

# THE DELHI SULTANATE ADMINISTRATION SYSTEM IN INDIA-A STUDY

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**ABSTRACT-** In this article we will discuss about the administration of India under the Delhi sultanate. According to Islam, Shariat is above everybody and every law and even the Imam or Khalifah is under it. The same way, all Muslim rulers are governed by it and have to obey its laws. Therefore, the primary duty of a Muslim ruler is to observe the laws of the Shariat in his administration. Most of the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate called themselves as the Naib (deputy) of the Khalifah and accepted Abbasid Khalifahs as their overlords. Ala-ud-din Mubarak Khalji alone was an exception to it while his son Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Khalji went a step further and himself assumed the title of Khalifah. Muhammad Tughluq did not give the Khalifah any importance in the early period of his reign but ultimately had to yield and accepted the Khalifah as his overlord with a view to gain support of the Ulema. However, the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate accepted the Khalifah as their overlord only in name. They called themselves as Naibs of the Khalifah on their coins but for all practical purposes they all behaved as independent rulers. They accepted the Khalifah as their overlord with a view to win over to their side Sunni subjects and the Ulema which wielded large religious influence among the Muslim populace. The head of the state was the Sultan who enjoyed unlimited powers in every sphere of state activity. There was no law of succession during the period of the Sultanate. It was not necessary that the eldest son or the daughter of the Sultan should succeed the father. However, tradition developed from the close of the reign of Sultan Iltutmish that the throne belonged to the eldest son or the daughter of the Sultan. Besides, the Sultan had also the right to nominate anyone as his successor to the throne. Thus, the principle of hereditary succession and nomination of successor by the Sultan came into vogue. Razia, Shihab-ud-din Khalji and Tughluq Shah were accepted rulers on the basis of one or other of these principles. However, the experiment of placing of a woman or minor on the throne failed. Therefore, the practice developed that the right of heredity was to be accepted only in cases of competent successor. In case a competent successor was not available, the nobles got the right to choose the Sultan. Iltutmish, all brothers of Sultana Razia, Qutb-ud-din Mubarak Khalji and Firuz Tughluq were chosen Sultans with the consent of the nobility. Besides, the sword also decided the issue of succession. Ala-ud-din Khalji, Khizr Khan and Bahlul Lodi got the throne by force.

**KEYWORDS-DELHI SULTAN, ALA-UD-DIN MUBARAK, KHALJI, FIRUZ TUGHALUQ, SHIHAB-UD-DIN KHALJI**

## INTRODUCTION

In this article we will discuss about the administration of India under the Delhi sultanate.

According to Islam, Shariat is above everybody and every law and even the Imam or Khalifah is under it. The same way, all Muslim rulers are governed by it and have to obey its laws. Therefore, the primary duty of a Muslim ruler is to observe the laws of the Shariat in his administration.

The Sultans of Delhi were no exception. They were not head of a religion but only head of their state. But their primary duty was the observance of the laws of Shariat or Islamic laws in matters of state.

, the rulers of the Delhi Sultanate accepted the Khalifah as their overlord only in name.

They called themselves as Naibs of the Khalifah on their coins but for all practical purposes they all behaved as independent rulers. They accepted the Khalifah as their overlord with a view to win over to their side Sunni subjects and the Ulema which wielded large religious influence among the Muslim populace.

### *The Central Government:*

#### **1. The Sultan:**

The head of the state was the Sultan who enjoyed unlimited powers in every sphere of state activity. There was no law of succession during the period of the Sultanate. It was not necessary that the eldest son or the daughter of the

Sultan should succeed the father. However, tradition developed from the close of the reign of Sultan Iltutmish that the throne belonged to the eldest son or the daughter of the Sultan.

Besides, the Sultan had also the right to nominate anyone as his successor to the throne. Thus, the principle of hereditary succession and nomination of successor by the Sultan came into vogue. Razia, Shihab-ud-din Khalji and Tughluq Shah were accepted rulers on the basis of one or other of these principles. However, the experiment of placing of a woman or minor on the throne failed.

All ministers, nobles and other officers of the state were appointed, promoted and dismissed by him. His order was the law in his state. But, these were his legal powers. Their effectiveness in practice depended on his military strength. The nobility also wielded influence particularly if the Sultan was weak.

The Ulema, being interpreter of Islamic laws, also influenced the policy of the Sultan. Only Ala-ud-din Khalji and Mubarak Khalji refused to accept the interference of the Ulema in matters of the state. Apart from maintenance of peace and order within the empire and its protection from foreign invasions, one important duty of the Sultan was to extend its territories.

## **2. Ministers and Other Officers:**

Different ministers and other officials assisted the Sultan in administering the state.

### **They were as follows:**

#### **(i) The naib (Naib-i-Mamlukata):**

The post was created during the reign of Sultan Bahram Shah after the fall of Raziah. The nobles had chosen one among themselves as naib who, in fact, enjoyed all powers of the state. However, this post had purpose and meaning only during the reigns of weak rulers.

In such cases, the post of naib was next only to the Sultan and was above the vazir. The powerful Sultan either abolished this post altogether or gave it to a noble simply to honour him as was done by Ala-ud-din Khalji. In that case, naib enjoyed no special power in administration.

#### **(ii) The Vazir:**

The Prime Minister was called the vazir. He was primarily the head of the finance department called the dewan-i-vizarat and was in a position to supervise not only the income and expenditure of the state but all other departments as well. Whenever there was no post of naib, the position of the vazir was next to the Sultan.

He, therefore, supervised the entire administration and looked after it whenever the Sultan fell ill or was out of the capital, appointed officers to different posts and performed various other duties. He was assisted by many officers and subordinates, most important among them being the naib-vazir, mushrif-i-mamaluk (auditor-general) and mustaufi-i-mamaluk (auditor-general).

#### **(iii) Ariz-i-Mumalik:**

He was the head of the department of diwan-i-arz and in that capacity was the controller-general of the military department. He recruited soldiers, fixed their salaries, arranged for their supplies and inspection and maintained the descriptive rolls of horses and men. He was, however, not the commander of the army though the Sultan assigned him this responsibility on certain occasions.

#### **(iv) Davir-i-Khas (Amir-Munshi):**

He was the head of the department of diwan-i-insha. All formal or confidential correspondence between the Sultan and the rulers of other states or subordinate chiefs, governors and officials was carried on by his department. He was assisted by a large number of dabirs (writers) in his work.

#### **(v) Diwan-i-Risalat:**

He was the minister of foreign affairs and looked after the diplomatic relations with foreign states and welfare of foreign diplomats and ambassadors.

#### **(vi) Sadr-us-Sudur:**

He was the head of the religious department. The propagation of Islam, observance of its principles and protection of privileges of Muslims constituted his primary duties. He controlled the finances of the tax called zakat which was a religious tax on the Muslims. He provided financial assistance to mosques, maqtabas (educational institutions for the Muslims), Muslim scholars and religious saints. He also looked after the distribution of charity by the state.

#### **(vii) Qazi-ul-Quzat:**

He was the highest judicial officer in the state after the Sultan. He had both original and appellate jurisdiction. Mostly, the offices of Sadr-us-sudur and Qazi-ul-quzat were combined in one person.

#### **(viii) Barid-i-Mumalika:**

He was the head of the intelligence and postal department. He was responsible for the espionage system, collection of news and their quick despatch and disposal.

Besides, the Sultan created several other departments and appointed their officers to carry on certain specific duties. For instance, Muhammad Tughluq created the department of diwan-i-amir kohi or the department of agriculture. The Sultan also kept his personal bodyguards and other officers to manage his household.

The Wakil-i-dar-mahal looked after the officials of the palace; the Barbak maintained the tradition of the court and its glamour; Amir-i-hajib looked after the visitors to the Sultan; Amir-i-shikar-i-shahi arranged for the hunting parties of the Sultan; Amir-i-majlis-shahi looked after the festivals of the state; and Sar-i-jahandar was the head of the Sultan's bodyguards. The Sultan also maintained different karkhanahs to manufacture different articles such as cloth, arms, etc. and various officers were appointed there.

Many officers among these were the trusted officers of the Sultan. They did not enjoy the rank of ministers but as a few of them looked after the personal security and comfort of the Sultan, they were very close to him and wielded good influence.

#### ***The Administration of Provinces (IQTAS):***

The empire was divided into provinces for the convenience of administration. They were called Iqtas. The number of Iqtas was not fixed and there was no uniformity in their administration. The head of the Iqta was called by different names, i.e., naib Sultan, nazim, muqti or wali. During the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji, Iqtas were divided into two categories.

Firstly, they were those Iqtas which were under the Delhi Sultanate from the beginning and, secondly, they were those Iqtas which were brought under the control of the Delhi Sultanate during the rule of Ala-ud-din Khalji. The muqtis or the walis of the second category of Iqtas were given a little more extensive powers so that the newly added territory could be brought about under the effective control of the Sultanate.

Besides, there were tributary states of south India. The Hindu rulers of the South who had accepted the suzerainty of the Sultanate were independent in matters of internal administration but paid yearly tribute to the Sultan. The walis or the muqtis enjoyed the same powers in relation to their Iqtas as the Sultan enjoyed in the empire.

However, they were under the supervision of the central government and carried on orders of the Sultan in their administration. They sent yearly report of their income and expenditure to the Centre and deposited the balance in the central treasury. They maintained large armies and were required to come to the support of the Sultan whenever needed.

They could not engage themselves in wars for extension of territory without prior permission of the Sultan and when they engaged in it they were required to pay part of the booty to the Sultan. The elephants and the members of the royal family captured during wars were the monopoly of the Sultan. No muqti was allowed to assume the title of the Sultan, to hold his own court, use a canopy or royal emblem.

They were not allowed to mint coins in their names and Khutba could not be read in their names. Yet, during the rule of a weak Sultan, the muqtis enjoyed extensive powers. During the period of Lodi Sultans they even kept elephants which was regarded as the exclusive monopoly of the Sultan. In general, the muqtis enjoyed wide powers during the period of the Sultanate.

That was one reason of occasional revolts and frequent dynastic changes during this period.

The Chaudhri, the Patwari, the Khut, the Muqaddam and the Chaukidar were the hereditary officers of the village who helped the government in collection of the revenue and enjoyed certain privileges except during the reign of Ala-ud-din Khalji. The Panchayat of the village looked after education, sanitation, etc. and acted as a judicial body as well concerning disputes in the village.

#### ***Finance:***

The Sultan mainly collected five categories of taxes besides certain others.

#### **Those taxes were:**

##### **(i) Ushr:**

It was a land tax which was collected from Muslim peasants. It was 10 per cent of the produce on the land watered by natural resources and 5 per cent on the land which enjoyed men-made irrigation facilities.

##### **(ii) Kharaj:**

It was a land tax charged from non-Muslims and ranged from 1/3 to 1/2 of the produce.

##### **(iii) Khams:**

It was 1/5 of the booty captured in the war and 1/5 of the produce of mines or buried treasure that was found. Four-fifth of it went to the army which fought the war or to the person who found the treasure. But, except Firuz Tughluq, all Sultans collected 4/5 instead of 1/5 while Sikandar Lodi took nothing of the treasure that was found.

##### **(iv) Jizya:**

It was a religious tax on non-Muslims. According to the Islam, a zimmi (non-Muslim) had no right to live in the kingdom of a Muslim Sultan. But this concession was permitted to non-Muslims after payment of the tax called Jizya. The non-Muslims were divided into three grades for the purpose of payment of this tax.

The first grade paid at the rate of 48 dirhams, the second at 24 dirhams and the third at 12 dirhams annually. Women, children, beggars, cripples, blind, old men, monks, priests, brahmanas (except during the period of Firuz Tughluq) and all those who had no source of income were exempted from this tax. All Sultans collected this tax on principle but, as a practical measure, nobody collected it with severity.

Dr Banarsi Prasad Saxena had expressed another view concerning Jizya He has opined that Jizya was a non-agricultural tax. Barni, Amir Khusrav and Nizamuddin Auliya expressed that the word Jizya was used for all taxes except land revenue.

**(v) Zakat:**

This was a religious tax which was imposed only on rich Muslims and consisted of 2 ½ per cent of their income. Besides above taxes, 2 ½ per cent was charged from the Muslims and 5 per cent from the Hindus as trade tax. There was 5 per cent tax on the sale and purchase of horses. Ala-ud-din Khalji imposed house-tax and grazing-tax as well, while Firuz Tughluq charged 10 per cent of the produce as irrigation tax from the land which enjoyed the advantage of the irrigation facilities provided by the state. Another important source of income were presents offered to the Sultan by the people, nobles, provincial governors and feudatory chiefs.

The main items of expenditure were expenses on the army, salaries of civil officers and the personal expenditure of the Sultan and his palace.

**Land Revenue:**

**The land was of four kinds, namely:**

- (1) The land which was given to the people in gift or charity particularly to Muslim scholars and saints such as inam or waqf. This type of land was free of tax;
- (2) The land which was in the hands of provincial governors, that is, walis or muqtis. The provincial governors collected land revenue from this land and after defraying the cost of their administration deposited the surplus in the Central treasury;
- (3) The land was of the feudatory Hindu chiefs who paid fixed annual tribute to the Sultan; and
- (4) The land which was directly administered by the Central government. It was called the Khalisah-land. Primarily, this fourth kind of land came under the revenue administration of the Sultan.

The Central government appointed amil or revenue-collector in each sub-division called the shiq. He collected the revenue with the help of hereditary officers of the village like chaudharis, muqaddams, patwaris, etc. The Sultan appointed one officer called Khwaja in every Iqta to look after the working of wali or muqti.

The walis or muqtis submitted the statements of their annual income and expenditure to the Sultan. Besides, the news-reporters and spies of the Central government informed the Sultan about the administration of provinces.

Normally, the peasants were asked to pay 1/3 of the produce to the state as land revenue. Ala-ud-din, however, collected ½ of the produce from certain territories. But, after him the revenue was again fixed at 1/3 of the produce while the attempt of Muhammad Tughluq to collect ½ of the produce from the Doab failed.

Mostly, the revenue was collected in cash but Ala-ud-din collected it in kind from Doab and the nearby territories of Delhi. Except Ala-ud-din and Muhammad Tughluq, no Sultan of Delhi collected revenue based on the measurement of land. Most of the Sultans collected it on the basis of rough assessment of the produce.

Ala-ud-din confiscated all land given as gifts or as charity by previous rulers and redistributed it among his loyal subjects. He also abolished all privileges of hereditary officers of villages like chaudharis, khuts, Muqaddams, etc. and forced them to pay all taxes to the state like other peasants.

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq decided in the interest of the peasants that in no case the land-revenue be enhanced more than 1/11 to 1/10 in any Iqta in any one year. Muhammad Tughluq prepared an estimate of the annual income and expenditure of the state. He desired that there should be uniformity in land-revenue in his entire empire.

He also established a separate agricultural department, appointed an officer diwan-i-kohi to look after it and carry on state-farming on a fixed piece of land for three years on experimental basis. But, his measures failed and were soon abandoned.

Firuz Tughluq made a rough assessment of the entire land-revenue of the state and on that basis fixed the land-revenue for the entire period of his reign. He made free the peasants from the payment of taqavi loans, enhanced the salaries of revenue officers, abolished nearly twenty-four taxes, planted fruit gardens, dug many canals, imposed irrigation tax, stopped the practice of imposing benevolences on the governors at the time of their appointments and also that of torturing officers to extract more money from them, the burden of which really used to fall upon the shoulders of the people.

The measures of Firuz, though defective in certain respects, certainly brought prosperity to the state and its people. The Lodi Sultans gave extensive lands as Jagirs to their nobles which reduced the area of Khalisa-land. The efforts of Sikandar Lodi to fix the revenue on the basis of measurement of land also failed. This reduced the income of the state.

The revenue-system during the period of the Delhi Sultanate suffered from certain defects. The assessment of revenue without the measurement of land could not be just to the peasants. This system gave the officials opportunities to make arbitrary decisions. The land was normally given to contractors to collect the revenue.

These contractors used to extract as much revenue from the peasants as could be possible so that they could have good surplus after depositing the required amount of revenue in the state-treasury. Besides, there were other taxes which the peasants had to pay besides the land-revenue and that certainly meant extra burden on them.

#### **The Army:**

The power of the Sultan depended on the army. During the entire period of the Delhi Sultanate, there remained conflict of power between the Muslims and the Hindus. While every Sultan desired to establish and extend his power, the Hindu kings resisted them and the Hindu subjects engaged themselves in revolts. Besides, the Muslims were also not united.

The provincial Muslim governors also attempted to establish independent kingdoms and different Muslim rulers also fought against the Sultan. Most of the Sultans faced the challenge of invasions of the Mongols as well from the north-west.

Therefore, every Sultan was forced to keep a large army at the centre. Different Sultans improved the organisation of their army and methods of warfare though failed to come up to the mark with pace of time as compared to other rulers in foreign lands.

#### **The army consisted of four types of soldiers:**

(1) The soldiers were recruited by the Centre as soldiers of the army of the Sultan. The army which was constituted by these soldiers was called Khasah- khail. Ala-ud-din Khalji kept a large standing army at the Centre which included 4,75,000 horsemen besides the infantry. Ghiyas-ud-din and Muhammad Tughluq also kept large standing armies at the Centre. But, the rest of Sultans, prior or after them, failed to keep such standing armies at the Centre.

This army was looked after by the Diwan-i-ariz who was responsible for its recruitment, organisation, maintenance, salary, etc. There was no regular course of training for these soldiers. Every soldier was responsible to improve his talents as he desired. However, Sultans like Balban trained them in hardship by carrying them on their hunting parties or like occasions.

(2) Those soldiers who were employed on permanent basis by nobles and provincial governors and who themselves were responsible for their recruitment, maintenance, training, etc. The nobles were assigned jagirs by the Sultan to maintain them while provincial governors met their expenses out of income of their Iqtas.

Arizs were appointed in provinces to look after this part of the army but the primary responsibility was that of nobles and governors themselves. It was expected that nobles and governors would place their armies before the Sultan for inspection every year but the rule was normally not observed. The nobles and governors brought their armies to the service of the Sultan only when ordered.

(3) Those soldiers which were recruited only in times of war on temporary basis and were paid only for that period, and

(4) Those Muslim soldiers who joined the army as volunteers at times of war against the infidels (Hindus). They regarded such war as a holy war, that is jihad. They received no pay but were given share out of the booty captured in the war.

The army consisted primarily of cavalry, infantry and elephants. The cavalry formed the backbone of the army. The cavalry-men were of two types, one, the Sawar who kept only one horse and the other, the do-aspa who kept two horses.

The horses were imported from distant foreign countries like Arabia, Turkistan etc. Ala-ud-din Khalji started the practice of branding the horses and that of keeping huliya (descriptive roll) of the soldiers so that the horses and soldiers could not be changed.

Ghiyas-ud-din Tughluq maintained these practices. Sikandar Lodi also tried to revive these practices. But, the rest of the Sultans could not maintain these practices and Sultans like Firuz Tughluq allowed corrupt practices in this system because of their unwise generosity.

Every horse-man kept two swords, one javelin and a bow and arrows with him. They also kept a shield, armour and a head-gear for self-protection. The horses were also kept protected by armours. The success of the army largely depended on the strength and mobility of the cavalry.

The second important part of the army consisted of trained war-elephants. The Muslim rulers also accepted war-elephants as an essential part of their army once they settled down in India. Only Sultans had the privilege to keep elephants. No Sultan, except the Lodis, allowed their nobles or governors to enjoy this privilege.

However, only sometimes a noble or a governor was allowed to enjoy this privilege as a mark of special favour. There was a separate department for the training and maintenance of elephants. They were also armoured during the

course of battle. The third part of the army was the infantry. The foot-soldiers were called payaks. They were armed with swords, spears and bows and arrows.

No Sultan of Delhi managed to keep something like modern artillery. However, there was a sort of mechanical artillery through which fire-balls, fire-arrows, snakes, stones, etc. were hurled on the enemy with the help of the gun-powder. But, gun-powder balls were not prepared at that time in India. The Sultan maintained a large number of boats as well primarily for transport purposes but for fighting as well.

The army of the Sultan consisted of soldiers of different nationalities and diverse faiths. The Persians, the Afghans, the Mongols, Indian Muslims, the Hindus, etc. were all recruited in the army but the higher offices were mostly given to foreign Muslims.

The efficiency of such an army which was constituted of so diverse elements depended largely on the leadership of its commander or that of the Sultan who was the chief commander of the army. Yet, as most of the soldiers were Muslims, they were certainly emotionally inspired and unified on the basis of one religion, that is, Islam.

However, its greatest weakness was lack of a modern artillery. It lacked effective use of gun-powder. It was a great weakness, particularly, when we find that it was well-developed in foreign countries.

#### **Justice and Police:**

The Sultan was the highest judicial authority within the empire. He used to hold his judicial court twice a week and decided all types of cases. He was helped in dispensation of justice by the chief Sadr (Sadr-us-Sudur) regarding cases of religious nature and by the chief Qazi (Qazi-ul-qazat) in all other cases. But, as the chief Sadr or the chief Qazi was mostly one person, he remained the chief adviser of the Sultan in judicial matters.

The chief Sadr, the chief Qazi and provincial Sadrs and Qazis were appointed by the Sultan himself. Most Sultans of the Delhi Sultanate were just. But as they were advised by the chief Sadr who was a religious man and as he had to follow Islamic principles while dispensing justice, it is doubtful that the non-Muslims received justice in the real sense from them.

The chief Sadr or the chief Qazi stood next to the Sultan in the judiciary and then were Sadrs and Qazis in provincial capitals and all important cities within the empire and they decided cases falling within their jurisdiction. The village-assemblies (Panchayats) decided cases of their respective villages.

The penal law was severe during the period of the Sultanate. Normally, the culprits were punished with seizure of their property and wealth, mutilation or death. Islamic laws were enforced not only in criminal cases but also in civil cases.

Thus, the judicial system during the period of the Sultanate was typical of medieval age and no Sultan had brought about any significant change in it. The nature of justice mostly depended on the personality and religious views of the Sultan. If the Sultan was justice-loving, the system worked well.

#### **Religious Policy:**

During the entire period of the Sultanate, Islam remained the religion of the state. Therefore, the Sultan performed a religious duty along with his political obligation while administering the state. That duty was to convert this dar-ul-harb (non-Muslim territory) into dar-ul-Islam (Muslim land).

Every Sultan pursued this aim according to his religious views, circumstances and power. Sultans like Ala-ud-din Khalji and Muhammad Tughluq regarded it their secondary duty but Sultans like Firuz Tughluq and Sikandar Lodi gave it preference over their political obligations and left nothing in their efforts to propagate Islam among their subjects.

All Sultans pursued a discriminatory policy between their Muslim and non-Muslim subjects, the majority of them being the Hindus. Mostly, the Muslims were not engaged in agriculture but those who were in it had to pay less revenue as compared to Hindu peasants.

The same way, the Hindu traders paid double trade-tax as compared to Muslim traders. Foreign Muslims alone were entitled to high offices of the state while the Hindus and even converted Muslims were not considered for them.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Therefore, the efforts of the conquerors to establish the supremacy of their religion and convert the Hindus to Islam with a view to create a majority of people of their faith suited their circumstances, benefited their political motive and served their religion. Thus, it is not justified to decry the religious policy of the Sultans and it is unjust to assign any other motive to their intentions as some modern historians have tried to do.

The policy of the Sultans was that of religious intolerance and it was, certainly, neither incorrect nor surprising. However, it is a fact that no Sultan of the Sultanate could become great because none could have a vision of future and rise above the spirit of his age. One main reason of this was definitely their religious bigotry.

Otherwise, why have modern historians refused to accept even Ala-ud-din Khalji as a great ruler who was certainly a great and successful commander and administrator? No Sultan of the Sultanate could realise that it was impossible to convert all Hindus to Islam or to destroy the strength of Hinduism by sheer physical force.

If they could realize it they could avoid religious fanaticism and promote understanding between the Hindus and the Muslims which was automatically growing between their subjects of two faiths. The Mughul rulers who became masters of Delhi afterwards could understand it and that is why Akbar, the pioneer in this field, was titled “**The Great.**”

For the same reason the Mughul empire proved more enduring, prosperous and advantageous to India. Thus, the policy of religious bigotry of the Sultans of Delhi was certainly one of their blunders.

The administration of Sultans suffered from certain serious defects. Yet, it fulfilled the need of the time. However, there remained two primary defects. One was the policy of religious intolerance and the other was their failure to improve their military strength according to changed circumstances. The one kept them devoid of loyalty and cooperation of the majority of their subjects and the other, that is, the declining military strength resulted in the loss of their empire.

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