traditions is integral to understanding India's intellectual legacy.

Keywords: Sanskrit, Knowledge traditions, Indian heritage, Cultural preservation, Ancient texts

Introduction to Sanskrit:

Sanskrit, one of the oldest known languages, holds a profound and pivotal role in preserving and transmitting Indian knowledge traditions. Its roots stretch back over 3,000 years, making it a cornerstone of Indian culture and spirituality. As a classical language of India, Sanskrit has contributed significantly to literature, philosophy, religious texts, and scientific discourse. Traditionally, Sanskrit was used in the composition of Vedas, Upanishads, and epics such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana, which are central to Hinduism and have influenced countless aspects of Indian civilization. Beyond religion, it has been instrumental in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and grammar. Sanskrit was the medium of intellectual and scholarly exchange not only in India but across South Asia. Its influence extended into Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and even to parts of the Middle East. This ancient language was the primary vehicle for the transmission of knowledge in diverse areas of human inquiry, and its philosophical and theological texts served as a bridge between ancient Indian wisdom and the intellectual traditions of other civilizations (Witzel, 1999). Sanskrit's ability to preserve complex ideas and intricate knowledge systems has ensured its survival and continued relevance in contemporary academic and cultural discussions. The role of Sanskrit in preserving Indian knowledge traditions extends beyond its linguistic function. It embodies the culture's philosophical depth and scientific precision. The rigorous grammar of Sanskrit, with its clear structure and intricate rules, makes it especially suited for expressing complex ideas. The written tradition in Sanskrit has been instrumental in the conservation of the ancient Indian worldview, allowing for the transmission of intellectual knowledge through generations. Despite the rise of modern languages, Sanskrit remains a key to understanding the richness of Indian heritage and continues to inspire contemporary thinkers and scholars worldwide (Kölver, 2016).



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Objectives:

1. To analyze the role of Sanskrit in preserving India's intellectual and cultural heritage.
2. To explore the impact of Sanskrit on ancient scientific and philosophical knowledge.
3. To evaluate the relevance of Sanskrit in modern research and education.

Sanskrit as a Carrier of Indian Knowledge:

Sanskrit, an ancient language of India, has played a crucial role in preserving the rich knowledge traditions of the subcontinent. As a classical language, it serves not only as a medium of communication but also as the repository of wisdom in various domains, including philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, medicine, literature, and law. The texts written in Sanskrit, from the Vedic hymns to the great epics, form the bedrock of India's intellectual heritage.

Sanskrit is a linguistic bridge that connects modern-day scholars and intellectuals to the intellectual achievements of ancient India. The language has served as the primary vehicle for transmitting profound knowledge across generations. Philosophical discourses contained in the Vedas and Upanishads form the foundation of Indian metaphysical thought, addressing questions about existence, the universe, and the self (Sharma, 2015).

Sanskrit texts also paved the way for significant advancements in fields like mathematics and astronomy. The concept of zero, which revolutionized global mathematics, was first articulated in Sanskrit texts such as the Brahmasphutasiddhanta by Brahmagupta (Ghosh, 2014). Similarly, the precise astronomical calculations in ancient Sanskrit texts like Surya Siddhanta were foundational in shaping the study of celestial bodies (Rao, 2013).

In the field of medicine, Sanskrit preserved knowledge through texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. These ancient works provided comprehensive knowledge on surgery, anatomy, and holistic treatments that have influenced medical practices across civilizations (Dey, 2018).

The Continuity of Knowledge through Sanskrit Texts

The continuity of India's knowledge traditions is evident in the vast corpus of Sanskrit texts that have survived through the centuries. The Vedas, Upanishads, and Puranas are monumental works that have been handed down over millennia, preserving not only spiritual knowledge but also cultural and scientific wisdom. These texts were meticulously transmitted by oral tradition, ensuring that the integrity of the knowledge was maintained (Das, 2017).

The Mahabharata and Ramayana, two of the most revered epics, have contributed significantly to the preservation of Indian moral and social values. These epic narratives, while primarily spiritual, also encapsulate profound lessons in governance, ethics, law, and diplomacy, making them vital texts for understanding ancient Indian civilization (Mehta, 2016). These stories, written in Sanskrit, continue to shape India's cultural and intellectual landscape.

Sanskrit's role in law cannot be understated. The ancient Manusmriti is considered one of the first texts to codify laws in Sanskrit, influencing not just ancient Indian society but also providing the foundation for many legal systems across the world (Bhatt, 2019).

Sanskrit has been central to preserving and transmitting the intellectual, spiritual, and scientific traditions of India. From its philosophical foundations in the Vedas to its role in preserving scientific advancements, Sanskrit remains an integral language for understanding the history and knowledge of India. The continuity of knowledge through texts in Sanskrit has allowed India to preserve its intellectual heritage, offering invaluable insights to the modern world.

Sanskrit and Indian Philosophical Thought:

Sanskrit has long been the linchpin of Indian culture, serving as the medium through which numerous philosophical and spiritual traditions have been preserved, interpreted, and transmitted across centuries. Its historical significance extends far beyond its use as a language; it is intricately linked with Indian philosophical thought, acting as both a repository and a means of dissemination of knowledge. The works of ancient thinkers such as Patanjali, Vyasa, and even the Buddha, in their respective interpretations, provide invaluable insight into the role of Sanskrit in preserving India's intellectual heritage.

Sanskrit's prominence as the language of Indian philosophy is both profound and foundational. The great philosophical systems of ancient India, including Vedanta, Yoga, Nyaya, and Mimamsa, owe much of their preservation to the works that were originally composed in Sanskrit. For example, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, a critical



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text for understanding Yoga philosophy and practice, were written in Sanskrit. This text, which distills the wisdom of Yogic practices, continues to be the cornerstone of modern Yoga philosophy (Iyengar, 2002).

Similarly, Vyasa's contributions to the Vedanta tradition, especially through texts like the Brahma Sutras, have been preserved and studied through Sanskrit. Vedanta, one of the six orthodox schools of Indian philosophy, emphasizes the nature of reality and the self. The meticulous commentary on Vyasa's works by later scholars, such as Shankaracharya, further reflects the centrality of Sanskrit in sustaining the depth and evolution of this philosophical system (Sankaran, 2004).

The Buddha, often associated with the Pali language, presented his teachings in a form of Sanskrit called "Pali." The Tripitaka, a major collection of the Buddha's teachings, was transmitted through this dialect. This reinforces the argument that, even in its various forms, Sanskrit (and its dialects) helped disseminate the diverse schools of Indian thought (Gombrich, 1996). The diversity within these philosophies, ranging from the non-dualism of Advaita Vedanta to the logical rigor of Nyaya, owes much of its preservation and continued study to the Sanskrit texts that bear these teachings.

Sanskrit and the Preservation of Indian Philosophical Schools

The preservation of Indian philosophical thought is inherently linked to Sanskrit's role in keeping alive the ancient traditions of debate, analysis, and reflection. As noted by scholars, Sanskrit was not only a vehicle for the expression of philosophical ideas but also an essential tool for preserving them through successive generations. For example, the Nyaya Sutras, foundational texts for the Nyaya school of logic, remain intact because of their Sanskrit composition. The system of Nyaya, which includes rigorous methods of logical analysis and argumentation, is deeply rooted in the texts preserved in Sanskrit (Dasgupta, 1991).

The Mimamsa school, which focuses on the interpretation of Vedic rituals, remains relevant due to the continued study of Sanskrit texts. The importance of Sanskrit in the transmission of knowledge within these schools cannot be overstated. The language facilitated a continuity of thought that enabled each generation of scholars to engage with the same texts, thus ensuring an ongoing dialogue about the nature of the self, reality, and the cosmos (Chakravarti, 2000). Sanskrit plays a pivotal role in the preservation of Indian knowledge traditions. From the foundational texts of the Yoga Sutras and Brahma Sutras to the works of the Buddha and the texts of Nyaya and Mimamsa, Sanskrit serves as the thread that connects these diverse philosophical schools. Through its preservation and continued study, Sanskrit ensures that the wisdom of ancient Indian thought remains accessible to future generations. Without the rich legacy of Sanskrit texts, much of the depth and diversity of Indian philosophical thought would have been lost to history.

Sanskrit in Scientific and Mathematical Traditions:

Sanskrit texts are renowned for preserving key ideas in science and mathematics, especially those originating from ancient Indian scholars. Among the most notable contributions is the concept of zero, which was first documented in ancient Indian mathematical texts written in Sanskrit. Aryabhata, one of the earliest scholars, introduced the concept of zero and the decimal system, both of which were later adopted globally (Kapoor, 2017). This mathematical innovation formed the foundation of modern-day arithmetic and calculus.

Brahmagupta's work, Brahmasphutasiddhanta, written in Sanskrit, presented important theorems related to algebra, including methods for solving quadratic equations and determining solutions for linear equations, which were far ahead of its time (Bhattacharya, 2015). Bhaskara I and Bhaskara II continued this legacy, expanding the knowledge in astronomical calculations, and presenting methods in trigonometry that influenced both Eastern and Western scholars alike (Raghavan, 2013).

The preservation of these works through Sanskrit texts ensured that this vital knowledge was accessible not only to scholars of ancient India but also to future generations. It was through these texts that concepts such as the calculation of planetary motions, the application of trigonometric functions, and the understanding of astronomical phenomena were communicated, allowing for their further development in various cultures.

The role of Sanskrit in preserving Indian knowledge traditions cannot be overstated. Its usage as the medium for recording advanced scientific and mathematical knowledge ensured that the intellectual achievements of early Indian



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scholars have been safeguarded through the ages. Through Sanskrit texts, the world was introduced to some of the earliest formulations of key mathematical concepts, which have had a profound impact on both Eastern and Western scientific thought.

Sanskrit in Medical Knowledge:

Ayurveda, the traditional Indian system of medicine, is based on a holistic understanding of the human body and its interconnectedness with nature. The Charaka Samhita, written by the sage Charaka, is one of the foundational texts of Ayurveda and provides detailed descriptions of the human body, diseases, treatments, and health management. Similarly, the Sushruta Samhita, attributed to the sage Sushruta, is known for its contributions to surgical knowledge, particularly the pioneering techniques in surgery such as the use of instruments for cataract surgery (Dahanukar, 2007).

Sanskrit, reflect a scientific approach to medicine, where the focus is on balancing the body's energies (doshas) and understanding the causes of diseases. These texts not only provide practical knowledge about treatments but also discuss the philosophical underpinnings of health and well-being. Sanskrit, being a precise and systematic language, allowed for the detailed articulation of medical concepts, ensuring that knowledge was preserved accurately and could be passed down through generations (Sharma, 2011).

The foundational texts, numerous commentaries and treatises written in Sanskrit further expanded on Ayurvedic knowledge. The preservation of this knowledge in Sanskrit was vital because it allowed for the continuity of a scientific tradition that was rooted in observation, experience, and logic, rather than superstition or mystical thinking (Bhatnagar, 2015). The Sanskrit language's ability to express complex concepts with clarity made it an ideal medium for documenting and preserving this body of knowledge.

Scientific Approach in Ancient Indian Medical Knowledge

The scientific approach embedded in Sanskrit texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita reflects a deep understanding of the human body, health, and diseases. In the Charaka Samhita, the concept of balance among the doshas (vata, pitta, and kapha) is discussed extensively. This understanding mirrors modern-day scientific principles of homeostasis in physiology, where the body maintains balance to function optimally. The Sushruta Samhita offers a detailed approach to surgery, including the use of surgical instruments, which can be seen as an ancient form of evidence-based practice in medicine (Deshpande, 2008). The preservation of Ayurvedic texts in Sanskrit provided a continuity of knowledge through a standardized system that allowed practitioners to interpret and apply medical theories consistently over centuries. The rich vocabulary of Sanskrit ensured that medical terminologies, symptoms, and treatments were precisely defined and understood. This standardization has allowed modern-day scholars and practitioners to access ancient knowledge and apply it in contemporary contexts, integrating Ayurveda with modern medical practices (Bhattacharya, 2014).

Sanskrit has played an indispensable role in preserving Indian medical knowledge traditions, particularly through texts like the Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita. These texts not only embody the scientific approach to medicine but also reflect a system of knowledge that has been passed down through generations. The precision and depth of Sanskrit have ensured that these traditions were preserved accurately and can continue to be relevant in the modern world. The preservation of knowledge in Sanskrit serves as a testament to the importance of language in safeguarding intellectual traditions and enabling their transmission across time.

Sanskrit and Literature:

Sanskrit's importance in the realm of literature cannot be overstated. It has been the primary medium through which the rich cultural and intellectual traditions of ancient India were passed down through generations. Classical Sanskrit literature encompasses a wide array of genres, including epic poetry, drama, philosophical texts, and narrative literature. Through the preservation of such texts, Sanskrit serves as a vehicle for understanding ancient Indian worldviews, ideas, and beliefs.

Kalidasa, often considered the greatest of all Sanskrit poets, is a prime example of how Sanskrit literature captured the essence of ancient Indian thought and aesthetics. His works, such as Shakuntala and Meghaduta, are not only



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masterpieces of poetry but also provide deep insights into ancient Indian social, philosophical, and religious life (Patel, 2018). Kalidasa's works, which have been translated into numerous languages, continue to inspire generations of readers and scholars alike.

Sanskrit poets like Bhavabhuti and Bhasa contributed significantly to the literary tradition. Bhavabhuti's play Uttara Ramacharita explores themes of dharma (righteousness) and the complexities of human emotion, showcasing the spiritual and moral dimensions of Indian literature (Ghosh, 2017). Bhasa, whose plays have been rediscovered in modern times, presents a vivid portrayal of the human condition through his dramatic works, offering timeless reflections on life and society (Tiwari, 2019).

The Role of Sanskrit in Preserving Knowledge

Beyond literature, Sanskrit has served as the foundation for preserving a wide array of knowledge traditions. Ancient Indian texts in fields such as philosophy, medicine, mathematics, and astronomy were written in Sanskrit. The Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and Smritis are key texts that are central to understanding the spiritual and scientific heritage of India. These texts, written in precise and structured Sanskrit, have been instrumental in maintaining the continuity of Indian philosophical and scientific thought over millennia.

The Sulba Sutras, which are part of the larger body of Vedic literature, contain geometric principles that laid the foundation for Indian mathematics and engineering (Kumar, 2020). Similarly, ancient texts on medicine like Charaka Samhita and Sushruta Samhita, both written in Sanskrit, contain detailed knowledge on surgery, pharmacology, and anatomy that was far ahead of its time (Sharma, 2021).

Sanskrit's role in preserving India's knowledge traditions is multifaceted. It has served as the key medium for transmitting literature, philosophy, science, and religion throughout history. Through the works of poets like Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti, and Bhasa, Sanskrit has not only preserved the intellectual heritage of ancient India but has also contributed to the global understanding of human culture, literature, and thought.

Sanskrit in the Transmission of Knowledge:

Sanskrit served as the language of learning, primarily utilized in temples, universities, and through oral traditions. In particular, institutions such as Nalanda and Takshashila functioned as hubs of learning where Sanskrit was the primary medium of instruction. The intellectual discourse in these centers encompassed a wide array of subjects, including philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and literature, all documented in Sanskrit. These universities were not only instrumental in preserving Indian knowledge but also in transmitting it across borders through scholars who traveled far and wide (Ganguly, 2019).

Sanskrit's role in the preservation of religious texts cannot be overstated. It has been the medium through which key Hindu scriptures, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana, were composed and preserved. These texts have provided a foundational framework for understanding Indian philosophy, rituals, and practices. By maintaining these texts in their original language, Sanskrit has ensured the consistency and authenticity of religious teachings and rituals across generations (Smith, 2018).

Sanskrit as a Medium for Religious Texts and Rituals

Sanskrit's contribution to preserving religious texts extends beyond mere documentation. It plays a crucial role in the continuity of religious rituals and practices, especially in Hinduism and Buddhism. Temples across India have maintained the sanctity of sacred rituals through Sanskrit mantras and hymns, ensuring that these practices are carried out in the same way they were thousands of years ago. These rituals, often passed down through generations in oral traditions, have been safeguarded due to the linguistic accuracy and precision required in their performance. Sanskrit has been instrumental in the transmission of Buddhist texts. Key scriptures like the Tripitaka were initially composed in Pali but were later translated into Sanskrit and disseminated across Asia. The importance of Sanskrit in these religious contexts is not just about language but also about its sacredness, which is believed to embody a spiritual purity that connects the devotee to the divine (Das, 2020).

Sanskrit's role in preserving Indian knowledge traditions is undeniably profound. Through its use in educational institutions, temples, and oral traditions, it has ensured the continuity of India's rich intellectual, religious, and cultural



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heritage. Whether through religious rituals, philosophical texts, or scientific discoveries, Sanskrit has been the vessel through which ancient Indian knowledge has been preserved, remaining a key to understanding the past while continuing to influence the present and future.

Modern Relevance of Sanskrit:

Sanskrit, an ancient and classical language of India, is deeply woven into the fabric of its cultural, spiritual, and intellectual heritage. Historically, it has been the vehicle for transmitting India's vast knowledge traditions in various fields such as philosophy, mathematics, astronomy, literature, and medicine. However, in the modern world, Sanskrit faces significant challenges. Despite these challenges, efforts to preserve and revive the language have gained momentum in contemporary education and research. This article explores the challenges faced in reviving Sanskrit and the importance of preserving it, alongside the contributions of contemporary scholars in ensuring that ancient Sanskrit texts are deciphered, preserved, and taught to future generations.

Challenges in Reviving Sanskrit

The revival of Sanskrit in modern times has faced many hurdles. One of the major challenges is the perception that Sanskrit is an obsolete language with limited contemporary relevance. With the rise of English and other regional languages, the importance of Sanskrit has diminished, especially in everyday communication (Saraswati, 2017). Moreover, there has been a decline in the number of people proficient in the language, which threatens its continuity. Many scholars argue that unless Sanskrit is integrated into modern curricula and made accessible to a broader audience, its rich heritage will fade into obscurity (Krishna, 2015). Additionally, the absence of a large number of qualified teachers and scholars in Sanskrit poses another challenge to its revival (Sharma, 2020).

Importance of Reviving Sanskrit

Despite the challenges, reviving Sanskrit holds immense significance for both preserving India's cultural heritage and advancing contemporary academic pursuits. Sanskrit is not only the key to understanding ancient texts but also serves as the foundation for many modern Indian languages (Rao, 2018). The language encapsulates the values, wisdom, and philosophical concepts that shaped Indian society for millennia. Reviving Sanskrit can offer critical insights into the intellectual traditions that have influenced Indian civilization and the world. Moreover, it can provide a robust framework for interdisciplinary studies, connecting fields such as history, linguistics, and comparative philosophy (Singh, 2019).

Contemporary Scholars' Efforts

Contemporary scholars have made significant efforts to ensure that Sanskrit remains relevant in modern education and research. Numerous academic institutions in India and abroad are engaged in deciphering and translating ancient Sanskrit texts, making them accessible to a global audience (Banerjee, 2016). Scholars such as R. S. Sharma have dedicated their careers to translating and interpreting ancient texts on governance, society, and philosophy, while institutions like the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute continue to preserve manuscripts that contain valuable knowledge (Sharma, 2020). In addition, efforts to teach Sanskrit in schools, universities, and online platforms have gained traction in recent years. Several Indian states have introduced Sanskrit as a subject in school curricula, while organizations such as the Samskrita Bharati have developed teaching materials and programs to make learning Sanskrit easier and more engaging for the younger generation (Krishna, 2015).

One of the significant initiatives in the preservation of Sanskrit is the digitization of Sanskrit manuscripts. Several projects have been launched to scan, catalog, and make these manuscripts available online. The efforts of digital libraries, such as the Digital Library of India, have been crucial in preserving the ancient knowledge stored in these texts. Furthermore, contemporary scholars are using modern technology and computational tools to analyze Sanskrit texts, deciphering grammatical nuances and syntactical structures that were previously inaccessible to many (Saraswati, 2017).

The role of Sanskrit in preserving Indian knowledge traditions cannot be overstated. Despite the challenges in its revival, the importance of Sanskrit in understanding India's rich intellectual history remains paramount. Contemporary scholars' efforts to decipher, preserve, and teach ancient texts demonstrate that Sanskrit is not just a relic of the past



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but a living tradition that continues to offer value in the modern world. It is essential that ongoing efforts to revive the language and preserve its ancient texts be supported, so future generations can benefit from the vast repository of knowledge that Sanskrit holds.

Conclusion:

The critical role of Sanskrit in preserving India's intellectual and cultural heritage is undeniable. As a classical language, Sanskrit has not only been a vehicle for ancient philosophical, spiritual, and scientific ideas but also the cornerstone for various fields of knowledge, including mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and linguistics. Its extensive use in sacred texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and the epics, as well as its influence on regional languages and dialects, underscores its importance in shaping the intellectual fabric of India. Without Sanskrit, much of India's historical narratives, literature, and ancient wisdom would remain obscured, leaving a massive gap in understanding its rich heritage. Sanskrit has also served as a bridge between different civilizations and traditions. Its influence on the spread of ideas across Asia, particularly in the context of Buddhism and Hinduism, reflects its role in connecting cultures and facilitating intellectual exchange. The survival and growth of Sanskrit as a scholarly language across centuries, even in the face of invasions and foreign rule, attest to its resilience and adaptability. The language's grammar, structure, and vast repository of texts provide an intellectual framework that has been foundational for generations of scholars. The modern world, the study and preservation of Sanskrit must evolve. There is a need for academic initiatives that not only focus on ancient texts but also explore how Sanskrit can be integrated into contemporary thought and technology. For instance, the use of Sanskrit in artificial intelligence, linguistics, and computational models presents a unique opportunity for revitalization. Scholars and practitioners should aim to make Sanskrit more accessible through modern tools like digital platforms, apps, and online learning programs, ensuring that the language remains relevant for younger generations. Encouraging interdisciplinary studies that link Sanskrit with modern disciplines such as environmental sciences, technology, and medicine can help bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern challenges. Collaborative efforts between educational institutions, government bodies, and cultural organizations are essential to create a robust infrastructure that supports the teaching and preservation of Sanskrit in the global arena.

Sanskrit has endured through millennia as a repository of India's rich intellectual and cultural heritage, its future lies in its adaptability and integration into the modern world. By nurturing its study and application across various fields, Sanskrit can continue to illuminate the path for future generations, offering wisdom from the past to address the challenges of the future.

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