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A Comparative Review of Plato and Swami Vivekananda's Thought on Education

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Abstract

The Greek Philosopher Plato and the Indian philosopher Vivekananda's diverse thought on education is considered to be very significant. Due to the differences in the social, political, economic and cultural environment of both philosophers in the development of educational thought, the differences in their educational thought can be observed in different aspects. Plato conceived of his ideal state to resolved the conflicts and prevent social decay in the city-states of Greece and developed his philosophy of education as the foundation of this ideal state. During the time of swami Vivekananda, exposure to western education led to the emergence of logical an intellectual consciousness among Indians, but they tend to be forgotten about the glorious past, ancient traditions and culture of their own country. Vivekananda wanted to awaken the self-power and self-consciousness of people by combining the science and technology of the West with Indian education and culture for the overall development of India. Despite the gap between the country and the time of Plato and Vivekananda but their idea up coordination of body-mind-soul was of great importance in the education thought of both philosophers. Besides the purpose of their educational thinking was to eliminate existing problems obstacles in the contemporary social, political and cultural spheres.

Keywords: Plato, Vivekananda, Education, Society, State.

Education is the main driving force of a Country as well as a nation's progress. Education provides internal and external power to the individual. Development of society and country is not possible without education.

From a wide range of social, political, cultural, education, literacy thought of Plato and Vivekananda, here efforts have been made to highlight the various aspects of the thoughts of both philosophers about education.

We get the description of Plato's education from his book 'The Republic' however Swami Vivekananda did not write any other independent book on education but there is a lot of evidence that he thought deeply about education, especially the education for our country all those thoughts are scattered in his various lecture and books.

In the development of the thoughts of any person, his life experience, surrounding environment, contemporary Context play an important role. In the case of Plato and Vivekananda, that rule was no exception.

Before discussing their educational thinking, on which context their philosophical thinking was developed, about that discussion is highlighted here.

Plato was a philosopher, but not unrealistic. The real problems of the Society of his time also affected his heart. In 431 BC, the civil war between Athens and Sparta reached its peak again. After this twenty-seven years' war, the social and political life of the defeated Athens suffered a severe crisis. Despite winning the war, Sparta became weak and the public life of Greece was severely disrupted. Parochialism and provincialism prevailed all over the society. Economic disparity between the rich and the poor grew. Division arose among the minority wealthy slave-owning class and the majority poor citizens.

As the city state became embroiled in internal strife, social anxiety and unrest ran high. In these critical situations, the Sophist philosophers of Greece protested against the existing social order. They began to argue for individual freedom. As a result, the unity and solidarity of the society is in the face of more crises.

Plato wanted to restore normality by removing the glowing doubts and suspicions against the legitimacy and rationality of the prevailing social order. He was particularly interested in sustaining the crumbling City-State by addressing contemporary social damages and crisis. He raised the bar of justice and proposed an ideal state in order to overcome the crisis in the social and political life of Greece. He developed his philosophy of education as the basis for building this ideal state.

His educational theory was aimed at social stability and the creation of an ideal state through unity and solidarity among the people.

In the 19th century, the renaissance of the Bengali lifestyle began to move in a new direction rather than following the traditional path.

Although British rule caused oppression, misery and exploitation of Indians. English education came into contact with reason and intellect, on one side about the rationality of existing superstitions, bad customs and morals in the social and religious fields as well as through the awakening of self-awareness, the nation became aware of its glorious past and ancient heritage. Society- literature-education- religion- politics started renaissance in every field. Swami Vivekananda came in this renaissance era.

Swami Vivekananda on the one hand, as a traveller, while traveling to different regions of the East and West, came to know about the life of people of various castes, religions, languages and cultures, their sufferings and their grievances. He realized from his own experience that without proper education, there is no other way to alleviate the sufferings of human life. He realized that for the progress in spiritual or worldly matters, it is necessary to first of all remove the ignorance of the people and awaken the consciousness; otherwise, the overall development of the society and the country is never possible.

Although he criticized the British rule, he felt that it would not be possible to overthrow the British rule until there was an awakening of nationalism among the people of India and they felt mutual solidarity. Minimum resources needed to survive in life with food-clothing and shelter for the majority of the poorest people in the country. In order to awaken their self-esteem and self-realisation, education should be extended to all stages of the people belonging to the society.

The subject has been divided into several sections in order to find out the similarities and contrasts between Plato's and Vivekananda's views on Education.

Plato and Vivekananda's Educational Thinking in Social Unity

According to Plato, education is the only element of the formation of a balanced state. The special needs of education to be suitable for the class work of the people under his planned ideal state are specially needed.

In this regard, Sabine said-

"If virtue is knowledge, it can be taught and the educational system to teach it is the one indispensable part of a good state. From Plato's point of view, with a good system of education almost any improvement is possible; if education is neglected, it matters little what else the state does" (Sabine, 1960:59-60).

Plato talks about 'Myth of the metals' to establish unity among the three classes to maintain social status. It is said that the presence of more or less three metals can be observed in the body of every child born in this world namely-gold, silver, iron/bronze. Among these three metals, the presence of gold is greater in the child; he will grow up and belong to the guardian class with philosophical and rational qualities. If the presence of silver is high, the child will become a soldier with enthusiastic and brave qualities in the future and if the child has an excess of bronze or iron in the child, he will be tolerant and participate in the production. In this regard Coleman said-

"The myth of the metals is a myth about society naturally constituting three classes which are the consequence of natural talent"(Coleman, 200:96-97).

Swami Vivekananda's education thought was important for the overall development of the individual as well as the society and the country. Bhupendra Nath Dutta said,

"The key-note of his attitude towards the Indian National question was to uplift the Indian masses by educating them, band by instilling the feeling of man-consciousness in them. What he wanted was to give a background to the process of Nation Building. On this account he emphasised education for the masses and to help 'to develop their lost individuality'(Dutta, 1954:3).

He also became vocal in praise of the traditional Varnashrama in Indian society. On the basis of karma in ancient India, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Sudra- this chaturvarna emerged. He believed that the root of the ancient caste was the foundation of social purposes, including logic. In this case, Plato's thoughts can be found to be somewhat similar to his thoughts. Overtime, Casteism has turned into a ritual and has made the separation of people from people far reaching and miserable. However, He criticized the deprivation, exploitative and oppressive aspects of the upper caste people of the caste system, towards the people of the lower castes. Vivekananda said-

"Cast is a natural order, I can perform one duty in social life and you another, you can govern a country and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading the Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head" (C.W-III, 1962: 245).

Aims and objectives of education:

In Plato and Vivekananda's educational ideas are very wide and extensive. All the elements necessary for the integrated development of body-mind-soul are present in their education thinking. According to Plato, main purpose of education is the purification of mind. It is possible only in a healthy environment. Education is a medium by which a person can be encouraged and motivated by the sense of society. So, Plato refers to education as a social process. Barker's opinion in this regard is-

"Education means the bringing of the soul into that environment, which each stage of its growth is best suited for its development.....The emphasis thus laid on education is the logical result of the Platonic conception of Justice" (Burker,1918:181).

Plato says the human soul is always active. It manifests differently in different stages of age. Education helps us assimilate with the environment. The nature of teaching is to guide the soul in the right direction. The impact of education in human life is essential because the soul is in constant process with the environment. George Klosko said about this type of thought of Plato as-

"Platonic education is primarily a moulding of souls..... Plato holds that the virtue of anything, including the soul, 'is a matter of regular and orderly arrangement.' It is the function of education to produce such order, which is a necessary condition for the virtue based on correct opinion and a necessary precondition for the virtue-based knowledge. Whereas Socrates, who views the soul as basically rational, sees education as a weakening of thought Plato believes education to be concerned as much with the non-rational elements as with the rational" (Klosko,1986:118).

Education has an important place in Swami Vivekananda's thoughts. He believed that no matter how many social reforms and Religion reforms were made, it was not possible for people to awaken themselves without education.

Needless to say, he did not consider education as a philosophical knowledge. According to him

"Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in men" (CW, Vol-IV, 1962: 358).

He said-

" Knowledge is inherent in men, no knowledge comes from outside, it is all inside. What we say a man 'Knows', should, in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils'. What a man 'Learns' is really what he 'discovers' by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge"(CW, Vol-I,1962:28).

The innate knowledge and potential of man is covered like fire. The purpose of education is to remove that cover. Swamiji feels that it is the teacher's duty to help the student's taste, inclination and instil in his inner strength. He gave an example of ancient Greece and India about how the knowledge acquired by the monotony of the mind plays an important role in the economic, political, social and cultural development of the country.

"The Greeks applied their concentration to the external world and the result was perfection in art, literature etc. The Hindu concentrated on the internal world, upon the unseen realms in the self and developed the science of Yoga"(CW, Vol-VI, 1962: 124).

Swami Vivekananda was well aware that not a single nation can truly develop without the development of human beings. The essence of the fundamental philosophy's teachings of his man-building is the mutual reconciliation of the human body-mind-spirit. This is a lesson to build a real human being. He said-

"The end of all education, all training, should be man-making. The end and aim of all training are to make the man grow" (CW, Vol-II, 1962:15).

The key to the development of any country is people. Human resources can improve the country and the nation. Therefore, once the right people are created, the country will reach the peak of development and progress in all fields of financial, social, political and cultural. Plato also emphasized character building and ethics in his education thinking. Because a person character has an important role in the development of identity. On this matter Coleman said-

"Books 2 and 3 of the Republic are developed to educating opinion. They focus largely on the Guardians as a military class and the aim is to train their bodies as well as their characters. But their character is the most important, and here Plato argues for the moulding of impressionable children's minds in ways that have struck liberals as nothing more than sinister mind-bending through censorship" (Coleman,1988: 95).

Swami Vivekananda also thinks that the goal of education should be character buildings. A nation can maintain its dignity by character, He said-

"We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's own feet" (CW, Vol-V, 1962:342).

The issue of religion and ethics was not excluded from Plato's education thinking. He thought that the positive aspects of the character of Hero and God in Greece should be high-lighted and avoided the aspects of violence. He thinks-

" The ultimate end of all educations is insight into the harmonious order (Cosmos) of the whole world. This earliest stage ends here in the perception of those 'Images' of moral or spiritual excellences which, when combined with bodily beauty in a living person, are the proper object of love "(Cornford, 1941:86).

Swami Vivekananda emphasized on the development of worldly wealth for the overall development of the country, on the one hand he emphasized on the western science and technology education along with the education of the west, on the other hand, He emphasized on religion and ethics for the development of the wealth of the heart. He said -

"Religion is the innermost core of education. I do not mean my own or anyone else's opinion about religion"(CW, Vol-V, 1962:231).

"The ideal therefore is that we must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical" (CW, Vol-III,1962:302).

Plato and Vivekananda's education reform ideas:

At the time of Plato there were two opposite teaching methods in Athens and Sparta. Athen's education was private, while Sparta's education system was completely state controlled. Plato incorporates the positive aspects of both types of education in his education plan.

"Plato attempted to balance the two contrasting models. The education system drew from Athens values of creativity, excellence and individual achievement, which it tried to integrated with that of Sparta, namely civic training"(Mukherjee & Ramaswamy,2011:80-81).

Swami Vivekananda criticizes the contemporary education system. He noticed that by coming in contact with English education, Indians became familiar with the ideals of Western civilization, science, nationalism, democracy, freedom etc. and is able to easily understand the weaknesses of one's society, religion, country and nation. However, in this contemporary education system, Swamiji realized several deficiencies. The western education introduced by the English was limited to a handful of people in the country including the educated upper class and middle-class people. This education although spread among the general public but never became mass education. He said,

"The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education and intelligence of the land among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it by spreading education among the masses"(CW, Vol-IV, 1962:482).

The aim of the contemporary education was to offer book degrees and serve as a business clerk. No effort has been observed to developed human character, development of thinking, physical and mental improvement. He said,

"Education is not the amount of information that is put into your Brain and runs riot there, undigested all our life. We must have life-building, man-making character making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library" (CW, Vol-III, 1962:302).

Being educated in the conventional education system of the time, Bengalis started blindly following the west and forgetting about the glory and traditions of their own country, considering the western civilization as advanced. Vivekananda believed that that the positive aspects of both the East and the West and the west should be accepted in both education or culture and the negative aspects should be avoided. He said,

"As western ideas of organisation and external civilization are penetrating and pouring into our country, whether we will have them or not, so Indian spirituality and philosophy are deluging the land of west.....It is not that we ought to learn everything from the west or that they have to learn everything from us, but each will have to supply and hand down to future generations what it has, for the future accomplishment

of that dream of ages, the harmony of nation, an ideal world."(CW, Vol-III, 1962:171)"

Education Planning:

Plato recommended a state-controlled, compulsory and comprehensive scheme of education. He divides state-controlled education into two stages namely ---

1. Elementary Education
2. Higher Education

Elementary Education:

Elementary Education or primary education will continue from childhood to 20 years of age. Children should be educated in religious and moral up to six ears. It is necessary to see that the child is entitled to become a nice polite manner of good taste. "Plato here passes from the simplification of poetry and music as used in early education to consider the whole field of art and craftsmanship and its influence on character "(Cornford, 1941:86). The second stage of this primary education is up to 18 years of age. During this time both physical and intellectual education will be arranged. In addition to this musical practice will continue. Sabine said in this regard-

"The curriculum was therefore divided into two parts, gymnastics for training the body and 'music' for training the mind" (Sabine, 1960:61).

Plato talks about logical stories, mathematics and natural science practice.

Great importance should be given on gymnastics from the age of 18--20 because at this age it is absolutely necessary to attain courage, self-restraint, morale, physical strength and reclusiveness. In this regard, he was inspired to become Sparta's education business.

"Physical training, no less than education in literature and the arts, really has to do with the soul. The two together should produce a harmonious development of the spirited and philosophic elements in human character (Cornford, 1941:90).

A test will be taken at age 20; then intellectual ability will be judged and professional training will be arranged based on that.

Higher Education:

Plato talks about training for both men and women from the age of 20-35 as auxiliaries/ subordinate offices in higher education. Those who will be Intellect will undergo five more years of training (30-35) especially in mathematics and dialectical matters.

"Higher education is to effect an escape from the prison of appearances by training the intellect, first in mathematics and then in moral philosophy.....The lower section of the intelligible describes the method of the mathematical science.... The higher method is called Dialectic" (Cornford,1941:218).

Then those intellect rulers will fulfil the responsibility of the state authority for 15 years (35--50); even after 50 years a relatively competent section of ruler will advise in their retirement in segment of state management and as well as practical contexts. These rulers will serve as the highest council of the state.

Swami Vivekananda was a supporter of the education system of ancient India. In this context, Swamiji said,

“My idea of education is Gurugriha- vasa. Without the personal life of the teacher, there would be no education”(CW, Vol-V, 1962:224).

He thought that not only the character structure of the disciple was healthy from the presence of the Guru, the disciple got the opportunity to get the necessary education from the Guru according to his taste and curiosity. He mentioned in his goals and programs that he founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.

“The instruction given in the maths includes lessons in meditation and other spiritual exercise, study of philosophy, manual work and training in sciences, arts and crafts like gardening, agriculture, medicine, animal husbandry, banking, cooking etc” (Banhatti, 2017: 208).

Vivekananda realised that education should be brought to the cottage of the poor for the complete development of the country. However, he realised the defects of public education in practical knowledge and encouraged the educated youth to participate in this great work. He said –

“Suppose you open a free school in every village, still it would do no good, for the poverty in India is such that the poor boys would rather go to help their fathers in the fields or otherwise try to make a living than come to the school. Now if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain... there are thousands of single minded, self-sacrificing sannyasins in our own country, going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organised as teachers of secular things also, they will go from place to place, from door to door... Suppose two of these men go to a village in the evening with a camera, a globe, some maps etc, they can teach a great deal of astronomy and geography to the ignorant. By telling stories about different nations, they can give the poor a hundred times more information through the ear than they can get in a lifetime through books” (CW, Vol-VI,1962:489).

Vivekananda's education plan included various Indian and western subjects.

“Teach them history, geography, science, literature and among with these the profound truth of religion through these” (CW, Vol -VI, 1962:148-149).

Women's Education in the visions of Plato and Vivekananda:

Plato believed that both men and women were naturally capable of handling guardianship, even considered suitable for warfare, policing and other executive tasks.

“The common life of the Guardian's, it now appears, involves that men and women shall receive the same education and share equally in all public duties: Women with the right natural gifts are not to be debarred by difference of sex from fulfilling the highest functions. So, when the best Guardians are selected for training as Rulers, the choice may fall upon a woman. At Athens, where women lived in seclusion and took no part in politics, this proposal would appear revolutionary”(Cornford, 1941:141).

Influenced by the educational system of Sparta, Plato talks about the exercise of both men and women.

"Plato's guardians comprising both men and women would have almost a lifelong training "(Mukhopadhyay,1988:13).

Again, in the concept of proposed communism for the soldier and guardian class, Plato expressed his opinion that not to keep their personal family and property. The guardian will have no responsibility to raise the child, the state will take the full responsibility of the child's maintenance and education. As a result, both men and women will be engaged in the service of the state, refraining from marital thinking.

"Conventional marriage led to women's subordination, subjugation and seclusion.....He, therefore, advocated temporary sexual unions for the purpose of being children. He relieved women of child rearing and child care responsibilities "(Mukherjee &, Ramaswamy, 2011:61).

On this matter Coleman said –

"Although Plato speaks of Philosopher- Kings and never of Philosopher-Queens, if a small number of women were capable of such intellectual development, it would not be as 'women' but as rationally dominated psyches.....Philosophical statesmanship has nothing to do with gender", (Coleman,1988:102).

Vivekananda has invited both men and women to participate in the service of the country. Nivedita says about on Vivekananda's such thinking

"With five hundred men, he would say the conquest of India might take fifty years; with as many women, not more than a few weeks" (Sister Nivedita,1910 :307).

Swamiji thought that an educated mother would be able to make her child a suitable citizen of the country, which will play a helpful role in the development of the nation and the country.

"If the women are raised, their children will by their noble actions glorify the name of the country; then will culture, knowledge, power, and devotion awaken in the country" (CW, Vol-VII,1962:220).

Swami Vivekananda also supported women's education like Plato, according to him, true education alone can create self awareness among all, male and female. The need for woman's awakening in India is more than the limited social legal reform movement. He said –

" Women have many and grave problems, but none that cannot be solved by that magic word: 'Education" (CW, Vol-V,1962:231).

Swamiji talks about the plan to establish Adarsh Stri math for the purpose of promoting women's education. He said –

"Brahacharinis of education and character should take up the task of teaching "(CW, Vol-VI, 1962: 489)

Vivekananda said about the curriculum of women's education –

"History and puranas, house-keeping and the arts, the duties of home-life and the principles that make for the development of character have to be taught" (CW, Vol-V,1962:15)

But he also tasks about women's self-defence education. –

"Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence- how grand was queen of Jhansi! (CW, Vol- V, 1962: 342)

From the previously discussed topics, it can be said that the socio-political- cultural environment plays an important role on both the thinkers in their ideas about Plato and Vivekananda's education.

In his contemporary times Plato highlighted the idea of an ideal state to prevent the degradation of the city state to maintain the social sphere. He highlighted education as an important medium to implement the plan of this ideal state. Barker commented on Plato's education that,

"In Plato's educational theory, as in his own life, there is a certain wavering between the idea of action and that of contemplation. Sometimes the goal of life seems to be the vision of the idea of the Good: Sometimes it seems to be the betterment of humanity and the turning away from the vision to a life of social service. Sometimes education seems to mean a process of social adoption, by which men are fitted for the place they can best fill in their community: Sometimes it seems to mean a perfect self - development "(Barker, 1918: 203).

Through swami Vivekananda's personal experience, contemporary situation, experience travelling in the various regions of the east and west, he realised that the reason for the development of Western countries that the number of educated people is high and the main reason of India's deterioration is that the poor working people of the society are deprived of the light of education. In this context, "The Education that India Needs" he said in the article

"Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got" (CW, Vol-IV,1962: 416).

It is certainly under that similarities can be observed in several places in Plato and Vivekananda's educational thought. The overall development of body- mind -soul had gained important in the education of both the thinkers. Efforts are made to associate education with physical education musical practise, moral education, value and philosophy. Both referred to education as an important medium in the development of the state and social unity. Both of them emphasised on women's education for the progress of society and the country however although Plato is equally acknowledged the importance of three classes in establishing justice in his imaginary ideal state he discussed in detail the teaching of the rural class in his education plan. Although the issue of teaching of the soldiers is mentioned, the matter of teaching of artisan class education is not clearly discussed. Sabine said in this regard,

"In view of the importance which education has in the state it is extraordinary that Plato never discusses the training of the artisans and does not even make clear how, it at all, they are to be included in the plan of elementary institution... it is at least true that he set no great store by general education, much as relied on selective education for the more gifted youth" (Sabine, 1960: 60-61).

But in Swami Vivekananda's education plan, cast-religion- race-male-female-language-culture by region, education has gained importance everyone to reduce an improve the quality of life of the poor working people of India, he met with the king of various province in the country and when get a chance advised them in various ways to improve the country's agriculture, industry, education and health in order to improve the standard or poor people. But he did not get any positive response. As a result, later he had more resentment towards the educated charismatic youth then the king, Maharaja rich man for the welfare of the poor people of the country. In this context Sister Nivedita says,

"He saw plainly that the education of The Indian working folk was properly the task of the Indian lettered classes, and of no others. The infinite danger that attended the introduction of knowledge by foreign mind from foreign sources, was never for one moment hidden from him. This is the meaning of his constant plea, in his published correspondence, for the teaching of the villages, by wandering students, who would carry the magic lantern, the camera, and some means for simple chemical experiments" (Sister Nivedita, 1910: 291-292)".

Finally, it can be said that the way Plato gave the idea of 'Philosopher King' to manage the proper governance of the country and planned higher education to educate the ruler class is also relevant today. He did not stop with the responsibility of running the state in the hands of the ruling class. Plato believes that the ruling class is not born wise; the qualities that the ruling class acquires naturally need to be developed further. Therefore, the lifestyle of the members of the ruling class will be controlled by strict rules and discipline. So, Plato presented a long-term education plan for the ruling class.

"The one sufficient thing is the guardian's education. If they are well educated, they will see to everything" (Plato, 1955: 190-191).

Even today appropriate education and training is being given importance in increasing the performance of people involved in governance.

Again, in Vivekananda's education thought emphasizes the foundation of the real life of the individual. Similarly, importance is given on the development of humanity. In his educational thinking, such as indigenous education culture, western science, technical and technology education has also been included. With the help of which if the development of agriculture and the industry consistence with the geographical and cultural environment of the country, the economic development of the country will be done and the employment of many people will be arranged. He said,

"What we need is to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own and with it the English language and western science, we need technical education and all else that will develop industries, so that men instead of speaking for service may earn

enough to provide for themselves and save against a rainy day" (CW, Vol-I, 1962:412).

In addition to this, he realized that the main essence of the development of a country is people. Human resources can improve the country and the nation. Therefore, once the right people are created, the country will reach the peak of progress in financial, social, political and cultural fields. That is why the 'Man Making philosophy' in his thought has gained importance. He said in this regard,

"What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean, meeting death face to face" (CW, Vol-III, 1962:224).

He emphasised the concept of 'Man Making Education', 'Character Building Education' in his educational thinking with the aim of rising such people.

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