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STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIA: POST-INDEPENDENCE ERA

Dr. Aijaz Sultana

Qadisiyah Education Directorate, Ministry of Education, Iraq

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ABSTRACT

Since independence, women's legal, political, educational, and social status have changed dramatically. This was not surprising, given that the issue of improving women's status had been at the forefront of the social reform movement since Ram Mohan Roy began questioning social orthodoxy in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the freedom struggle, which began in the 1920s and intensified in the 1930s, drew heavily on the creative energies of Indian women. After independence, in India, improvements were made in terms of various areas that led to well-being of women within the society. There were formulation of many programs and schemes that had the main objective of bringing about progressive among women. Encouraging them towards acquisition of education and participation in the employment settings are the main aspects that promote women empowerment. In spite of initiation of the measures and policies, still in some of the rural communities, women are regarded as subordinates to men. One of the unfortunate areas is, throughout the country, women and girls are subjected to abuse and mistreatment. But with the advent of globalization and industrialization, women are acquiring development opportunities. The women, belonging to urban communities are mainly enhancing their livelihoods through acquisition of good education and acquiring employment opportunities. The main areas that have been taken into account in this research paper include, status of women in post-independence India, empowerment of women, gender issues in post-independent India, political participation of women and problems of working women.

Keywords: *Women Empowerment; Gender Issues; Political Participation; Progress; Post-Independence; Women Status*

INTRODUCTION:

When the time came to consolidate the gains of the long struggle for independence, the focus naturally shifted to securing legal and constitutional rights. Women were promised complete equality

in the Constitution. It fulfilled a promise made by the national movement many years ago: women were given the right to vote alongside men, regardless of their education, property, or income. Though at the time of independence, before the

Constitution of India, some reforms in the state of law were carried out by the British rulers at the instance of the Indian social reformers, like Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The concept of women, that they should not undergo any form of mistreatment, should be given equal rights and opportunities and should be treated with respect and courtesy were the major concerns. There have been cases of women, who participated in the movement of independence by the country against the British rule. Since the country achieved its independence, the all India women's conference developed interest in constructive work and left its attitude of the pre-independence era. The activities, since independence led to the enactment of some of the legislations, concerning women. Some of the significant ones are, The Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Children Act 1954, The Special Marriage Act 1954, The Guardianship Act 1956, Interstate Succession Act 1956, The Orphanage and Widow Home Act 1960 and the Dowry Prohibition Act 1961 (Chapter II, n.d.).

The status of women in the post-independence period underwent transformations. In the discussion of their status within the society, there are two main aspects that need to be taken into consideration, first is extent of actual

control of women over their own living conditions and the extent to which they possess the decision making authority and perform their tasks and activities in a well-organized manner. Women constituted half of the population within the Indian society. They have been rendering a significant contribution in the development of human resources. Hence, it is vital to encourage them in participating in the decision making processes, acquiring educational opportunities, getting engaged in employment and sustaining their livelihoods in an enhanced manner. The National Policy on the Empowerment of Women in India, 2001, is regarded as one of the important strategies in the development process and led to changes within the socio-economic environment. With these changes, transformations also came about in the status of women (Women in Society, n.d.).

STATUS OF WOMEN IN POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA

The Universal declaration of human rights states that motherhood and childhood requires special care and protection. The Constitution of India makes provision of equality, liberty and right to life to all the citizens of the country. The citizens of the country are also required to give up the customs and practices that imposed

unfavourable effects upon the status of women. The Constitution of India has incorporated norms and policies that are primarily focused upon enhancing the status of women. From 1950, with the introduction of democratic constitution, it has granted equal social and political rights to women (Nandal, & Rajnish, 2014). Each state has been imposed with an obligation to maintain law and order and justice to women. Despite the laws, treaties and declarations, the status of women have not been given much recognition and they are still treated as inferior to men (Status/Position of Women in Society, n.d.).

The women's movement began to get initiated in 1920s, building on the 19th century social reform movement. The progression of the women's movement was observed during the period of high nationalism and struggle for independence. Among many achievements of the movement, the most significant were the constitutional guarantees of equal rights for women and universal adult suffrage in independent India. However, these approaches did not bring about changes in the status of women to a much greater extent. A new women's movement articulated to mass and politics and it emerged in the 1970s (Sen, 2000). In the

present existence, the individuals, primarily belonging to rural communities, who possess traditional viewpoints and perspectives, still long for a male child and regard females as burdens. In India, the behaviour of men is deeply rooted within the society. They possess the viewpoint that they are more capable and superior as compared to women and have the right to exercise control, authority and make important decisions.

Transformations have been brought about in the status of women. They are rendering an important contribution in social, political, cultural, economic and religious fields. Women are getting enrolled in educational institutions and pursuing higher education. They are attaining Bachelors, Masters and doctoral degrees and are acquiring employment opportunities. Women are employed in reputed educational institutions, organizations and other areas. They are doctors, researchers, educationists, managers, administrators, directors, politicians, lawyers, engineers and so forth. The participation of women in the society is regarded as the most notable and this is primarily because of the changing values. When acquiring an understanding of the status of women in post-independence India, it is vital to generate

awareness in terms of the factors and these have been stated as follows:

Technology is regarded to have rendered a significant contribution in reforming the lives of the individuals. Women, who have not been enrolled in educational institutions, or possess less education or no education at all, are generating information in terms of usage of technology. With the use of technology, they not only are able to get engaged in leisure activities, but also are able to work and generate a source of income. The benefits of technology are numerous. Individuals in the present existence, are depended upon technology for carrying out number of tasks and activities. These include, paying bills, making purchases, etc. they are able to acquire knowledge and information in terms of various areas and so forth. Research has indicated that elderly women, who are even above the age of 90 years are learning technology. The reason being, women, belonging to all age groups and backgrounds have acquired an understanding that it is essential for them to acquire technology education to not only bring about improvements within their socio-economic conditions, but also to enhance their overall quality of life. The changes that have come about in technology with the developments and

advancements taking place have provided new opportunities to women.

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

In the present existence, individuals belonging to all communities and backgrounds have recognized the significance of education. Education not only enables girls and women to hone their academic skills, but they are able to generate awareness in terms of other aspects as well. Girls too are getting enrolled in schools and higher educational institutions to pursue education. The acquisition of education has enabled women to understand the difference between appropriate and inappropriate. An educated woman or a girl will be able to work towards encouraging education and development of literacy skills among women and children, who are experiencing setbacks, due to lack of education. There are establishment of government and non-government organizations, who are working for promoting education among the marginalized, deprived and socio-economically backward sections of the society. Improvements in educational opportunities are regarded as one of the indispensable aspects that have contributed towards promoting well-being of women. Education enables women to acquire independence and not entirely be

dependent upon others. Household management is regarded as the primary task that women are engaged in. Education enables them to implement all household responsibilities in a well-organized manner. These include, household chores, maintenance of the house, child development, health care, taking care of the needs and requirements of the elderly family members and so forth.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Whether women belong to urban or rural communities and whether they are educated or not, in some cases, it is considered important for women to get engaged in employment to supplement family income. Getting engaged in employment opportunities is regarded as one of the crucial aspects in leading to their empowerment. Employment opportunities not only enhance the skills and abilities of women, and generate income, but they are able to bring about improvements within their overall quality of life. When the income generated by the male members is not sufficient to meet all the needs and requirements of the household and family, then it is necessary for women to get engaged in some types of employment opportunities. Well educated women, are normally engaged in reputed jobs in educational institutions and

organizations, whereas, some women establish their own businesses, or set up nursery schools or training centres. The women belonging to rural communities are the ones, who are employed in the agricultural sector and implement farming practices. They may or may not possess the basic literacy skills. Women are also engaged in manufacturing and production of handicrafts and artworks and carry out their own businesses of food items. Hence, it can be stated, women are engaged in different types of employment opportunities, in accordance to their skills and abilities.

PREVENTION OF CRIMINAL AND VIOLENT ACTS

Women have been subjected to criminal and violent acts since ancient times. In the medieval and Mughal period, there have been prevalence of practices, which led to degradation in the status of women in society. These practices include, sati, child marriage, female foeticide, female infanticide, polygamy, and women experienced various forms of abuse and mistreatment. In the present existence too, there has been prevalence of crime and violence against women. It takes place within as well as outside the home. The most prevalent criminal and violent acts are, verbal abuse, physical abuse, rape,

sexual harassment, trafficking, discriminatory treatment, theft and murder. In India, even girls, who are below 10 years of age are experiencing these acts. Severe disciplinary action is been implemented and doers are subjected to stringent penalties. This is particularly with regards to minor girls. Hence, in order to enhance the status women and above all lead to progress and development of the community and nation, it is vital to treat women with respect and courtesy, make provision of equal rights and opportunities and not discriminate against them on the basis of any factors such as, caste, creed, race, religion, ethnicity, occupation and socio-economic background.

EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

When acquiring an understanding of the empowerment of women, then it is not only focused upon their material development, but it is oriented towards mere economic growth. It usually renders a significant contribution in the overall development strategy. The status of women is primarily recognized within the society as a householder. As householders, they perform number of tasks and activities. Therefore, when a woman is educated and empowered, then she would be able to carry out the job duties in a

well-organized manner. On the other hand, if she is uneducated, and experiences discriminatory treatment, then she would experience problems in the implementation of household tasks and activities.

The women, normally belonging to underprivileged sections of the society are the ones, who are experiencing number of challenges and problems in facing empowerment opportunities. Women empowerment should be construed as the overall development of their faculty of self-realization, self-image, recognition and economic development, which holds a key to their actual development (Chapter 2, n.d). In other words, the provision of empowerment opportunities for women lead to their overall development. They are able to acquire recognition within the society. Women empowerment has ceased to be a local or a national issue.

United Nations Charter, which significantly projected discrimination against women is regarded as the worldwide problem. With the primary objective of weeding out the charter, in its Preamble, stated to uphold the Fundamental Rights as one of the human rights and equality should be maintained between men and women. Workplaces, public places and households, men and women should be regarded equal and there

should not be any discrimination between them on the basis of any factors. This sufficiently depicts the concern of the international community, espoused with regards to the rights of the women in general and their right to equality with men in particular. The declaration provides that all rights and fundamental freedoms are available to men and women on an equal basis, without any kind of discrimination. Therefore, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights also rendered a significant contribution in protecting the rights of women.

In India, the seed of women empowerment has been sowed in the early 18th century on an international level. It began to be recognized in India in the 19th century. The Indian community is regarded as more articulate with noticeable preference for men and women, as reflected in the nutritional and health differentials and noticeable differences in the mortality rate of boys and girls. It has been observed that girls receive health care facilities and medical assistance less frequently as compared to boys. This is regarded as one of the major impediments within the course of attainment of empowerment opportunities. There has been prevalence of malnutrition among girls more as compared to boys. Due to malnutrition, the

rate of maternal mortality is quite high within the country. It has been observed that despite the restraints imposed on child marriages, which is quite common in some rural communities. It adds that prostitution is widespread within the country.

The giving of dowry at the time of marriage is regarded as an unlawful practice. The brides often become subjected to psychological and physical abuse, when they are unable to satisfy the avarice for more and more dowry, after they have been wedded. It reiterates that the prevalence of more violence against the girls is considered as the most pervasive and the least recognized human rights abuse in the world. There has been prevalence of crime and violence against women throughout the country. In order to promote empowerment opportunities among them, it is vital to take into consideration various factors. These are, women should be treated with respect and courtesy, they should not be subjected to abuse and mistreatment, equal opportunities should be provided to them, particularly in terms of acquisition of education and employment and families and communities should not consider them as liabilities.

Women empowerment has to be observed as associated to the total process of social

change leading to a fair society, in which there are not any differentiations or prejudices. The success of women empowerment is primarily based upon the success of the supportive socio-economic policies and simultaneous changes in the political process. The implementation of operations in terms of all the strategies are required to be spontaneous to achieve the desired results. To put into operation, the strategies and approaches, it is vital to conduct an analysis in terms of status of women. The women, who are well educated and are engaged in good employment opportunities do not have to be concerned in acquiring empowerment opportunities. Whereas, women, who are not educated, are struggling to make ends meet, and are often experiencing abuse and mistreatment are the ones, who primarily need to be concerned in terms of empowerment opportunities.

GENDER ISSUES IN POST-INDEPENDENT INDIA

Gender based differences and prevalence of violence has taken place not only in India, but in other countries of the world. Gender issues are regarded as a serious problem that has been experienced by women. In some cases, when women and men, both are employed in organizations, women are not given equal pay as men for

the performance of same job duties, hence, they experience discrimination in terms of pay. Women are not employed in manual jobs, as it is believed that they do not possess the capabilities to perform manual jobs. Hence, men were assigned manual job duties. On the other hand, men consider themselves to be more capable as compared to women and abuse and mistreat them. Research has indicated that individuals, who are not educated, who are residing in the conditions of poverty and backwardness are the ones, who mistreat women. Whereas, educated individuals, who are engaged in reputed jobs, normally treat women on an equal basis.

In rural communities, individuals have recognized the significance of education. But they possess the viewpoint that education should be provided to the male children. The rural communities in some cases, are of the viewpoint that if they educate the male children, then they would acquire good employment opportunities and work towards enhancing the reputation of not only the family but also the community. Whereas, girl children are regarded as liabilities. It is believed that girls would only make demands and would yield no return on investment. The girls were trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities, and take care of

younger siblings and elderly members of the household, particularly when their parents go to work. Even if they have been enrolled in schools, they are compelled to drop out of schools, before their educational skills are honed. The parents usually do not believe in sending their girls to schools, because they primarily possessed the viewpoint that they have to eventually get married and would not be able to make use of educational skills in any manner. They primarily would need to manage the household responsibilities in their marital homes.

The individuals, who belong to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society are the ones, who normally give more preference to the male children, as compared to female children. When they have both sons and daughters in the family, and have limited income, then they normally spend resources in taking care of the needs and requirements of their sons. The male children are treated with respect and care, better food is provided to them and parents ensure to take proper care of their health and well-being. They are encouraged to be informative and strong, so they can take care of their parents and other household requirements, when they become mature. Whereas, girls are provided with proper

training in terms of taking care of the household functions, they were of reticent nature and usually were not allowed to give their ideas and suggestions. The girls are required to follow the instructions that have been imposed upon them by the male members of the household.

The overall development of women gets effected due to gender inequalities. The gender issues that have been created by the society degrades the position of women in all forms. The society has created issues by making demands for dowry. Dowry is referred to the price, which the bride's parents are required to pay to the groom's parents, at the time of marriage. The dowry is considered as the major issue, which enables the families as well as the communities to regard girls as burdens. The families belonging to deprived, marginalized and socio-economically backward sections of the society normally experience problems in paying dowry, hence, they do not feel contented upon the birth of the girl child. It is vital for the society to bring about changes within the attitudes and perspectives, particularly in terms of girls and women.

When the girl child is born within the family, she should be made aware in terms of values, cultures and principles. Girls should be encouraged towards acquisition

of education. Upon completion of education, they should be encouraged towards engagement in employment opportunities. When the women have accumulated financial resources, then marriage should be arranged. Hence, it can be stated that making provision of opportunities for women, would not only enable them to augment the status and well-being of their families, but when they are well-educated, they would be able to sustain the livelihood opportunities in a well-organised manner.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

In India, women acquired the right to vote, after the country achieved its independence. In India, women did not have to undergo problems and challenges in seeking the right to vote as compared to women in America and Britain. The leaders of India, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and others had put emphasis upon mass participation in the country's struggle for independence. When the large number of women came together, they expressed their concern in the legislative assembly as well. The number of movements that were initiated for independence also gave opportunities to women to participate. The political participation of women is further strengthened by their participation in the

Parliament and Lok Sabha. They constitute 10 percent of the legislators according to the 1955 International Parliamentary Union in the Parliament and at the Lok Sabha (Status/Position of Women in Society, n.d.).

Research has indicated that women hold just 11.7 percent of the seats in the Parliament around the world. Success at the panchayat level is based on the accomplishments in terms of the reservations for women. There were establishment of women's organizations, which depict that it is the appropriate time to extent these reservations up to the higher levels. At the panchayat level, women experience number of issues. In addition, they experience opposition to a major extent, the reason being, the male members of the panchayat do not consider them equal. Family members are also the ones, who experience problems and often compel them to resign from their positions.

The states of Karnataka and West Bengal are regarded as good examples, where women have reserved their seats to 33 percent and 42 percent respectively. This information depicts that if women are provided opportunities, then they can excel in any field. Support, assistance, motivation and encouragement are regarded as the main factors that lead to

progression of women (Status/Position of Women in Society, n.d.).

PROBLEMS OF WORKING WOMEN

In India, women are engaged in numerous employment opportunities. Acquisition of employment opportunities primarily depends upon educational qualifications, skills and abilities, and personality traits.

The women, who are engaged in employment opportunities in organizations or institutions experience number of problems. The problems that women experience within the workplace have been stated as follows:

1. **Working Environmental Conditions:** In order to perform one's job duties well and achieve the desired personal and professional goals, it is vital to form appropriate working environmental conditions. Within the working environment, it is vital to make provision of proper facilities, equipment, materials, technology, furniture and infrastructure. Particularly, when women remain in the office for long hours, then they prefer having amiable working environmental conditions. In the present existence, technology is considered as prominent in the implementation of

job duties, therefore, it is vital to ensure that it is properly maintained. Hence, when proper materials and equipment will not be available, then they would experience problems in performing their job duties in a well-organised manner.

2. **Unavailability of Technology, Materials and Infrastructure:** In order to carry out various job duties, whether it is production, manufacturing, project work, research, preparation of presentations, and so forth, individuals require proper materials, technology and infrastructure. Unavailability of these factors imposes problems in the implementation of job duties. Another vital aspect is, it is essential for the workforce to possess adequate knowledge and be efficiently trained in terms of usage of technology and other materials. Unawareness and lack of knowledge is regarded as a major problem. It is the job duty of the supervisors to ensure that employees are efficient in the implementation of job duties.

3. Ineffective Training and Development Programs: Training and development programs are regarded as an integral part of organizational structures. The main purpose of these programs is to ensure that members of the organization are well equipped and possess the necessary information in terms of all aspects of the organization. These programs are normally required to be attended by the employees upon their recruitment. Within the course of time, when any modern or innovative strategies and approaches come about, then too employees are required to attend the training programs, with the purpose of acquiring knowledge. In India, women are employed in industries and factories. In order to carry out the production and manufacturing processes too, it is vital for the employees to undergo training and development programs. Inefficiency in these programs is regarded as the major problem. Inefficiency is primarily characterized by lack of sufficient information in terms of various aspects of the organization,

unawareness on the part of the instructors, and inadequate information regarding use of technology and materials, and the performance of job duties.

4. Sexual Harassment within the Workplace: Women have experienced sexual harassment within the workplace to a major extent. This has not only enabled them to feel vulnerable, but also compel them to leave their jobs. The employers are required to take preventive steps which prohibits this act within the workplace. The employees and all the members within the workplace should be notified in terms of policies. There have been formulation of various measures, which should make provisions for penalizing the act of sexual harassment of women, particularly within the working environment. The members of the workplace should put into practice the traits of morality and ethics.

5. Terms and Relationships with Other Members: The members of the organization need to ensure that they maintain appropriate terms and relationships with each other within the working environment.

All individuals possess different natures and attitudes. Some possess an introvert nature, whereas, others are extrovert in nature. Some of the women, primarily focus upon their job duties and do not take pleasure in communicating with others. They communicate with other members, primarily in terms of their job duties. Effective communication is essential with the purpose of forming good terms and relationships with each other. Forming amiable terms with the other members, will help the individuals in performing their job duties effectively and achieving organizational goals.

6. **Unavailability of Equal Rights and Opportunities:** In some cases, women are not given equal rights and opportunities as compared to men. For instance, they are not assigned the same job duties as men. The reason being, individuals are of the viewpoint that women do not possess the same skills and abilities as men. Women in some cases are given lesser pay as compared to men for the same kind of work performed. Another important aspect, which needs to be

taken into consideration is, when women have been deprived of equal rights and opportunities, when certain decisions need to be made or when promotional opportunities need to be implemented, men have been given more preference as compared to women. Therefore, it is vital to ensure that women too are provided equal rights and opportunities, and there should not be any kind of discriminatory treatment.

7. **Lack of Knowledge and Information:** It is vital for the individuals to possess adequate knowledge and information, primarily in terms of implementation of their job duties. Upon recruitment in reputed organizations, men and women are required to undergo training programs, which enable them to acquire knowledge in terms of organization, departments, goals and objectives, job duties, and so forth. In order to perform ones job duties well and accomplish the desired goals and objectives, it is vital for all the individuals to possess the necessary information.

When the employees lack the awareness and are not well equipped with the performance of job duties, then they experience problems in retaining their jobs.

8. **Conflicts and Disputes:** Conflicts and disputes in some cases do take place within the organizations. When these take place, it is vital for the members to put into operation, conflict resolution methods in a peaceful manner. Within the working environment, one cannot work in isolation. It is vital for the individuals to form good terms and relationships with each other. When conflicts and disputes assume a major form, then the individuals certainly impede terms and relationships with each other. As a consequence, they are unable to incur the feeling of job satisfaction or even generate the desired outcomes, particularly, when they need assistance from each other in the implementation of project or any other job duty. Therefore, it can be stated that the occurrence of conflicting situations and disputations are the major problems within the course of

achievement of organizational goals and objectives.

9. **Creating a Balance between Personal and Professional Life:** Women are required to create a balance between personal and professional life. Irrespective of the employment opportunities that they are engaged in, they are required to manage the household as well. The role of women as householders are given utmost consideration within the Indian society. Working women are required to implement the household chores and take care of the needs and requirements of their family members. When women are overwhelmed by personal and professional responsibilities, then they mostly experience psychological problems of stress and anxiety. Therefore, in order to alleviate psychological problems, it is vital for them to create a balance between personal and professional life. In addition, it is vital for them to implement proper time management skills. Normally, preference is given to job duties, as they not only lead to generation of income, but also

enable women to enhance their careers.

10. Lack of Promotional Opportunities: Promotional opportunities are regarded as the ones that individuals all the time aspire for. Research has indicated that when they are recruited, then they may or may not find their job duties pleasurable. Even when the employees do not feel satisfied with their jobs, they have to work hard to please their employers and generate income to sustain their living conditions. There have been cases of women, employed in various offices, organizations, and other places for long term period, but they have not acquired promotional opportunities. They have been in the same positions throughout their jobs. Therefore, lack of promotional opportunities is regarded as one of the crucial impediments within the course of attainment of job satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

The status of women in post-independence India has been undergoing changes. The population of women is regarded as almost half of the total population in India. A country or the community cannot be

considered civilized, where a woman is not respected and treated with courtesy. In India, there have been formulation of laws and measures that have promoted empowerment opportunities among women. The main areas, which are considered vital and which have enhanced the status of women are, usage of technology, educational opportunities, employment opportunities and prevention of criminal and violent acts. In post-independent India, women are progressing. Empowerment opportunities are being created for them that are rendering a significant contribution in leading to their progress. But women in some cases are not treated equally to men and are considered as liabilities. This viewpoint is usually prevalent among the individuals, belonging to rural communities. They possess the viewpoint that girls should be trained in terms of implementation of household responsibilities and education is not meant for them.

After the country achieved its independence, women acquired the right to vote. They are also acquiring positions in Parliament and Lok Sabha. Hence, women are getting involved in politics. Acquisition of education is regarded as a significant aspect that leads to effective growth and development of the

individuals. Women are getting enrolled in higher educational institutions to enhance their academic skills and abilities. They are engaged in number of employment opportunities and professions, such as, doctors, lawyers, teachers, researchers, educationists, engineers, administrators and so forth. Within the workplace, there are number of problems, which they experience, these are, working environmental conditions, unavailability of technology, materials and infrastructure, ineffective training and development programs, sexual harassment within the workplace, terms and relationships with

other members, unavailability of equal rights and opportunities, lack of knowledge and information, conflicts and disputes, creating a balance between personal and professional life and lack of promotional opportunities. Finally, it can be stated, it is necessary to provide remedies to the problems experienced by women, they should be treated equally within home and outside the home and should be encouraged towards acquisition of education and employment opportunities.

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