

INSIGHTS INTO PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT: THE INFLUENCE OF CHILDHOOD IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AS PORTRAYED IN THE SELECTED MALAYALAM MOVIES

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Abstract:

This paper intends to focus on analysing the impact of childhood trauma and childhood experiences in shaping one's character as an adult. Here, the aim is to show that childhood has a profound impact on individuals. It is capable of shaping the physical, emotional, and social development of a man. Certain characters from the three Malayalam movies "Forensic" (Dir. Akhil Paul, 2020), "Amala" (Dir. Nishad Ebrahim, 2023) and "Iratta" (Dir. Rohith M. G, 2023) is thereby taken in order to analyse the same. The paper also tries to understand how the experiences, relationships, and environments of a child during his childhood play a crucial role in influencing his or her personality, behaviour, and overall well-being throughout their life. What the child sees, hears, experiences, their living conditions, behaviour of people around him, the way he is raised, mannerisms of people surrounding him etc. during this phase will be unconsciously captured by him and later gets reflected in his character when he begins to start his own independent life and these will always have an influence on him till his death and he will always tend to reflect the same in the future. Many aspects of an individual's personality are shaped during childhood. The parental and societal influence on the child's personality development is looked upon and the reasons behind the careless behaviour of the character's parents are also being analysed in this paper. This topic is being studied in the light of theories such as Psychoanalytic Theory, Socio psychological theory, and Trauma Theory.

Keyword: childhood experiences, behaviour, trauma, personality development.

INTRODUCTION

Originated from Philosophy, Psychology is first considered as the study of the soul and later on after a series of research conducted by various psychologists, it is later termed as the study of behaviour of a person. "Development refers to the changes over time in the structure, thought, or behaviour of a person as a result of both biological and environmental influences." (Craig 8). Humans undergo changes throughout their lifespan. Some developments are biological while some developments occur as a result of the environment in which he lives in. According to Upton Sinclair, Developmental psychology is a scientific study of the changes in mind and behaviour that happens at different ages of a person (2).

Trauma is defined as an emotional response to a disturbing event that affects an individual's coping ability, leading to feelings of helplessness, fear, and vulnerability, which can result from various events, including abuse, violence, accidents, natural disasters, or sudden loss of a beloved one. Trauma can be classified into different types, which includes Acute trauma, Chronic trauma and Complex trauma. Acute trauma is caused as a result of a single traumatic event. Chronic trauma comes as a result of prolonged or repeated exposure to traumatic situations

while Complex trauma occurs due to the exposure to multiple traumatic events, often during childhood.

IMPORTANCE OF CHILDHOOD IN THE CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The early experience of a child is a key aspect that is capable of shaping the social side of an individual, which includes his perspective and attitude towards the society. Personality Disorders is a change in character which is entirely different from the social and behavioural norms in an individual causing abnormal behaviour patterns in him. Early childhood experiences are an integral part to personality development. Unfortunate childhood experiences and perceptions cause Personality disorders, and these patterns could be visible only when the individual reaches his adolescence age, and it will be present throughout the person's lifetime.

"Freud stressed the importance of early childhood experiences, believing that personality was formed in the first six years of life, and that if there were significant problems, those problems must have begun in those early years." (Taylor 11). Carl Jung and Erik Erikson also support the statement of Sigmund Freud by stressing on the importance of the first few years in the character development of a person. Thus, childhood becomes the root of

an individual's life. The childhood is the phase which gives an outline to the behaviour and as well as the shape to the mental stability of an individual.

PARENTAL AND SOCIETAL INFLUENCE ON CHILD, PTSD AND OTHER DISORDERS

The world is always in the mode of changing and as human beings are social beings, one cannot keep a static position. One must keep on growing day by day, and this growth process continues till the end of his life. As for the child, parents are the first models, home is the first school, and society is the first textbook in a child's life. Hence, all these three plays an important role in moulding the character of an individual. Children observe and imitate their own family and society in their life. So, society and dysfunctional or abusive family play a major role in the behavioural pattern of a child as well as an adult. Parents should be able to act as a counsellor rather than abusing or threatening their child. When it comes to family, both family problems and the psychological problems of the parents like depression, alcoholism, disharmony in married life etc. can adversely change the attitude of parents towards the children and thereby affects the child's mental health. Such parents are too busy handling their personal problems and concerns that they fail to listen to their children and cease to understand the conflicts and pressures that the child is facing. As a result, they often refuse to give adequate support and assistance to their child who is dealing with a crisis of his own.

Psychological disorders can be genetically transmitted when the child is in the womb of his mother. This is another way of parental influence on children. Scolding and abusing a child will evoke a sense of violence in them, which makes them misunderstand that violence is the solution for all the problems. Children with dysfunctional families have a high chance to show aggression (due to jealousy) towards those children who get a proper family which they never got themselves. Children often imitate and repeat the words uttered by their parents even when they are in public. Society usually passes on their stigma into the upcoming generation as well. Some parents teach their child to isolate the children of their same age with dysfunctional or socially downward families. Judgemental society being yet another factor for misconduct of a person.

POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND OTHER RELEVANT PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS PORTRAYED IN THESE MOVIES

Recognised as a psychiatric disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental condition in which a person experiences or witnesses a traumatic event. This disorder also occurs when a person loses their beloved ones. People with any other disorder can also be at the risk of PTSD triggering at any point of their life when they encounter any traumatic events or loved one's separation. Uncontrollable thoughts over the event may lead them to depression stage which may or may not include suicidal tendency.

Anxiety disorder is a mental state where the affected person stresses themselves on any particular incident or reason. They approach the scenario with an emotion of fear. This makes them an overthinker and ends up avoiding anything adversely affecting them.

THE ROLE OF CHILDHOOD IN CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT PORTRAYED IN THE SELECTED MALAYALAM MOVIES

The Malayalam movie "Forensic" (Dir. Akhil Paul, 2020) talks about investigation regarding the series of kidnapping and murdering of children that happened in a particular area. The villain is revealed as Dr. Alphonse at the climax. He was a well reputed psychiatrist and people have never seen the other side of him which makes the movie so thrilling with a great twist.

"Iratra" (Dir. Rohith M. G, 2023) is a Malayalam movie that is about the investigation process regarding the murder of a policeman that happened inside the police station itself. The movie focuses on the two characters, Pramod and Vinod (who are twins) and their life. Vinod was the victim of the alleged murder, and his corpse was shown in the beginning of the movie. "Krishnan attributes childhood trauma to many of the ideas in "Iratra" which deals with cycles of inherited violence and pain that are impossible to escape from. Our childhood has a huge role in shaping our character and personality. Our experiences from before we turn 7 or 8 affect our future" (Sequeira). The movie showcases the effects of childhood trauma. From this movie, both the characters are taken for analysis.

"Amala" (Dir. Nishad Ebrahim, 2023) is a psychological thriller which depicts the murderous attitude of Basil Jose who became the reason for Amala's death. He developed feelings for her but eventually due to his obsession, he tried to kill a senior boy who too had feelings for her. But unfortunately, Amala dies accidentally while escaping from him, meanwhile he was attempting to kill the boy. Later, when he became an adult, he targeted those who looked like Amala, and tried to kill them while mercilessly killing away all the obstacles that came in his way as well. This movie is open-ended as the heroine escapes from his clutches, but the police couldn't arrest him, and he is wandering somewhere freely looking for his next prey. All the three movies give a clear-cut picture of the childhood phase of the selected characters with the portrayal of the main life events that happened in their childhood. This aspect of the plot thus helps in analysing the root causes underlying their character. It is clearly visible that the childhood incidents have a very important role to play in the shaping of their character. The anti-social behaviour that is seen in these characters are the aftereffects of these dreadful experiences. All the characters that are selected for the analysis of this study have abnormal and anti-social behaviour and for it, parents and society had a major role to play.

In "Amala" (Dir. Nishad Ebrahim, 2023), on analysing Basil, the trait of jealousy can be traced as the main cause of the first crime he has committed. Jealousy of a person sprouts from his inner fear and anger. A person becomes jealous when he feels that something that legitimately belongs to him is being taken away by another person. This causes a threat to his security, and he feels so powerless that he finds himself unable to defend against this threat. Jealousy is not something that comes out of nowhere. It is something that develops over a period of time and progresses as a person grows up. It begins from the babyhood stage itself. It gradually becomes a form of stress and as the intensity hikes up, it is capable of worsening the person's physical and mental well-being, which is seen in Basil also. He considered Amala as his own possession that is rightfully his and one who approached Amala acts as a threat that instilled jealousy in him. He somehow felt inferior to the threat that developed fear and anger, which later gave rise to a sense of jealousy towards the threat. The fear of losing Amala and the helpless situation of Basil caused him a state of extreme frustration which eventually

led to killing the threat. Jealousy is one of the symptoms of anxiety disorder. The role of genetics is very well shown as Esther (Basil's mother) was pregnant with Basil and During the initial phase of her mental illness she used to imagine and create things in her mind and used to overthink about it a lot and as a result she fell into depression many times. In most cases, overthinking is due to anxiety. This psychological disorder was something that she got from her parents. It is said in the movie itself. "Doctors said Esther got it genetically from her parents" ("Amala", 35:22). She was so mentally unwell that even a small incident disturbed her so much. She was jealous, possessive, suspicious, depressed etc. But her husband Jose took great care of her. One day Esther asked Jose a question "What If I die in childbirth?" and the reply made her unhappy, major doubts and pain clouded in her. After this incident, she grew more suspicious. In her derailed mind disturbances, she was not sure how to respond and one day she lit up her house and Jose died. Only Esther was saved then but she died in childbirth.

Basil meets Amala during his school days. It was for the first time that he got close to someone in his life. After getting acquainted with her, many positive changes happened for him. She too had a soft corner for him. But after knowing Jerin's feeling for Amala, his mind got disturbed. This triggered his inherited disorder which suddenly changed him. He became like his mother. They both had the fear of losing their beloved. They became restless and sleepless. Like his mother, Basil also started imagining and creating fake scenarios in his mind and he developed anger towards Jerin and decided to kill him. Like his mother, he too had overthinking, unstable mind, over possessiveness, suspicion etc. He invited Jerin to an abandoned place and murdered him.

The mother plays an important role as she is the key social agent in an infant's life. But here Basil lost his mother while she gave birth to him. He lived as an orphan due to his mother's act. She was also jealous, which made her burn him alive. It is the evidence that even prenatal experiences can have a long-term impact on the child. So, his childhood and prenatal period was full of chaos. When it comes to children of age two or three, parents are the key social agents. Generally, a mother and child will immediately form a bonding, which is the foundation of a child's bonding skills. The role of a father is also very important. Father plays a key role in both the intellectual and emotional development of the child. Here, in Basil, the absence of parents has affected his personality to a great degree.

After the accidental death of Amala, he escaped from there and he left a letter saying that he went in search of Amala. This shows that even though he saw Amala dying in front of him, he cannot accept the reality. He doesn't want to lose her. He is a psychopath, and his victims are those women whom he felt some resemblance to his Amala. That is why he says to Celin that "Amala, there is no place left to search for you. I couldn't sleep at night after you were gone. Don't you recognise me? Amala, It's me." ("Amala", 1:10:50). He saw Amala in Celin. He started imagining Celin as Amala who is playing tricks with him while actually, she was striving to save her life. It was like a game of cat and mouse. When he killed Celin accidentally like he killed Amala, the childhood memories and trauma rushed back into his mind once again. The police officer who is investigating this case concluded that "Amala's loss has affected him immensely. He doesn't see every woman as Amala but there is a specific reason for him to consider a woman as Amala." Hence, the impact of childhood on the character Basil from the movie "Amala" (Dir. Nishad Ebrahim,2023) is clearly seen.

The accidental death of Amala becomes a traumatic event in Basil's life. This trauma has a long-term impact on him. Re-experiencing certain events or having flashbacks about the trauma is one of the most important symptoms of PTSD. In several scenes, flashbacks come to mind. Particularly in the climax scene, when he accidentally kills Celin, he gets the flashback of Amala's death as well. His heightened anxiety gets easily irritated and is living an estranged life. He is emotionally numb. All these clearly point out the fact that Basil had PTSD. As the traumatic event happened during his childhood, it had a long-term impact on him.

Human developments can be biological or environmental. In most cases, developments or changes happen as a result of the interaction of both. This interaction begins immediately at the moment of childbirth. In Basil's case, he acquired hereditary personality traits from his mother and when he interacted with an environment that triggered it, his behaviour changed. Here, both the factors changed his character into negative.

Modelling is a significant factor that happens during the childhood phase. The child tends to observe and copy the behavioural patterns that attract them. Research shows that certain people remain as 'influential models' as they possess certain characteristics that brought the child's attention. They are power, nurturance and perceived similarity. Power is one of the powerful factors, which has the ability to assert influence and control over people and situations around them. A child tends to imitate the powerful adult rather than the powerless one. Here in "Iratra" (Dir. Rohith M. G, 2023), their father was more powerful than their mother. Even though nurturance is also a factor, here in this case, Vinod was made to stay with his father and never saw his mother after they separated. He lived in the absence of his mother and automatically became like his father as he was the only parent and thereby the only model he had throughout his life. Perceived similarity with the model is another factor. According to this, boys tend to imitate other males, blacks tend to imitate other blacks etc. Here, as a boy, Vinod tends to imitate his father and that is why little traits of his father were caught for Pramod also even though he lived with his mother.

The character of Vinod seems to be affected with a disorder named Serious Childhood Adverse Experience, which is the same as PTSD. In his case, dysfunctional family and abusive parenting created a trauma when he was young and witnessed his father abusing his mother several times and thus a violent nature emerged in his personality. Their father used to bring many women to their house for physical intercourse and even forcefully tried to molest girls. This made him think that women are made to satisfy the sexual needs of men. This is purely the 'factor of Imitation' that when Vinod grows old, he imitates his father's trait. Moreover, he witnessed his own father's murder which added on to his trauma. Vinod was more violent than Pramod. In younger ages, Vinod developed a sense of insecurity and abandonment when his mother chose his brother over him and created a thought in him that he is worthless. The adverse effects of negligence and improper parenting can be explicitly seen in him in comparison to his twin brother, Pramod's, who got a good parenting at least from his mother. His father was a selfish and self-involved man that he completely neglected the existence of Vinod. After the departure of his mother, he gradually started becoming like his father and became a womaniser as well as a pedophile, started consuming alcohol daily like he did, thus becoming an addict. He felt envy towards his mother for abandoning him and thereby felt envy towards the entire woman community. He was rude to everyone till a

woman, Malini, entered his life. He even faced humiliation from society for being abandoned. This can be understood from a few dialogues delivered by certain minor characters in the movie. “Vinod, you’re moved out with your dad, right? There’s no one there. Your mom and Pramod left yesterday. Didn’t they take you along?” (“Iratta”, 52:38). These words from a neighbourhood lady, in a pitiful and sympathetic tone, made him ashamed that even his mother does not want him. “Is it our fault that your mom left you?” (“Iratta”, 53:02). The question from random children and their teasing made Vinod more frustrated. This explains the attitude of others towards an abandoned child. Negligence from parents and the insults he suffered from society are the factors that caused Vinod to have an abnormal personality. Instead of being a support to such a child or consoling them, their parents taught them to mock the child and alienate him, which is seen when they laugh at him.

The parents' attitude towards the child plays a significant role in his life. Here in Vinod's case, his mother's attitude towards him instigated the seeds of trust issues in the mind of the young Vinod and later when he became an adult, there is a conversation with Malini in which he says “Well I never let anyone stay. I don't trust anyone.” (“Iratta”, 1:20:44). This shows the character's lack of sincerity and trust in women. It was his childhood incidents that ruined his entire life. Each incident in Vinod's life made him a pessimistic being who once said to Malini that “I've never had anything good in my life. It was all filth. I am filthy”. (“Iratta”, 1:20:58). In this movie itself, there is a short scene where Pramod is giving a lecture regarding childhood trauma and in the scene, he says, “Some people got shattered living with childhood trauma and some people had overcome it and prospered in life.” (“Iratta”, 1:19:04). This is exactly about their own life. Pramod overcame the trauma to a certain extent, as it was less adverse in comparison to Vinod, while Vinod still couldn't prosper in his life. But however hard they try to erase it off, there will always be some pieces still remaining. That is how powerful its effect on an individual is. It can be considered that Vinod also had Narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) that he recurrently argues and fights with his mates and speaks in a high voice as to prove his superiority and power among them. This made him molest his niece Swetha (he was unaware that she was his niece and he molested thinking of her as a stranger), who is a very bold and brave girl and at some instance she argued with Vinod who came up as ‘moral police’. This made Vinod angry and out of his frustration he rapes Swetha. He acted as a superior power but when Swetha disobeyed him, he felt inferior to her which triggered his insecurity and the only way for him to impose his superiority is to use his physical power over her. So, he mercilessly abused her. The absence of good mothering is very visible in him. He didn't get the love, and affection neither from father nor from mother. This made him cruel with inhumane character. He always looked at every woman in the eyes of lust due to the lack of mother's presence and every time, he was showing his father's behaviour towards women. This made him such a vicious person. The climax of the movie reveals that the character Vinod was not killed by anyone as suspected but shot by himself. When an individual feels that they have become the reason for the loss of life of their loved one, there arises a strong feeling of guilt and in some cases it turns to be chronic stress that lasts for months but in some cases, they develop some suicidal tendency as they ought to believe that they do not deserve to live after being a reason for their own loss.

Identical twins are more similar in appearance than fraternal twins. This is due to genetic influence. As in appearance, the

identical twins tend to be more similar in their personality traits as well such as sociability, emotionality and activity level. Even so, some have different personality styles as they have a different environment. A quiet and easy-going child has different environmental experiences than an angry, assertive and impulsive child. This happened in the case of Pramod and Vinod after the divorce of their parents. They were separated from each other and raised in two different environments. The different environmental influences caused their personality to be different as well.

Even though the twin brother Pramod was comparatively way better than Vinod, Pramod also showed a few negative shades as an after effect of the dysfunctional family that he chose alcohol over his family, and this made his wife to leave him with their newborn child. They both grew up in a problematic background. It is the dysfunctional family scenario that destroyed the character of two future generations in this movie, i.e., Pramod's and Vinod's life and Pramod's child's. Usually, children neglected by their family are more likely to cause PTSD. Even though they have the same family, Vinod is more affected with this dysfunctional family and certain differences are seen in the characters of both the brothers. Pramod is raised well by single parents with good manners in a well-developed and supportive society. Whereas Vinod lived with his father who was a womaniser and abusive. This can be considered as the major reason for his character. Here, Pramod never considered and treated his wife well and spend whole life consuming alcohol and quarrelling with her. He was scared of getting abandoned, that he abandoned his wife without giving her a chance to abandon him. This is the aftermath of PTSD.

In “Forensic” (Dir. Akhil Paul, 2020), the serial killer, Dr Alphonse Kurian reaches his worst mental condition when he is diagnosed with Acute Myeloid Leukaemia. He says, “The cancer report shattered my life” (“Forensic”, 1:45:57). During the second appointment with the doctor, he gets triggered by a little girl who was very happy with her parents. He became envious towards that girl. So, it is seen that the image of a ‘happy family’ got him triggered every time and thus that girl became his first prey. On the other day, when he went to his son's school to pick him up, he came up with his friend and asked Alphonse to drop her at home as it was raining. When they came to her house, she ran towards her parents, and they embraced her with love. This again triggered the trauma that was already present in Alphonse. At that moment he was reminded of how his father used to beat him so hard by tying him up and he killed her. He deliberately went to that girl's funeral to see the parents crying to feel the satisfaction and ecstasy of watching them crying out loud.

His father abused him a lot and he, as a child, never got parental love or care. This malicious behaviour of his father and his relationship with father wounded his mind in early childhood itself. This psychological scarring created enormous rage towards his father as well as his environment. It is this rage that made him kill his victims. It is also shown in the film how he was exposed to butchering the raw flesh of the animals and the room in which he did all these killings was similar in appearance to a butcher shop. There was blood everywhere, different kinds of knives were there, a bathtub full of blood. Similar to that environment, he also used various methods to kill his victims. So, everything he had in his childhood has a great influence on him when he became an adult. He did all this in the name of shedding all his frustration regarding his unfair fate.

Moreover, the character himself is saying directly in the movie about his childhood in one of the scenes in the climax - “As I was wreaking havoc for my illness on my victims, I took great

care to keep these secrets hidden from my son. I was ready to do anything to prevent my son from having the same childhood that I had" ("Forensic", 1:50:58). So, it is seen that his childhood environment played a key role in his character development that made him a person he really didn't want to be. Still having these disorders, he strived hard to keep his own child away from such a way of living as his subconscious mind believes that the way he lives is not appropriate for being a good human. This provides an explanation that disorders are caused due to the tricky play of mind that they couldn't resist without proper therapies and counselling even though they are aware of their own disorders. There are certain common characteristics that can be inferred after closely observing all the three characters from each movie. All the three characters hated the people around them and behaved so rudely but here, Dr Alphonse Kurian and Basil are exceptions where even though they deeply hated society and people, they wore a mask and appeared to be a good human in front of others. Both were so manipulative in their nature, and they used it to get to their victims. They had shown their real nature only to their victims. Only Vinod was explicitly rude to others. The common feature that can be seen in all these characters is that each of them had a soft corner to one person in their life. To that person, they are genuinely good at heart and care for them as well. For Dr Alphonse, it was his son Naveen and his wife Sofia. For Vinod, it was Malini who entered his life very unexpectedly. For Basil, it was Amala whom he lost by accident forever.

In all the three character's lives, there is a person who holds the position of an angel. In their life, the attitude towards the society and the people around them were so rude and unsympathetic with an evil aura in the mind of the selected characters. This is a part of their antisocial behaviour. They felt alienated in their own life. At that point of time, they feel that they are strong and that they become a stone hearted person. There is one exception to this behaviour in all the three characters. Generally, they are rude, manipulative, bogus, cruel, hard-hearted, inconsiderate, and insincere to everyone but to that one person, they are just the opposite. The characters Amala from "Amala", Sofia and their son from "Forensic", and Malini from "Irattra" are those who hold angelic aura in the selected character's life. No one is completely evil that there should be some goodness left in each person. However cruel, they have provided a loophole to escape from this worst scenario of being a mentally disabled person. These angelic figures had played an important role in their life and had the capacity to bring out the good side in them. It is said out loud by Dr Alphonse himself in one scene, when he says that "Sofia, the love of my life. She was the one who made me a human being." ("Irattra", 1:44:59). From this particular dialogue, it is clear that how much his wife influenced him and acted as a thread to able him to get out of the situation he had and she successfully won the task for making him a good being, but the second phase of their life starts with the death of Sofia which triggered the mental state of Dr. Alphonse Kurian causes him Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and from there his criminal acts begin. In Vinod's case, it was only after the arrival of Malini that he stopped inviting strangers or his alcoholic friends to home and started to care for someone for the first time in his life, bought her clothes, cooked for her, supported her career etc. In fact, his friends mock him by saying "You've turned over a new leaf after finding a new woman." and he replies to them that "It is good to change when a good woman enters our life." ("Irattra", 1:39:32). We can see that a ray of hope has entered his life making him a new person. In Basil's case, he was neglected by all his peers, and he was alone in his school. It was for the first

time a person smiled at him and talked to him. This made him happy for the first time in his life and he started getting close to her more. Her coming into his life has caused a lot of change in his attitude. He became more pleasant, started being kind to others, and started smiling frequently. Later his friendship changed to an obsession where he felt jealous and over possessive when he found that his senior loves her.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this paper is to make people aware about the importance of a healthy childhood, which includes both physical and mental well-being, in moulding the personality of an individual as he or she becomes an adult. It is important to have a healthy childhood in order to become a good individual with a healthy mind. It is also noted that the influence of parents is very well explicit as well as powerful. Hence, as an adult one should be aware about the consequences of treating a child badly and the extremities of childhood traumas.

Today's world, especially the people in Kerala, fails to take care of their mental health. They consider physical health as something more important than mental health and neglect mental issues. They also have the tendency to brand those people who consult psychologists or psychiatrists, as "insane". They refuse to seek medical attention as they are least concerned about their mental health and more concerned about 'what the society would say'. Thus, it is very relevant and important to address these problems in contemporary society. This social stigma acts as a barricade for those who are suffering from both psychosis and neurosis and drags them back from consulting to a mental health professional. It is high time that this notion should be changed and proper awareness regarding the importance of mental health should be propagated among the people.

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