

## Hindi-film, *Angoor*: an Indigenized and Transcultural Adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Comedy of Errors*

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### Abstract

Transaction from a play to a screenplay is indeed, more an exercise of critical insight than just pulling dialogues from the pages of a book. In any comparative study between a play and its filmic adaptation, it becomes essential to address the question: what is left out, added, and altered in the film and why? The objective of the study is to investigate that to what extent Gulzar's *Angoor* – a cinematic adaptation of Shakespeare's *the Comedy of Errors* has been indigenized or indianised, keeping in view the transcultural audiences. By de-historicizing the settings and time, de-racialising the characters and disembodiment of the events of the play from their immediate context, that is the sixteenth century England; Gulzar, the director of the film has indigenized the play and this makes his film an illustration of transcultural adaptation. The context has played a decisive role in conditioning the meanings. As a film has its own formation codes such as intricate interaction of mise-en-scene (the visuals in frame at any given moment), the diegetic or non-diegetic and the sound or musicality, therefore “the fidelity factor is no longer needed to be addressed in writing about film and literature” (McFarlane, p. 15).

**Keywords:** transculturation, indigenization, adaptation theory, filmic version

The adaptation process is best summed-up in Hutcheon's words as: “adaptation is repetition, but repetition without replication” (p.7). This is absolutely true for the filmic versions of “the Comedy of Errors” where the story-line is the same but plot is altered, while transposing the play to the Indian context. To the researchers, it could be then analyzed in the light of Hutcheon's (2013) model of transcultural adaptation. The play

and its filmic version differ to a greater extent. In fact, in the habituation process, a number of people are involved such as the playwright, the screenwriter, the director and the actors. Hence, it is really hard to discuss all the changes brought about to the original work. So far, the attention has not been paid as to how the film is an indigenized and transcultural adaptation of the play.

Before doing a comparative study of the play and film, it is worthwhile to briefly examine the biography of the artists, Shakespeare and Gulzar. Shakespeare being a unique English writer of the Elizabethan-era enjoyed a distinctive position even outside the English-speaking community. Whereas, Gulzar was born in Jhelum, the erstwhile part of undivided India and now a district of Pakistan. Later on, he migrated to India. He is the screenwriter and director of the film “Angoor”. He is a poet as well as a filmmaker. Both the artists belong to different races and also geographically and temporally have lived far away from each other. Gulzar’s adaptation, “Angoor” has made interesting additions and omissions. Fischlin and Fortier (2000) have maintained about Shakespearean plays that “as long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays” (p.1).

The plot of Shakespeare’s “the Comedy of Errors” at first seems frustrating because a father has lost one of his son as well as wife. The remaining son leaves the home in search of his long-lost twin brother. The desolated father, after not hearing from his remaining son for a long time, decides to set out to locate the whereabouts of his identical pair. To make the plot more complicated, by chance he arrives in a city that is sworn enemy to his own city. To the end of the play, when he was seemingly at the verge

of certain death, quite coincidentally, the whole family along with servants is reunited and starts living merrily thereafter.

According to Hutcheon (2013, p.7-8) the process of adaptation undergoes three crucial phases. The first step is to formally announce that the work is an extensive transposition or adaptation of a particular work or works of literature. Such a transcoding may be a shift from one genre to another genre or from one medium to another medium. In this formal phase of production, the transcoded work may experience a shift in terms of context too. This aspect is exclusively applicable to Gulzar's adaptation, "*Angoor*" (1982). In the opening of the film, it is acknowledged that the movie has been adapted from Shakespeare's play, "*the Comedy of Errors*". Both the contexts as well as genre have been changed because the context is India and it is a filmic version of the play not a dramatic. About the second phase, Hutcheon is of the view that this is the stage of "creation" (p.8). Here comes the idea of reinterpretation and recreation of the adapted text and this can also be called as "appropriation and salvage" (p.8) depending on the perspective of the readers/viewers. As this stage is the domain of the screenwriter, she argues that such reinterpretation requires an act of dissembling a story in order to get rid of all unnecessary details that seem to be no longer appealing to the audience. One may need to a readjustment and replacement of the old events, by incorporating the new ones. This is also true about Gulzar's rendition of the said play. First of all, the title of the play is altered to a Hindi/Urdu word, "*Angoor*" (grapes) a very suggestive title in fact. Secondly, the details concerning the death sentence of Egeon, the father of the twins (*Antipholus of Syracuse* and *Antipholus of Ephesus*) and the passages related to

slavery in the original version of the play have all been erased out in the adapted version, “Angeer”. Seger (1992) observes that in “making the transition to film, many books or plays that are downers have had the endings changed in order to appeal to the wider demographics of film and television” (p.6).

As far as the third phase of adaptation is concerned, according to Hutcheon (2013) it is to be viewed from the perspective of its reception. She claims that “adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (p.8). What she wants to say is that intertextuality is the main ingredient of adaptation. Also, from Sanders’ (2006) perspective Shakespeare himself was an adapter of the classical Roman and Greek works:

Whatever the ideological stance(s) of his adapters, one inescapable fact is that Shakespeare was himself an active adapter and imitator, an appropriator of myth, fairy tale, and folklore, as well as of the works of specific writers as varied as Ovid, Plutarch, and Holinshed. (p.46)

In this sense, our experience or response to adaptation is primarily based on our understanding of the intertextual relations between the source text and the adapted text. Accordingly, the explanation of any adaptation may differ from person to person based on his/her personal understanding of the interconnections between the two texts, the written and the visual. In short: “an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing” (Hutcheon, 2013, p.9). In the film, “Angeer” we have only one merchant, Gneslil but in the play there

are three merchants. Similarly, the character of Doctor Pinch, a schoolteacher has been left out of the filmic version of the play. The characters, like policeman and taxi-driver are added to make it more appropriate for modern audience of late twentieth century-India. It is pertinent to mention that although Shakespeare's plethora of works has been read extensively because of his masterful way of writing-style and it is not astonishing at all that scholars continue reading his works around the globe, yet Katsiadis (2015) describes the mystery around Shakespeare's person as follows:

The mysteries surrounding William Shakespeare's imaginative power as a playwright have perplexed scholars for centuries. The importance of thinking about Shakespeare and imaginative creativity endures because of the ways his influence spans literary genres. Such an extensive body of work – 37 plays, 154 sonnets, and three narrative poems – with such a great influence on succeeding generations of creative writers begs explanation, historicization – in a word, contextualization. (p. 62)

This suggests that the politics of the era has a role in the formation of each work. To this end, Gulzar has contextualized, if not Shakespeare's person then at least his play by making the Indian version of the story of the identical twins with a new setting, new meaning and signification.

### **Literature Review**

"The Cambridge Companion to Literature on Screen" (2007) offers a multi-disciplinary approach to literature on film and television. The writers from different backgrounds have disused these concepts and their applicability to the field of adaptation. The issues

such as adaptation from novels and plays to the screen and fantasy and popular literature especially for children have been given due consideration. The book also contains some 'case studies' of the renditions of classical works of Shakespeare and Jane Austen in particular and the nineteenth century novel and drama in general and this provides the readers an opportunity to understand these adaptations within a wider context of filmic versions. The book also discloses the practical choices and issues/challenges that are faced by the professional writers and adaptors during the process of reproduction. Hutcheon's (2013) "A Theory of Adaptation" explores the theoretical underpinnings of adaptation from different sources such as film, television and theme-parks. For her, adaptation is akin to story-telling. She considers the theory of adaptation from audience's perspectives. Her reading is not based on case-studies rather she analyzed form/genre, context and content of the movies. This second edition features an epilogue from Siobhan O'Flynn who examines the digitized adaptations from Twitter to Facebook and delineates how responses are conditioned by these Media. These books provide the theoretical framework for the study at hand.

As far as the film is concerned, according to Chandra (2014) because of "Angeer" Indian people started taking comedy seriously. For Salam (2014) when "Angeer" came, the comedy was not a respected genre in Indian cinema as it was in Bollywood film industry but this movie paved the way for the promotion of the said genre in Indian cinema. As a result, the analysis of the film from the perspective of its being a transcultural adaptation of "the Comedy of Errors" is yet missing. The present study is an effort to fill the said gap. In view of that the objective is to foreground

how by adapting from the existing story that is Shakespeare's version of two pairs of identical twins, Gulzar while transposing it to a film has employed the threefold strategy to indigenize and appropriate it for the Indian audience. Besides, I also want to accentuate that he has used the local-cultural traits as the building blocks of his story so that he can effectively reshape it and assign it new perspectives and meanings. It is examined how Gulzar's film, "*Angoor*" can be termed as a transcultural/indigenized transposition of Shakespeare's "*the Comedy of Errors*"?

### **Methodology**

The study would illustrate how Gulzar's adaptation of Shakespeare's play can be counted as his own explication and interpretation of the original text. The study will also probe how this filmic conversion is indigenized by altering the structure and characters of the source text and then appropriating them to the new cultural and political setting, India. In order to demonstrate it as a transcultural adaptation of the foreign work, Hutcheon's (2013) threefold model of transnational adaptation that is, historicizing/dehistoricising, embodiment/disembodiment and racialising/deracialising is employed as theoretical frameworks for the current study. Through comparative study of the portrayal of the characters, settings and structure of the play and the film, it has been adduced that Gulzar's adaptation is truly a trans-cultural conformity of Shakespeare's play. Gulzar modified the plot of the play to make it fit and worth-seeing for the alien and familiar readers of Shakespeare alike. In our opinion, the central defining elements of all the characters involved in the film, is their ability to be true to their immediate culture that is Indian in nature. The study might be instrumental in promoting a trend of critical

reading among the film-critics who can re-evaluate the Indian adaptations of foreign writers from the perspective of Hutcheon's concept of indigenization of unfamiliar literary texts.

### **Analysis: “Angoor”: A Transcultural Adaptation**

Adaptation not only transforms a previous work into a new context but it also transplants the local particularities to a something new in a hybridized style. Hutcheon (2013) calls this process as “the process of indigenization” (p. 142). These are the transcultural accommodators who decide what to transplant to their own soil. The adapters of on-going stories exercise their power over their adaptation. In such a process, the change of language may involve just like the change of place and time-period because adaptation to her is not done in a vacuum rather, the adapted work is invariably re-framed and re-shaped in a context, society, culture, time and place. In short, “context conditions meaning” (p.145). Her remarks are worth-quoting here: “transcultural adaptations often mean changes in race, gender and politics” (p.147). This is what is absolutely felicitous of Gulzar's adaptation of “the Comedy of Errors”. For example, we do not see any reference to Christianity, the Duke's court, Egeon's death-sentence, or English language as a medium of communication although these are the making-ingredients of the play.

Contrarily, in the movie, the source of communication is Hindi language instead of English language as is the case in the play. One does not come across in the film with any character's name in English language. Rather, all names referring to Hindu or Muslim origin are derived from Hindi or Urdu language. The context is India not England, the technological advancement is also shown in the film like in the field of



automobiles, cars, rickshaws and buses have been displayed as the modern means of transportation unlike the old ones used in the seventeenth century-England. The temples or mosques instead of churches have been manifested to indigenize the adaptation under discussion. In this regard, Pavis (1989) is of the view that a cross-cultural adaptation is not merely “a matter of translating words” instead one needs to convey social and cultural meaning through what he calls “language body” (p. 30). The intercultural, to him is just like “intergestural” in which the visual is as important as the aural. He is of the opinion that while transposing the medium from telling to showing, the differences that arise out of philosophy, national culture, religion, gender and race ought to be dealt with dramaturgical considerations which are likely to be kinetic or physical just like linguistics (p.30). Likewise, the dressing-code for Ashoke, the protagonist and Bahadur, his attendant is not the same and this indicates the rich divide of Indian society into ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. So, it could be noted that the facial expressions along with dress-codes and gestures that take place in any film may transfer cultural information that is both verisimilar to and an “index of the ideologies, values, and conventions by which we order experience and predicate activity” (Klein, 1981, p.4)

### **Historicizing/Dehistoricising *The Comedy of Errors***

The film is not just a matter of transcribing the play but it is a naturalized alteration in a true sense. It is abundant with local cultural traits and details. Leitch (2003) very astutely remarks that any adaptation, “though it takes less time for most audiences to sit through most feature films than it does for them to read most novels, films...can contain quite as many telling details as novels” (p.155). We can say that the film has advantages

over the written medium. While the play is in English and the movie is in Hindi language, one comes with what Hutcheon (2013) calls the first stage of transcultural adaptation that is historicizing/dehistoricising of the source text. Gulzar's dialogues are based on codeswitching between Hindi and English languages. As we know that in a multilingual society it is a norm to switch the codes (Wardhaugh and Fuller, 2015, p.73), thus a new historical perspective is awarded to the play by uprooting or specifically dehistoricising it from its immediate context, Elizabethan era of seventeenth century. This also conveys the idea of India as being a multicultural and multilingual society. Also, all the characters have been drawn mostly from the working class background and Gulzar exploits such characters to show the Indian society of the 80s as divided into rich and poor, yet another technique of historicizing the play: "Shakespeare is constantly being made new, remade, by this process: 'if adaptations of Shakespeare somehow reinforce Shakespeare's position in the canon ... it is a different Shakespeare that is at work'" (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, p.6). The movie also reflects the division in the Indian society in the name of caste and creed. For example, the people were hesitant to adopt the new-born babies who were left by an unknown lady near the temple only and only because they do not know their caste and creed. The dialogue between the carriage-man and Raj Tilak, a representative of Shakespeare's Egeon in the film goes as follows:

*Huzoor mander ke darwaza per aik abhagan maan apne bachon ko chor gai ha, Log jama Hain ... lekin uthane k liay koi tayar nhe ha, sub zaat-paat ke chakkar mein hain* (An unfortunate lady has left her twins at temple footsteps, a crowd has gathered there... but nobody is ready to

accept them, because, they are worried about *children's caste*).

In the extract, the words “temple” and “children’s caste” are local cultural offshoots which have nothing to do with the original text. ‘Christian church’ is replaced with a ‘Hindu’ temple’. The words; “unfortunate lady” reflects the socio-economic conditions of the Indian society. Gulzar has performed the process of historicizing the real text by dehistoricising it from its immediate setting, the seventeenth century-England. In this respect, Edwards (1940) argues: “[i]n some film adaptations, original story lines are drastically altered, characters eliminated, condensed or combined, and narrative emphases shifted: other adaptations attempt scene-for-scene transcriptions of the source material” (p.32).

### **Embodiment/Disembodiment of *The Comedy of Errors***

The opening of the film is different from that of the play. There is a shift from Solinus, the duke’s court to the scenery of Indian countryside. We watch the parents of the identical twins sitting in a carriage, drawn by horse and travelling to their home. This is enough to foreground the changes that would take place in Gulzar’s filmed version of the play. While Shakespeare’s play approximately consists of 29-pages, the screenplay had to be made appropriate to fit 141-minutes film-duration. In his selection, Gulzar has therefore excluded certain events such as the love-affair between Antipholus of Syracuse and Adriana has not been give much space in the film, as it is reduced to a very short and insignificant dialogue between Ashoke and Deepti on the screen. To make it a worth-visual for the audience, the addition of policeman’s character is yet another indication of its being a transcultural adaptation. Sanders (2006) claims: “The

adaptation of Shakespeare invariably makes him ‘fit’ for new cultural contexts and different political ideologies to those of his own age” (p.46).

The whereabouts of the lost father of the twin are not communicated in the film. Instead, at the end of the film we just have a glimpse of the mother, meeting her sons. Likewise, the instances like ‘ring’ that played an important role in the play is absent in the film. Here in the film, the ‘ring’ is replaced and appropriated to ‘necklace’ for what Ashoke’s wife demands and this eventually leads the otherwise separated twins to meet and the riddle is resolved. In order to retain the adaptation very near to the original, some scenes and roles have also been appropriated. Like the slave is changed to an attendant because ‘slavery’ has been outlawed and to the audience of the 80s, it could have been a farfetched idea: “Adaptors of Shakespeare undertake a number of responses to Shakespeare’s canonical status: some seek to supplant or overthrow; others borrow from Shakespeare’s status to give resonance to their own efforts” (Fischlin and Fortier 2000, p. 6). Through Gulzar’s adaptation the readers have an opportunity to view the story from a new but indigenous perspective of the play. Instead of merely focusing on the minor details that go into the making the play, Gulzar includes some cultural specific shots in the film so that he can make it an aesthetic extension of the original.

The overall story –line is the same, however, the content of the movie differs a great deal from the original. The new context in which Gulzar adapted is not a static one. His audience can probably better relate it to the setting and can assign it entirely new meanings. On this subject, we can say that Gulzar’s audiences are not Shakespeare’s audience thus he has to cater and alter the story according to the needs of the cinema-

going viewers in the late twentieth century: “There are still other motives for adaptation, however. Given the perceived hierarchy of the arts and therefore media [...], one way to gain respectability or increase cultural capital is for an adaptation to be upwardly mobile” (Hutcheon, p. 91). There is another wonderful scene in the film where Ashoke and Bahadur decide to make their wives unconscious by feeding them with doped fries (*bhang ke pakore*) and this is a wonderful addition on the part of Gulzar who added a very cultural specific food item to make it a worth-watching funny movie. This can also be cited as an instance of embodiment to the original text. In fact, art as viewed by Wimsatt (1976) is never perfect with authorial intent, instead:

An art work is something which emerges from the private, individual, dynamic, and intentionalist realm of its maker's mind and personality; it is in a sense ... made of intentions or intentionalistic material. But at the same time, in the moment it emerges, it enters a public and in a certain sense an objective realm; it claims and gets attention from an audience; it invites and receives discussion, about its meaning and value, in an idiom of inter-subjectivity and conceptualization. (p.11–12)

Although, Wimsatt was trying to make an argument against the need of the authorial intent to be taken into consideration during the process of interpretation of the text but we can take it as an exemplification of the role that an adapter's intentions actually play in reconceptualising the phase of an earlier work purely from the standpoint of his/her audience. Gulzar's reproduction of Shakespeare's play reflects the same.

The music of the film is also an illustration of its being an indigenized version

of the play. The music is the most effective source of emotions in films. The songs; *roz, roz daali, daali kia likh jae* in the melodious voice of Asha Bhosle, pictured on Deepti Navel, a representative of Shakespeare's Adriana in the film and *preetam aan milo*, pictured on Bahadur (Devan Verma) who is playing double-role of Shakespeare's Dromio of Antipholus and Ephesus are case in point. The songs of the movie might be categorized as an instance of entertaining embodiment to the original work. It does the job of uniting the otherwise segregated Indian community and the audiences on emotional levels. "Angoor" has R.S. Burman as composer who is considered a legend in the music history of Indian cinema. As a whole, the lyrics and songs supplement each other. The slow-paced music of the songs has successfully recreated an idyllic romance in the film, a remarkable addition and embodiment to the actual work for there is not even a single instance of song or music in the Shakespearean play of which it is adapted from:

There are always other words in a word, other texts in a text. The concept of intertextuality requires, therefore, that we understand texts not as self-contained systems but as differential and historical, as traces and tracings of otherness, since they are shaped by the repetition and transformation of other textual structures. (Alfaro, 1996, p. 268)

In addition to this, Hutcheon's (2013) distinction between the knowing-audience and unknowing-audience is of paramount importance to this study. If we are not familiar with the actually adapted work then our appreciation of adaptation would be just like any other work of cinematography or we "greet a film version simply as a new film" (p.121).

However, to experience it as an adaptation in a true sense, one should be acquainted with the original text and this allows the readers/viewers to oscillate their memory with what they experience by side by side filling the gaps and receiving information from the adapted text. Consequently, good knowledge of the original text is equally necessary for the audience and for Hutcheon (2013) the adaptation should be comprehensible for both the audiences. She maintains: "For an adaptation to be successful in its own right, it must be so for both knowing and unknowing audiences" (p.121). To this end, the beauty of Gulzar's version is that it is equally understandable for both the audiences. One can make the meaning of mise en scene without even knowing the real text. Intertextuality is the formative feature of this filmic transposition:

Texts feed off each other and create other texts, and other critical studies; literature creates other literature. Part of the sheer pleasure of the reading experience must be the tension between the familiar and the new, and the recognition both of similarity and difference, between ourselves and between texts. The pleasure exists, and persists, then, in the act of reading in, around, and on (and on). (Sanders, 2006, p.14)

### **Racialising/Deracialising of *The Comedy of Errors***

Shakespeare's characters are transferred from their immediate setting to a new situation of late twentieth century. Without even any single exception all the characters in the film are Indians, overwhelmingly belonging to Hindu religion and a very few to the Muslim community. The characters are the essential ingredients in narrative form, whether film or novel. The usual method for categorization of the character as distinct

from one another lies in paired terms such as dynamic/static. A static agent does not experience any change or up-gradation in the status during the course of narration. On the other hand, a character can be classified as dynamic if he/she has the ability to transform himself/herself as compared to their appearance in beginning of the story. Flat characters are mostly one-dimensional and are undeveloped throughout the story and most often they are associated with one personal quality such as good or bad. Whereas, the round character is life-like and has detailed traits which we often find in the people around us in our daily life. We see the wives of Ashoke (Sanjeev Kumar) and Bahadur (Devan Verma), Sudha and Prema respectively as the flat character or rather static ones. Both have been depicted as pure eastern women who just stay at home and are not out there in the society to actively take part in their everyday affairs. Very less amount of camera-shots these women have been given in the film. In this way, the characters have been racialised by deracialising them from English race and appropriating them to the new racial dimension. Seger (1992) observes: “Cutting and combining characters helps condense an unwieldy novel into a workable form” (p.3). Moreover, Seger maintains: “There is no rule...that says that you can’t use your imagination when working with the original material, the adaptation is a new original” (p.9). Gulzar definitely seized the opportunity and with some necessary changes he masterfully created a new version of “the Comedy of Errors”.

Ashoke and Bahadur are the round characters in the film. The double-role played by Devan Verma/Bahadur representing Dromio of Syracuse and Ephesus in the film is different from the one that is in the play. In terms of adaptation of this character we can



say that Gulzar has transposed Shakespeare's character in an entirely new fashion. The director has not portrayed him merely as a slave but an attendant and almost a friend to Ashoke. He is shown as a singer and entertainer in the movie. On the other hand, Ashoke seems to be a feudal lord yet another indication of indigenization of Shakespeare's play. These changes make the film a transcultural adaptation. Seger (1992) is of the view that one may need to alter the structure of the original text as long as the desire is to produce a popular film so in creating "a commercial and viable adaptation means giving the story a clearer structure... There's no opportunity to turn back the page, recheck a name, reread the description; clarity is an important element in commercial viability" (p.7). This is what Gulzar has practically done by depicting the characters according to the requirement of the society in which he produced the film.

In the movie, we come to know the religious affiliation of the character from their names like the Goldsmith's worker's name is Mansoor usually understood as a Muslim name. Bahadur is a common name in both the cultures Hindu and Muslims. Equally, significant are the facial expressions and dressing-code of the characters. For instance, Gneshilal, a diamond merchant to whom Chedilal, a goldsmith owes debt is playing the role of the Second Merchant of Shakespeare's play. He wears the cap that might resemble the style of Nehru; the first prime minister of India. The way he demands for money is worth-watching. Through this character, although a minor one, Gulzar has given a very funny touch to his filmic version of the play:

It shouldn't be necessary after several decades of serious research into the processes and challenges of adaptation to insist that "fidelity" to

the original text (however distinguished) is a wholly inappropriate and unhelpful criterion for either understanding or judgment. (McFarlane, 2007, p.15)

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, we can say that Gulzar has utilized many cultural and literary references as a means of making a local version of the foreign story. By certain omissions and additions, the adaptation is made a wonderful contribution to the Indian cinema. By historicizing, racialising, and embodying the original text, Gulzar has produced a good piece of comic-film and his adaptation might be viewed as repurposing the old story in which he salvages the character and makes them more appropriate for the contemporary audiences. By retying the classical story to contemporary historical, religious and cultural references he has successfully created an indigenized and transcultural adaptation of the play. By placing Shakespeare's "the Comedy of Errors" in a larger context, the adapter has rendered an entirely new perspective and culture in the film. Resultantly, it forms a new viewpoint and gives the meanings that are relevant for the contemporary age:

The fact is that filmgoers simply are interested in how filmmakers have gone about the business and art of transposition from one medium to another – and that this transposition and the processes involved constitute a phenomenon of continuing interest to large numbers of people. (McFarlane, 2007, p.18)

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