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## Research Article

### ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE SUGALI TRIBE

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#### ABSTRACT

As the above story tells the Sugalis trace their origin to their ancestors called Mola and Mota, the two brothers, who were among the disciples of Lord Krishna.<sup>3</sup> The Sugalis believe that the two brother - Mola and Mota were brought into the world through the spiritual power of the Jagadguru. The saint did not provide any means of livelihood for the two brothers. Hence, both of them approached Lord Krishna who then named these two unknown persons as Mola and Mota and asked them to tend his cows to which they readily agreed. From then Mola and Mota became the close disciples of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna at the time of completing his incarnation (close of Dwaparayuga), distributed all his 16,000 Gopikas among his disciples. Mota was given Rukmini, Mola was given Radha, a Gopika from Yadava community as a wife to farmer on condition that he should not have any sexual relation with her. Radha and Mola became life partners and became dancers and acrobats. They used to go from one capital to another capital exhibiting their skill before the Rajas and Maharajas. One day they entertained a serious thought about the adoption of children for the future expansion of their community. Accordingly they happened to visit Raja Lohad Pamhar, Swamsha Kail of Dharungadh. Radhs and Mola exhibited their dance before the Raja. Raja was highly pleased with their amusing dances and agreed to the desire of Radha and Mole a child of his as a reward. The Raja was happy to give one of his sons as reward. Taking this child with them they approached Raja Kasam of Rathod. Here too by their exquisite dance they could get one of the sons of Raja Kasam. In the same manner they went to Raja Chetur Bhuj alias Phoolia of Mandvi. He too was pleased with their dances and gave away his son as reward.

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#### INTRODUCTION

The origin of the Sugali tribe is contained in mythological legends and stories which are popular among this tribe. Sugalis are the descendents of the Rajputs and hence, they call themselves as Kashatriyas,<sup>1</sup> this is illustrated by the following legend.

Lord Vishnu, the creator of the world first created two Maharshi, namely, Bhrgu and Raghu. These Maharashis created both Raja Dhaj and Amba Bai and to them was born a son known as Kower Dhaj. In turn Kower Dhaj had Rajpal and to Rajpal was bom Reem. Reem had two sons, namely Habal and Kabal. The direct descendents of Habal were Hindus and those of Kabal were Muslims. Habal had a son named Waged. Waged had Jagad, Jagad had Sandal, Sandal had Kasam, Kasam had Karan, and to Karan were bom two sons namely Jeeda and Chada. The descendants of the Jeeda are Sugalis. The descendants of Chada are the other Hindu communities.<sup>2</sup>

As the above story tells the Sugalis trace their origin to their ancestors called Mola and Mota, the two brothers, who were among the disciples of Lord Krishna.<sup>3</sup> The Sugalis believe that the two brother - Mola and Mota were brought into the world through the spiritual power of the Jagadguru. The saint did not provide any means of livelihood for the two brothers. Hence, both of them approached Lord Krishna who then named these two unknown persons as Mola and Mota and asked them to tend his cows to which they readily agreed. From then Mola and Mota became the close disciples of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna at the time of completing his incarnation (close of Dwaparayuga), distributed all his 16,000 Gopikas among his disciples. Mota was given Rukmini, Mola was given Radha, a Gopika from Yadava community as a wife to farmer on condition that he should not have any sexual relation with her. Radha and Mola became life partners and became dancers and acrobats. They used to go from one capital to another capital exhibiting their skill before the Rajas and Maharajas. One day they entertained a serious thought about the adoption of children for the future expansion of their community.

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Accordingly they happened to visit Raja Lohad Pamhar, Swamsha Kail of Dharungadh. Radhs and Mola exhibited their dance before the Raja. Raja was highly pleased with their amusing dances and agreed to the desire of Radha and Mole a child of his as a reward. The Raja was happy to give one of his sons as reward. Taking this child with them they approached Raja Kasam of Rathod. Here too by their exquisite dance they could get one of the sons of Raja Kasam. In the same manner they went to Raja Chetur Bhuj alias Phoolia of Mandvi. He too was pleased with their dances and gave away his son as reward.

Along with these three boys, Radha and Mola visited several places exhibiting their dances. These three boys were named as Raja Pamhar, Karam Rathod and Payan Chowhan. They were known as Gwars, and they married three Brahmin girls. The descendants of these three were Gwars (Sugalis). In connection with the marriages of these boys the mythology of Sugali says,<sup>4</sup> there was a Brahmin whose name was Neelakantham had three daughters and a son. The names of three daughters were Kakarche, Modarche, Nagarche and the name of the son was Parshram. In the olden days it was customary among the Brahmin that the marriage of a Brahmin girl should take place before the attainment of menarche. As Neelakantham could not celebrate the marriage ceremony of his daughters in time, the he was forced to leave his daughters in the jungle. In the jungle Radha happened to see those three girls and were married to her adopted sons.

In the 1901 census report, Thanda and Vali Sugriva are given as synonyms for the tribal name, vali and Sugriva were two monkey chiefs mentioned in the Ramayana, from who the Sugalis claim to be descended. The legend, as given by Mr.F.S.Mullay, is that “there were two brothers, Mota and Mola, descendants of Sugriva. Mola had no issue, so being an expert in gymnastics, he went with his wife Radha, and exhibited his skills at ‘Rathanatch’ before three Rajahs. They were so taken with Mola’s skill, and the grace and beauty of Radha, and of her playing of the nagara or drum, that they asked what they could do for them. Mola asked each of the Rajahs for a boy, that he might adopt him as his son. This request was accorded and Mola adopted three boys. Their names were Chavia, Panchar and Ratade.<sup>5</sup> These three boys were well trained in acrobatics and soon they attained marriageable age.

Then Radha Bai started thinking of how to get them married.

Brahmin in a village and he had three daughters and a son. It was customary for them to get their daughters married at a prepuberty age. As he was in abject poverty, he failed to get his daughters married. Then his family was ex-communicated from the village. Once night out of sheer frustration, he leaves his daughters and son at a village alone and escapes from that place. The next morning, his children start crying. Radha Bai comes to know about them and takes them to her house. The three Brahmin girls were got married to her three sons. Eldest son Rathod was married to Khokrochi, her second son Chouhan was married to Nagarachi and Pamhar to Asavali. Rathod and his wife Khokrochi gave birth to two sons. The eldest son again had 14 children and younger son had 13 children. Hence Rathod clan consists of 27 sub clans and these are better known as Sattais Pada Bhukya.

The origin and history of Sugali community is ambiguous. There are several legends that explain their origin and history. Mythological affinity is one of the unique features of Sugali society which distinguishes them from other tribals. They trace their origin to Mota and Mola who were in the court of Lord Krishna. Mota and Mola are the brothers and they were the cowherders. When Lord Krishna was ending his avatara in Dvapara Yuga, they requested him to provide livelihood. Then Lord Krishna donated Rathod to them. Radha was treated as a mother of Mola and Mota. They earned their livelihood by performing the acrobatics at various places. When they reached old age, they started thinking about their livelihood. On one day they performed acrobatics in Rathod ghad fort and won the applause of the King. There they expressed their desire to have a son as to look after them in their old age. The Rathod dynasty gave a boy to them. After some days they reached Chouhanghad and acquired a son from Chouhan dynasty. There they got a boy from Pamhars in Pamhanghad. Chouhan had got six sons and Chouhan clan has gotras which are known as Chogot Chouhan. Pamhar had twelve sons and Pamhar clan had Bargot Pamhar. The brother of the three Brahmin sisters was Parasuram. He marries the daughter of Jharapala of Pamhar clan. His clan is known as Jadhav Vadatiya which consists of fifty two sub-gotras better known as Bavan Pada Vadatiya.

Another story relating to the origin of the Vadatiya clan was that long ago there were some Sugali families living in a thandas. The Naik of the thandas was having three daughters. A Brahmin living in a neighbouring thandas had developed illicit connection with the daughters of the Naik. No one in the thandas was aware of this, but it became public when the girl became pregnant and gave birth to a boy. The Gor Panchayat consisting of all the Naiks of neighbouring thandas was summoned to discuss and decide this case. Since the Naik was very influential and also good at heart, the Panchayat took a lenient view of the affair and decided to admit the Brahmin boy into their community. They also decided to establish a new clan to accommodate the newly bom boy. They named the new clan as ‘Vadatiya’ meaning ‘banyan’ since the panchayat deliberated the case under the ‘Vadatiga’ tree.

The mothers of these clans are treated as the clan Goddesses. Rathod clan has their Goddess Khokrochi or Parvati and Jillegu (Callotrophis giganta) plant is treated as their totemic plant. Chouhan clan is Goddess Nagarachi or Lakshin is worshipped in the form of Tulasi Plant (Ocimum Sanctum). Pamhar clan deity is Asavali or chandimata and their totemic plant is Jammi tree (Prosopis Spicegera). Jadhav clan has Pasvali as their clan deity and she is represented by Banyan tree (Ficus Bengalensis).

The above legendary story reveals that the Sugalis are the descendents of Kshatriya father and Brahmin mother. They are the admixture of Brahmins and Kshatriyas. Hence they possess the courage of Kshatriyas as intellectual capacities of Brahmins.

**Rathod Clan: Sattaispada Bhukya - 27sub-gotras** 16 72 83 94 5

1. Karamtot	10. Rajavath	19. Merajoth
2. Kanavath	11. Degavath	20. Depavath
3. Pitavath	12. Keemavath	21. Rathla
4. Khetavath	13. Bhilavath	22. Sotki
5. Megavath	14. Bhanavath	23. Jhandavath

6. Nenavath	15. Khilavath	24. Devasoth
7. Dungavath	16. Meravath	25. Pata loth
8. Kodavath	17. Khatroth	26. Ranasoth
9. Ramavath	18. Aloth	27. Sangavath

Chouhan Clan: Chogot Chouhan has 6 sub-gotras

- |            |             |
|------------|-------------|
| 1. Mood    | 4. Korra    |
| 2. Paltya  | 5. Dumavath |
| 3. Sabavat | 6. Keloth   |

Pamhar Clan: It is otherwise called as Bargot Pamhar. It consists of 12 sub-gotras.

1. Vislavat	5. Nunsavat	9. Tarabanni
2. Vankodoth	6. Injrvat	10. Pamadiya
3. Jharapala	7. Inlot Pamhar	11. Ivat Pamar
4. Amgot	8. Banni	12. Chaivot Pamar

The Jadhav clan consists of fifty two sub-gotras. They are known as Bavan Pada Vadatiya. Some of these sub-gotras are given below.

1. Guglooth	8. Tejavath	15. Jajigiri Vadatiya	22. Dugaroth
2. Goram	9. Bumeavath	16. Bhagavan Das	23. Meravath
3. Dharavath	10. Maloth	17. Badavath	24. Lulavath
4. Lokavath	11. Ajmera	18. Undavath	25. Tepavath
5. Halavath	12. Jate	19. Lonavath	26. Poosnamal
6. Kunsoth	13. Bharot	20. Sejavath	27. Mohandhas
7. Boda	14. Jaloth	21. Thubar	28. Theravath

According to Sherring<sup>7</sup> that in the Deccan the Banjaras are divided into four branches. They are (1) Mathuria Banjaras, (2) Lambana Banjaras, (3) Charan Banjaras and (4) Chori Banjaras. *Aiyer* is of the opinion that the Banjaras are divided into three divisions they are Mathurias, Labhans and Charan. *Russel* and *Hiralal* also mentioned the above three main divisions and Dhadi as fourth main division who are half Hindus and half Mohammadans. The Lamban as of Deccan belong to Charan Banjara division. According to *Thurston*<sup>8</sup> Tamburis are found in Mysore State and they are also called as Dhadis. They are Mahammadans, practice circumcision and dress like the Lambadis. They are the genealogists and bards of the Lambadis.

According to *Syed Siraj ul Hassan*<sup>9</sup> Lambadis have five exogamous sections (1) Rathod, (2) Panwar, (3) Chavan, (4) Badiya or Vadiya, (5) Tori, all of eponymous character, being the name of their founders. According to *Aiyer*<sup>10</sup> Rattod clan, besides being divided into original divisions, again split up into two groups called Jongi and Bhangi. Each of the clans is exogamous belonging to the same clan are considered marriage between the two hold relatives is strictly prohibited. Ex-communication is the punishment for the violation of this rule.

Apart from the above, the Mathura Banjara, who forms among the Sugali community, lives in a few villages of Adilabad and Nizamabad Districts. Lambhani is their synonym. Like the Lambhani, the Mathura Banjaras were also nomadic people. Their settlement is known as thanda and its hereditary leader, Naik. They claim that they migrated to the southern parts along with twin pack bullocks from Mathura in Northern India and hence they are called Mauthra Banjara. According to the census report of Hyderabad State 1921, "the Lambadas are divided into four tribes, viz. Mathura, Lambhani, Charan and Dahia. Members of these sub tribes neither intermarry nor interline. The Mathura and Lambhani or Lambada are Hindus, while the Charan are mostly animistic in their religious beliefs. The Mathura claims their descendant from Mota, the mythical

herdsman of Sri Krishna. They profess to be of the highest rank, are fairer and cleaner in their habits than the other Lambadas and also wear the sacred thread. They do not eat flesh and nor food cooked by a person of any community other than their own. They speak a dialect which is a mixture of Hindi and Gujarathi.<sup>11</sup> The Mathura and Lambadi are two different communities. There are no commensal or connubial relations between these two groups.

### Synonym Names of the Tribe

The Sugalis are also found in other states like Bihar, West Bengal, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Mysore and Orissa where they are called as Banjara. The Lambadis of Mahboobnagar and Khammam call themselves as Banjara and they believe that Banjara, Lambada and Sugali are one and the same, rather they are synonymous, whereas many Lambadis of the name Banjara and the existence of their counterparts in other parts of India. In all the above three districts, they call themselves as Sugali and are well aware of the name, 'Lambada'. *Aiyer* is of the opinion that Banjaras are also called Lambani, Lambadis and Sugalis. *Thurston* treats Lambada as synonym of Brinjari or Banjari, Boipari, Sugali or Sukali. According to Census of India 1911, Lamanis or Vanjari, Lmbhanas and Sukalirs, Banjaras, Banjaris, Brinjaris, Lamans Lambadis, Labhans are one and the same. In Telengana the other neighbouring castes generally call them as Banjara and in Andhra area most popular name which they are known as 'Sugali'.

Banjaras and Sugalis of Andhra area one and the same, their clan division, way of dressing, customs and traditions are identical in every aspect.

Various explanations are given as to how the names Banjara, Lambada and Sugali have been derived. They believe that the name 'Banjara' is the corruption of 'Vanachara' which means those who live or roam in the forests. They connect the origin of their name with Prithviraj Chauhan who was defeated by Ghor. Immediately after the defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan many of the Rajput soldiers ran into the forests with their families and hide themselves to escape from the hands of Ghor and from then onwards, forest becomes their abode, and their people called them 'Vanacharis'.

They were not also given sufficient information how the name Lambada has been derived. Except saying that the word might be derived from 'Lavana' meaning salt, since their forefathers were traders in salt. Many Lambadis believe that the name Sugali has been derived from 'Supari' meaning 'Betelnut', since they believe that their forefathers traded in Supari.

### Historical Backroom

The history of Sugali says that they had been carriers of supplies and drivers of pack-bullocks. There are a number of historical evidences and landmark which prove that the Sugali tribe is one of the aboriginal and primitive tribes of Indian sub-continent. The 'Lamani Margas' dating back to 6th century B.C., proves that this tribe lived even before the period of Buddha.<sup>12</sup> The Sugali tribe seems to be the most ancient, since their migrations go as far back as the 6th century B.C., their extensive migrations took them sometimes outside the frontiers of Rajasthan. These migrations if they are judged by the inscriptions found in Khyber and Bolan passes, had taken place between 600 B.C. and 350 B.C.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps, the Sugalis stopped

their migrations towards West during decline of Buddhism around 12th Century A.D., before Moghul invasion.<sup>14</sup> This period is noted with a great isolation agglomerations. Thus, the carvaneers found great possibilities of selling goods. They exchanged luxury articles for some time and that was given up to the benefit of items of food stuffs of duty necessities exchanged between towns and villages in North-West India.

The Sugali tribe based on the past identity, and their wandering habits, they were classified as the Gypsies of India. They are supposed to be descendants of the original Aryan Gypsies of North West India, whose descendants are also to be found in various parts of central and southern Europe and the America.<sup>15</sup> In this connection, the word Gypsy is employed in its purely conventional sense of 'Vgrant'. It is only the recent research that has established the genetic connection between the Sugali and Gypsy and the European Gypsy and the Sugali have been identified as one people before dispersion. The Sugali culture and language indicate that they hail from North India. Their folklore depicts them to be the descendants of Rajput stock.<sup>16</sup> There are many similarities between the Sugalis and Rajputs. Both have veneration and devotion for the Sun God. The Sugalis like Rajputs build their houses with the main doors facing the East. While they dine or assemble in group they always sit in a circle resembling their ancestors, Rajputs. Prof. Rama Sarma says that the Sugalis synchronize with the Rajputs not only in their legends, even in the clans, gotras and the sub-groups (Padas). This similarities aligues the Sugalis with Kshatriyas who form one of the major castes of Hindu society.<sup>17</sup> The nomadic Sugali moved not only through the greater Punjab, but also transverse far beyond Sindh, upto Beluchistan.<sup>18</sup> Then it can be said that Punjab and Rajasthan, should have also been the original home of not only the Sugalis but also of the Gypsies. That is how the traces of Punjabi and Sindhi find in their nomadic language.

The Sugalis are not the autochthons of South India. Their original home is believed to be Marwar in Western part of Rajasthan. They came into the Deccan (South India) as transporters of supplies or merchandise for the armies of Delhi emperors in their raids in the South early in the 17th century. At that time, they were unsettled nomads and often resorted to robbery.<sup>19</sup> Some of the Sugalis returned to the North but some stayed behind and carried on petty trade with their pack-bullocks. They became a useful medium of transaction between the South and the North during periods of peace until 1850s. In the 18th century they had also taken up service under the Maratha rulers of Satara, the Peshwas of Poona, the Nizam of Hyderabad, and the British in their Mysore and Maratha wars.<sup>20</sup> The Banjara lineage goes back to some 2000 years. They are said to be the descendants of the Roma gypsies of Europe who migrated to India through the rugged mountains of Afghanistan and finally settled down in Rajasthan. The colourful stream of the Banjaras began to travel down to the South in the 14th century. Many of their families and pack bullocks crossed the Vindhya as and reached the Deccan country in the wake of the plundering armies. The Banjaras also came to the Deccan following the invasion by the armies of Aurangzeb. There were no navigable rivers and no roads to wheel the belongings of Banjaras. Thousands of laden bullocks and carts had to travel on mere dust tracks. *Capt. Briggs* (1813) says that 'a single tribe owned as many as 50000 to 60000

cattle'. And so, thanks to the number of cattle they owned, the Banjaras worked for the Moghuls as commissariat carriers transporting provisions and arms, setting up camps on the outskirts of army encampments. When the Southern campaigns ended, the Banjaras forgot their desert homes in Rajasthan and settled down in the Deccan.

Most of the medieval historians and ethnographers of Deccan mention that the Sugali migrated to Deccan along with the conquering armies of Mohammedan rulers especially they came to South India along with the great armies of the Moghul Emperors when they invaded the South. The Sugalis with their pack-animals helped the imperial army, fighting in an exhausted country far from their base of supplies, by supplying fearless and reliable transport service. When the Sugali came to the South, they were in five groups, Rathod, Pamhar, Chowhan name after the names of Rajput clan's said to have been adopted by Mola. The theory of Sugali migration from Rajputana to Deccan has been shrouded in controversy as there is difference of opinion between various historians. But the Sugalis who are in Deccan claim that they came from North India, particularly from five distinct regions of Rajasthan: 1. Jodhpur, 2. Jaisalmer. 3. Shekhavati near Jaipur, 4. Haranti of Kota Bundi, and 5. Marwar near Ajmeer.<sup>21</sup>

William Irwine<sup>22</sup> gives a graphic account of the Sugalis as suppliers of rations to the warring Indian armies. He states that it was by this people that the Indian armies in the field were fed but left un-injured by either army. The grain was taken from them but invariably paid for. They encamped for safety every evening in a regular square formed of the bags of grain, of which they constructed breast work. They and their families were in a centre and the Oxen were kept outside. Guards with matchlocks and spears were placed at the comers and their dogs did duty as advanced posts. Irwin states that he himself had seen them with droves of 50,000 bullocks. They did not go beyond two miles an hour as they allowed them to graze as they proceeded on the march.

Mr. Crook<sup>23</sup> is of the opinion that the first mention of the Sugalis in Mohammedan history was made in Sikander's attack on Dholpur in the year 1504 A.D., Mr. Cumberlege<sup>24</sup> another British historian states that the Sugali first came to Deccan with Asaf Khan in the campaign which closed with the annexation of Ahamed Nagar and Berar by the emperor Shahjahan about 1630 A.D. The Sugali evidently came to the Deccan with Asaf Khan, the Vazir of Shahjahan and in the year 1630 or there about. Bangi and Jhangi Naik had with them one hundred and eighty thousand (1.80.000) bullocks and Bhagawandas, the Vadtya Naik had only fifty two thousand (52.000) bullocks. Both the Sugali Naiks accompanied Asaf Khan during their raid into the Deccan against the Bijapur.

It was the object of Asaf Khan to keep these bullocks well up with his force, and so much were they prized by the Vazir that he was induced to give an order to Bhangi and Jhangi Naik's as they put forward excuses regarding the difficulty of obtaining grass and water for the fettle. The order engraved on copper plate in gold letters<sup>25</sup> as.

*"Ranjmkapani, Chappar Ka ghas,  
Dinka teen Koon Maff,  
Aur Jahan AsafJanka Ghode,  
Wahan Bhangi Jhangi Ka bail "*

The meaning of the inscription seems to be: 'if you can find no water elsewhere, you may even take from the Ranjans (name pots) of my followers, grass you may take from the roof of their huts and if you commit three murders a day, I will even

pardon this provided that where I find my cavalry, there I must find always Bhangi and Jhangi Naik's bullocks.'

With the advent of the British rule, the Sugalis gave up much of their traditional occupation of transporting goods due to introduction of mechanized transport, laying of roads and rail lines by the then Government. Hence, they turned to the forests for their livelihood by cutting wood and collecting other forest produces.

But this avocation could not provide enough to live by as much of the forest in the country was cut down to provide wood for industry and rail-laying. Being poor, illiterate<sup>26</sup> and lacking technical skills, they degenerated and took to crimes like robbery, dacoity, cattle-lifting and kidnapping of children until the middle of the last century.<sup>27</sup> To reform them through persuasion and education was considered impossible by the British administration. Therefore, in order to control their criminal activities, they were brought under the ambit of the Criminal Tribes Act XXVII of 1871.

Further, despite the precarious economic position, they did not like to adopt wage-labour as it was against their proud spirit and tradition. Therefore, the Sugali men did not stop poaching in the forest, though it had been banned. Their women took up collection of forest produce and latter, agricultural wage labour on the farms of neighboring peasants out of sheer economic necessity. Thus, after 1880's, forest labour, sale of forest produce and pastoralism became their main occupations. However, by 1930, the forest work had ceased to provide them enough earnings because of deforestation, strict implementation of forest protection measures and declaration of some forests as reserved forests. This situation compelled the Sugali men to turn their attention towards agricultural and other types of labour in order to supplement the earnings of their women. But after 1930, they ultimately settled down first as pastoralists and then as agriculturists, although agriculture had never been their occupation in their history.<sup>28</sup> After Independence, they were listed in 1949 as one of the denotified communities, and since 1977, they have been recognized as a Scheduled Tribe.

At present the Sugalis are aware that their forefathers were migrants from North and but they are not definite whether they came along with the Mughal armies. It is interesting to note that the Lambadis of Telengana are quite aware that they were migrants of North, whereas the Lambadis of Andhra and Rayalaseema particularly of Anantapur, Kumool and Chittoor districts many of this tribe are ignorant about their migration. It may be due to the Banjaras of Telengana were always in the prominence even during the time of the rule of Nizam providing commissariat service to the Nizam armies and they were more well known in Telengana due to their criminal activities than in Andhra and Rayalaseema. Because it appears that they were more inactive and concerned with themselves only.

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