



Elements of Women Marginalization in Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*

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Abstract- The current study highlights all those elements that lead to marginalization and discrimination of women by investigating the challenges in this regard. The study aims to explore the circumstances of marginalized women in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif. The objectives of the study are to analyze how Christians in general and, Alice Bhatti, a lower-class woman, in particular, are demoted in society. In order to explore these issues, qualitative research methodology is used. The study concludes that Alice Bhatti is socially excluded from the mainstream of society just because of their religion, caste, and gender. She is depicted as a meek, helpless creature devoid of any individuality.

Keywords: Marginalization, Stagnant, Stereotype, Humiliation, Discrimination, Patriarchy.

I. INTRODUCTION

"Woman is defined as an aberration, a pathological condition, associated with 'complaints' and 'weeping' and pains" (Robbins, 2000). In the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Mohammad Hanif (2011) captures the life history of Alice Bhatti, the protagonist of the novel. Hanif declared her as a marginalized individual in the current situation of Pakistan. And being a woman, a Christian and from lower-caste, she is triply marginalized. Therefore, on the surface of the novel, she appears a stagnant stereotype. Throughout the novel, she is represented as an oppressed and humiliated figure. Although Islam contemplates women as independent personalities and offers equal status to them which cannot be subdued. All humans irrespective of men and women are addressed in the Holy Book as Annas, Al Insan, Al Bashar, and Al Momin (Khan, 2004). Our Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) surrendered His whole life to fight against every sort of social ills that still exist and deep-rooted in our society. The alleged custodians of beliefs consider it habitual to penalize and snub them. The exploitation of women in the novel is a major indication of the Muslim community's barbaric attitude towards women in Pakistan. And Mohammed Hanif in his novel has set meticulous interpretations of the numerous factors that make them an estranged group of the society.

In the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*, Hanif (2011) has touched and exposed social realities and some of the important aspects of humanity and culture in a straightforward way. In his work, Hanif has shown that religion, class, and gender are the three major angles based on which women are categorized and marginalized. He proves through his novel that the patriarchal traditions still deeply exist in our country. In our society apart from family, the feudal system has also severe opposition towards women that is caused the source of all evils. A famous saying *Zan, Zar, Zameen* 'woman, money and land' is a core part of such a system which reveals absolute commoditization and disregard for women. In case of any undesirable behaviour, such terms are used to put blame on women and exclude men from any responsibility (Ali & Gavino, 2008). Violence, on the other edge, is a daily reality for the vast majority of Pakistani women, a prepaid threat given to them at home, in the fields, or the streets (Ali, 2001). In a society family 'honor' is obsessed with womenfolk, explicitly monitoring their physique for which men are assigned to the task of safeguarding them in terms of both their sexuality and its reproductive ability. Thus, when a woman challenges the patriarchal order through her behavior, then a member of the safeguarding group of the society performs his obligations by punishing her body by thrashings, arsons, sensual exploitation, and even then killing them for honor (Noor, 2004). Hanif has defined the crestfallen dilemma of women and his tone becomes satiric as he says, "*cutting up women is a sport older than cricket but just as a popular and equally full of obscure rituals and intricate rules ...*" (Hanif, 2011, p.

96). This is also evident from the study of the novel that when Alice comes out from home she often adopts some defensive measures as she has always shown her concern about her gears, manners, and behaviors etc. In the novel, the novelist portrays psychosomatic anguishes and sufferings on the part of women only through the characterization of Alice Bhatti along with other female characters.

The story of the novel commenced in Karachi. When the story begins we come to know that Alice Bhatti has joined the *Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailment* as a junior nurse. (Hanif, 2011) She is very anxious which indicates that this job is her primary goal. It is her key concern. The novel further discloses that she is the daughter of a Christian janitor, Joseph Bhatti. They are from a lower caste. When she was getting her training at nursing school, as a nurse Alice was sent to *Borstal Jail for Women and Children* (Hanif, 2011) because she physically attacked on a surgeon who initially imprisoned her in Borstal Jail. When she gets a job as a nurse in Sacred Hospital, there she meets senior sister HinaAlvi. She works under her supervision and she always guide her that how she should handle different situations whether it's related to her professional life or domestic stuffs. There she also meets an errand boy Noor, who usually works in the offices of different doctors in the Sacred Hospital and whose sick mother is also admitted at the same Hospital. Alice is quite acquainted with Noor and his mother because they spend some time together at Borstal Jail. As the story proceeds another character is introduced and that is Teddy Butt and he works for a heinous group which is leaded by inspector Malangi. He meets with Alice in Sacred Hospital and falls in love with her and consequently they got married. While once she was in the VIP room performing her duty at Sacred, where an old landlady is admitted. She is enforced by the son of that old woman for oral sex. Alice slashed his penis with a razor. The story of the novel concludes with a catastrophic happening as she is being victimized by her own husband by throwing acid on her body. He has no reason for making an assault on his wife except his self-created suspicion against her. Inspector Malangi through his malicious attitude instigated the mind of Teddy Butt against women.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ever since the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* by Mary Wollstonecraft, there have been various movements for the rights of women. Various writers expressed views against the marginalization of women in patriarchal cultures. Protests and demonstrations were launched to create awareness among communities regarding the due rights of women and strong voices were raised to prevent and end sexism and traditional norms. According to Deepwell (1995) feminist critical discourse has their primary concern and explicit determination to represent and support these working females because they are usually ignored in every society. Their focal point is to highlight their struggles rather than to instruct them and discourage them. The primary goal of feminist critics to completely disheartened all the practices of patriarchy, because it has very strong effect on various layers of societies.

Ackerly (2000) supports 'Third World feminism' that is a type of women's movement. In this type of feminism the key elements and practices which centered on gender, group, linguistic, and learning etc. are eliminated. This discrimination supporting the role of feminine gender and consider them a part of patriarchal society like Pakistan whereas, the female's privileges are always seized. Langer (2001) also gives emphasis to grimy condition of working-class women in the mid of nineteenth century. Because they were always facing the worst circumstances of their lives which are quiet deplorable. They are treated by their brutal hands of their irresponsible husbands who could not fulfill their rights and forced their wives to provide earnings for them. Tandon (2008) believes that it is sexism which paves the way for working class male to attain privileges and makes them attain control over women and hence a commanding position to usurp their due rights. He opines that the socialist criticism makes this fact manifest that oppression has its roots in the class structure.

Feminists around the globe were trying their utmost to create awareness amongst women to stand for their rights and resist aggression. Hooks (2000) describes that one must take initial steps to determine a feminist criticism. Because feminist criticism depends on a person's selection criteria upon which these critics channelized their disposition. Feminist criticism is just like that in which a woman privilege position does not matter but it totally depends on their goals. She further emphasizes in her earlier work (1981) that the actual aim of feminism to end sexism because it is harmful for both sexes. She (1981) proclaims that these strict patterns of sexism frequently existed in black communities as compare to any other American community. It was acknowledged that the leaders who were admired and esteemed were men from black community. Black activists defined freedom as gaining the right to participate as full citizens in American culture; they were not rejecting the value system of that culture. Consequently, they did not question the rightness of patriarchy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study the researcher explores major components on the bases of which women are relegated in the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*. As the primary emphasis of the present research study is to search, the social realities and achy aspects of women lives in Pakistan from a feminist perspective. Hence, this type of research emanates in the sphere of issue-oriented research in which researcher have to find out all the crucial issues accountable designed for the demotion of womenfolk. The goal of research is achieved in the light of feminist perspective by the use of qualitative method and close analysis of the text. Selected text is thoroughly examined by various social and cultural phenomena to ascertain how and to what extent the lives of women in the novel are impacted through practice of marginalization and distinguished due to the origin of sex, belief and a specific group of people. The basic parameter of the present study and its objectives is achieved by examining these factors thoroughly.

IV. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Elements of Women Marginalization

Hanif in his novel applied the word "*Endangered Species*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 143) for womenfolk in Pakistan. In his novel Women are also described for instance docile and submissive beings that mainly reliant on their men for livelihood and fortification. It is further said that women cannot protect themselves and they are depend on their men. Once Hanif is interviewed by Claudia Kramatschek and asked about his point views on the subject of his supreme novel he states his thoughts that women in Pakistan are less than men but they are not considered as majority of the whole population and they are still treated as subspecies. He further added his opinion that if Alice belongs to a Muslim community she would be treated the same way as she is treated now. Though being different in faith is not an issue in our society but main problem is being a women. He also said that it is my firm belief and understanding that it is only your social class that determines your beliefs not your religion (Hanif, 2014).

Wattenbarger (2012) praises Hanif for his very novel and says that he is very bold to emphasis the most detestable aspects such as religious hypocrisy, the violence against women, the embedded misogyny, abuses of medical profession and most importantly the poor system of law in our society. Every single day they are slayed, chopped, gunshot and Alice Bhatti is the eye witness of these situations as she confronted such cases in Sacred on daily basis. They are displayed submissive beings created for endurance that will never fight for themselves. Paul & Rai (2018) considers the novel to be an inclusive manuscript of inhumaneness as well as terrible dealing to womenfolk since the times immemorial and it is a sizzling treatment with women that is similar to terrorism against females.

Hanif struggles are appreciated by Esstman (2012) as well in her *review of Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* for producing an amazing personality like Alice as she considers her identical to a saint. She considers Hanif as a phenomenal writer to disclose various abominable and mysterious aspects of the social order in the novel. In her review she brilliantly depicts that the modern day Pakistan is just like a cesspool where every individual is sick to some extent that is vividly illustrated in the novel. Esstman (2012) further depicts that women are continuously endure peril of sexual molestation, distortion, beatings, death etc in addition to a cheap commodity. According to Hanif (2011) the prime concern of the study is to revolve around the enclosed hatred against the women and different societal issues. Here still some elements are investigated by the researcher to highlight all these crucial issues which exists in our society.

Religious Discernment

In a conventional religious society like Pakistan, the power structure dynamics regarding the position of religious minority sections always remains quite hazardous and remain helpless to deal with justice. The leading lady of the novel belongs to very low socioeconomic ladder and it turns out to be the most awful in a men dominant situation that the same individual also a female. She faces triple marginalization of being from a different sect of Christianity, an underprivileged person and furthermore a female. Alice Bhatti was often threatened by Muslims girls at the time when she was at nursing school getting training. Instead of feeling safe because of a Christian institute, these Muslims girls did attacked the place where Alice Bhatti was living and called her "*the Kafir den*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 253) while holding hokey stick in one hand and a photocopy of the Holy Book Quran on other hand and singing that, "*Who belongs to Pakistan, Musalman, Musalman.*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 253)

HinaAlvi too conceals her Christian identity even though apparently she is quite impressive and brave person however she also knows that it is actually challenging to protect herself in a society where one belongs to a minority and apart from this it is more difficult for a lonely female. Hanif has brought out the tormenting fact of minorities to openly confess their faith. She married to a Muslim doctor and got separated from him but because of the fear she continuously reserved her husband's name involved. As she says, "*changing back to Massey might give someone the idea that here is a muslim abandoning her faith. And you know how much they disapprove of that.*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 298-99)

HinaAlvi possesses for supplication a furtive Christ's character but it is her utmost fear that she always conserves her windows shut and covered with curtains that her identity might not be disclosed, "*I don't like to open the curtains. I have some really noisy neighbors*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 294). She makes a very sensible answer to Alice's observation about her personality: "*What would you have suspected? Is this some kind of illness that a trained nurse like you should have detected?*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 296) Here, the novelist in a very satirical manner conveys his notion that in a typical Pakistani society being a minority is not less than an ailment.

Measured Demeanor

Alice knows that in a patriarchal society she is not secured, so she differently disguises her exterior form and chooses her spoken language very consciously: "*She speaks in practiced, precise sentences so that she is not misunderstood. She chooses her words carefully, and if someone addresses her in Punjabi, she answers in Urdu, because an exchange in mother tongue might be considered a promise of intimacy*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 145)

Alice suffers from the psychological distress that makes her think so differently that; "*she avoids eye contacts. She tries to maintain a nondescript exterior; she learns the sideways glance instead of looking at people directly*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 145) and "*she sidesteps even when she sees a boy half her age walking towards her*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 145) she becomes extra careful when she is about to eat something in public. She often avoids doing so that it might be assumed as "*...an invitation for someone to shove something horrible down your throat*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 146). That kind of habits are adopted by Alice and perhaps followed by all females to discourage the tempting behavior of patriarchy which has caused them anguish.

Conversing Women as Inferior

Inspector Malangi is a true portrayal of a typical misogynist as he sets his common notions about women. He never misses a chance to abuse and humiliate women in all probable ways. He himself "*...get[s] away from one wife and three daughters...*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 149-150) He treats females not more than a business deal or a game of cards to play with them and enjoy. Once Malangi gives some tips to Teddy Butt, how to make a woman contented, he declared "*...was the easiest thing in the world*". (Hanif, 2011, p. 213) He further add in his advice to him that it is very tiring job to retain a woman pleased, irrespective of her kith and kin, it "*...is impossible*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 213). Inspector Malangi has gathered some knowledge about women during his lifetime experience and now considers it his duty to deliver others in a very offensive way. He tells Teddy Butt about a woman in love is just like a made filly, "*When a filly goes mad, there is not much you can do. The best rider can try and mount it and it'll still kick up a storm. You can chain it to its bones but it'll still run away in the middle of the night.*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 305)

At the end of the novel Hanif informs the readers about the savagery of Malangi who provokes Teddy Butt to throw acid on Alice's body and thus committed a terrible crime to abolish a woman's life.

Persecution of Women

In his novel Mohammed Hanif vindicates women as victims of reimbursements for numerous clashes. Being a weak unit of society, they always compensate for the misdemeanors of their fathers, partners, sons etc. In Sacred these types of cases came on daily basis and very often they are seemed to be victimized by their family. Whereas Alice was performing her duty in Accidents and Emergencies ward she encountered such situations as Hanif says; "*–not a single day–when she didn't see a woman shot or hacked, strangled or suffocated, poisoned or burnt, hanged or buried alive*" (Hanif, 2011, p. 142)

It is a typical job for husbands, fathers and brothers, to torture and murder their women ruthlessly just for sake of their so-called reputation. Woman is there to resolve every kind of problems from honor to

minor disputes as water arguments, property matters and other sorts of disputes. The status of women in Pakistan is defined by Hanif in the following comments that how they are maltreated; "A woman was something you could get as a loose change in a deal made on a street corner." (Hanif, 2011, p. 142)

Hanif in quite sarcastic tone elaborates the living condition of these migrants in shelter homes and describes them not innocent as they seem, "nomads living in improvised tents could catch the honor bug and settle a game of cards that had gone on for too long in the night by trading in a woman" (Hanif, 2011, p. 143). In their everyday lives maltreatment and domestic viciousness is a very common form of behavior which they daily experience. Hanif says, "the gas cylinder, a leaky oven, a cupboard can fall, someone slips out of a window. It happens every day" (Hanif, 2011, p. 306) are very caustic and horrendous treatment that is excerpted for Pakistani females.

The Women and Legal Lacuna

In unjust societies, it is very common practice that poor segment of the society is exposed to every sort of ransoms, fierceness and provocation; whereas the prevailing fragments of the same society are involved in various offenses and often gets fortification by law. Due to a loose judiciary system a criminal can simply get seepage from punishment by applying different resources. Due to their strong influences in society the lives of women are in hazard. The same situation happened with Alice's mother, where she worked as a maidservant the owner of the house first raped her and then murdered her and later on proclaimed that she died just because of falling from a smooth marble staircase. In this regard the novelist remarks are cherished: "But it is not very likely that when you slip on that staircase you'll also accidentally scratch yourself on your left breast with such violence that those who wash your body will see four parallel sharp gashes drawn with human nails" (Hanif, 2011, p. 175)

In her last year at nursing school a doctor who made Alice a scapegoat was a wealthy and influential man was easily escaped. She was accidentally alleged and trapped while the doctor gets a bail before arrest because he paid a luxurious amount to an eminent lawyer. Hanif strongly manifests the deplorable condition of our system of law by the mouth of S. M. Qadri who was Alice's lawyer but failed to support her. S. M. Qadri tells to Alice's father that, "...the law is the eternal whore for those who can pay for its upkeep..." (Hanif, 2011, p. 72)

Teddy Butt is incited by Inspector Malangi for taking revenge from Alice Bhatti by throwing acid on her body and also provided a bottle of acid to him and guided him; "Try this and she'll always remember you. This is the only thing that'll hurt as much as love hurts." (Hanif, 2011, p. 310) Here Hanif also tries to show us the obnoxious aspect of the law enforcement organization by the appearance of criminal minded Inspector Malangi. Though this situation is furthermore explained by HinaAlvi when she evaded Alice for filing a case against the sexual assault she encountered in a VIP room of the Sacred during her duty. HinaAlvi tells her; "In our VIP room you had to deal with one man. In the police station there will be a room full of them in your face." (Hanif, 2011, p. 114)

At another occasion Alice notices that every kind of maltreatment women are facing and there is no one to ask them the injustice they do with females as Hanif says through the mouthpiece of Alice ".....nobody was surprised; there were no police detectives sitting around matching clues, no parliamentary subcommittees discussing ways of saving this endangered species" (Hanif, 2011, p. 143).

Professional Anxiety

A man can do their job single mindedly but women cannot do at all, because the circumstances of working women are quite different as compare to working men. She is entitled with countless responsibilities which she has to do even if she is employed. Women's are always working in an environment that is full of challenges. For better achievement, a peaceful working environment is the demands of every worker. The worker will work the best of their potentials only in a conducive environment. It is quite normal that almost in every field; women are busy to labor along with men. But it is not an easy task for a woman living in a patriarchal society like Pakistan to do their work in collaboration with men because in every step she has to face hell of disparagement from the society. In order to protect themselves from the lecherous looks of the society, from their verbal abuse and physical harassment in any professional background, they need to make a less prominent appearance. Though Alice Bhatti was very conscious about her appearance and wardrobe as Hanif vindicates: "For work she chooses a loose shirt and then over

that loose shirt covers her chest with a dupatta, makes sure that even the back of her neck is covered” (Hanif, 2011, p. 139)

Indeed it is deplorable and a sort of psychological trauma that an individual associated to a sacred career like serving patients feels lack of confidence and shame while performing her duty. It is certainly a stereotypical negative notion that has been associated to any profession. Unfortunately, in Pakistan nursing profession itself keeps a stain of stereotypical humiliation while in other countries of the world it is considered an insignia of civilization and humanity and in this regard earns much respect. But here the case is in reverse as the novelist elaborates she *“ties her hair back, then makes sure that her shalwar covers her ankles. And only then does she set off for the Sacred” (Hanif, 2011, p. 139)*

Hanif (2011) in his novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* has honestly displayed these kinds of gender-based perception. Subsequently, on the basis of these observation women are sexually harassed and misrepresented and that convert them vulnerable and miserable being. In his novel Hanif represents HinaAlvi's character as his representative of stating the horrible aspects of our society and especially their outlook towards nurses: *“...when your average man hears the word “Sister”, he gets an erection” (Hanif, 2011, p. 86).*

once Alice was holding in her hand the wrist of an old and noble grandfather to check his pulse and at the moment her eyes were closed for extra concentration but on reopening her eyes she became astonished to found an indirect sexual intimation occurred: *“Grandpa's other hand had parted his dhoti and was tugging at a long, thin, flaccid penis” (Hanif, 2011, p. 141).*

While Alice was carrying out her responsibility in a VIP apartment, where a landlady Begum Qazalbash, was admitted as a patient she all of a sudden grieved the aggressive sexual harassment by the youngest boy of that lady. He becomes restless when he sees Alice in the lawn and overpowered by his lust. When he finds Alice alone in the room, suddenly he pulls his pistol and lowers his trouser and compelled Alice on his gun point to suck his sex organ and fulfill his sexual desire by which she feels nauseous when *“...a flaccid piece of cold meat grazes her cheek” (Hanif, 2011, p. 88).*

Matrimonial Complications

In patriarchal society women are subordinated and often double marginalized; first on the basis of their meek social position and second because of their gender. Daughters are always considered inferior to sons and after getting married they are supposed to serve and obey their husbands. The most senior sister HinaAlvi often talked to Alice about the marital matters because she was expert in this field by marrying three times and two times with the same person. At one occasion she tells her that men don't bother to understand the problems related to females as she states; *“They think understanding means climbing up a mountain and disappearing into a cave” (Hanif, 2011, p. 197).* She thought that it would be a wrong decision if she would marry just for the sake of to earn a Muslim name, because *“[a] married Muslim nurse is not much better than a single Christian nurse. You just become a slave multiplied by two” (Hanif, 2011, p. 194).*

It is not weird that women in a men dominant society must obey the commands of their men because they are the handmaidens of men and they have to obey and follow them blindly. There is no question of objection regarding their decisions. Teddy Butt also shares the same thoughts after marrying with Alice Bhatti *“... this is his house and if there is going to be a lord around here, it has to be him” (Hanif, 2011, p. 108).* All these conceptions are pre-existing in their mentality whether it is expressed explicitly or exercised quietly. The patriarchal ideology is strongly implanted its roots in family patterns with diverse faces and men are attaining predominance over women.

Acid Attack

It is gender-based violence. This kind of violence is banned locally and as well as internationally. Unfortunately, in a patriarchal structure it is so deep-rooted that it almost persistently prevailed in every corner of life. Our national laws and orders are so fragile that it is available in every street and market with the cheapest prices. The incidents of acid attacks are directly associated with woman's face. A woman who has a beautiful face is generally targeted in these attacks that permanently damage her physical appearance. Therefore, it is rightly said that a woman's marriage ability and social standard is connected to her appearance and our society is so obsessed with beautiful women (Zia, 2013).

Consequently, in a patriarchal society they are left terminating beings and become worthless. In these cases, usually the victims suffer from administrative and multiple judicial systems avoidance that are also dominant in Pakistan such as high courts, sharia courts and tribal courts etc., that further confuses these matters (Zia, 2013).

Teddy Butt did the same with Alice and she faced a fatal death, a death on which a Death itself cries. He burnt her face and body by throwing a bottle of acid upon her. Alice does not change the so-called traditional concept regarding women. Her death does not create a little difference to pre-existing norms. She faces the same miserable fortune as an ordinary woman she exploited throughout her life and meets the same miserable death at the end. According to Wattenbarger Hanif has presented in a very honest way the treatment of women in Pakistan. Women's views are considered worthless and men always alleged them guilty for their wrongs (Wattenbarger, 2012).

V. CONCLUSION

Alice Bhatti plays a pivotal role in the novel. She is the Centre of magnitude in the story. She is introduced in the novel as a distracted woman. She is overwhelmed by frustration about her felinity. She is constantly abused, exploited and, humiliated in the novel. The whole atmosphere is suffocating for her. Life gives nothing except agony and mortification for her. Alice's character has flourished by the writer as a stereotype of a typically oppressed woman. Due to this characterization, she is represented as a tortured being. She is depicted as a 'pariah' of our society. She is not portrayed as a person of free determination but an unreasonable being cast on the desolation of fortune. She accepts the fact that she is from the untouchables. The appropriate conditions for categorizing Alice as a pariah Hanif has aptly drawn her personality on the same ranks as Sherry & Farber, (1996) writes about, "*To be a pariah is to be shunned and isolated, to be treated as if one had a loathsome and contagious disease...Outcasts are not merely inferior; they are not fully human and contact with them is dangerous and degrading*" (Sherry & Farber, 1996, p. 266).

In the novel, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* through the vision of the author we observe that Pakistani society apparently claims of having a high standard of moral and sacred morals but shows only disappointment and has moved out from evil to worse. All categories of violence are exposed to women and mainly females from the poorer sections of the society are mostly affected by it and this bitter fact is a clear testimony of the life of Alice Bhatti who is the protagonist and major character of the novel. Females in a lower class are mostly exposed to harassment and exploitation and lead a very wretched life.

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