

## The Future of Quiescent Public Library System: A Developing Country Prospective

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### Abstract:

*This study aimed to explore the contemporary status of public libraries in Pakistan. Its key objective was to identify the number of public libraries and their condition to provide a policy document to higher authorities for the development and sustainability of the Public Library System (PLS) in Punjab, a province of Pakistan. The findings are outcome of a questionnaire based survey, in-depth interviews with district coordinators and a focus group with LIS researchers. The province of Punjab is administratively divided into 36 Districts. The data shows that 176 libraries exist in the province. The quantitative data shows that libraries are in poor condition such as absence of professional staff, outdated collection, tattered library buildings, insufficient and irregular budget, , poor IT infrastructure, lack of interest by different stakeholders and absence of proper administrative control over these libraries. Qualitative data suggest the ways to solve the issues identified in the data and recommend the future course of action for the improvement of these libraries.*

**Keywords:** Public Library System, Public Library Services, Punjab-Pakistan, Directory of Public Libraries,

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Public libraries came into existence with causes like safeguard to democracy, a symbol of social change and community service. The services of public libraries are highly ranked in civilized societies. Special attention is paid in establishment of public libraries to develop an information society. In the early days it was considered that public libraries are depositories of books and only issue or return the books. With the emergence of information society, the preservation paradigm has expanded to utilizing of collected sources. Public libraries will survive and thrive by recognizing their changing role in digital environment to develop them as community places.

Public library system in Pakistan was established by British Colonial Rulers who had their own vested interest in it instead of public welfare and education. They established it to assist in administrative affairs and leisure reading of elite not for common public who were illiterate. However, Bhatia (1936) reported that during the British Colonial Rule in 1930s “The Punjab Government....established about 16,000 ruler libraries attached to middle

schools, where school teachers act[ed] as public librarian after school hours, and for this routine work they g[ot] special allowances” (as cited in Anwar, 1996, p. 3). Due to this initiative many public libraries were established in large cities and the data of the present study shows that almost 12% libraries established and developed under British rule and they need special attention to be maintained.

Developing countries in South Asia and South East Asia with Colonial rules in the 20th century have the same economic and policy crises due to the inability of leadership and less focus on education and libraries. In Pakistan, a public library system (PLS) could not be established due to unrealistic planning, not perusing the implementation of existing PLS laws, and unawareness of socio-political & economic condition of the country. Library community demands are not in-line with the interest of bureaucracy and elites. Anwar (1996) rightly pointed out that “librarians in many developing countries, especially in South Asia, driven by UNESCO declaration, have been struggling and wasting their energies for almost half a century to achieve goals which, in many cases, have been forgotten even by UNESCO itself”(p.4). This is one of the important factors that public library system couldn't be nurtured even after the independence of the country in 1947 from the British Colonial Rule.

Anwar (1996) mentioned that Six-Year National Plan of Educational Development of Pakistan approved to establish 522 new libraries from 1951-1957. He mourned over the feudal psyche of politicians that among 522 libraries only 38 were developed in West Pakistan (among them 6 in Punjab Province) due to the dominating feudal political culture in this territory and the remaining 484 were in East Pakistan (now called Bangladesh) because of political leadership from the lower middle economic background in East Pakistan.

Pakistan has a long history of ordinances regarding a public library system from LC Key report (1956) to local self-Govt. act 2001. There are many developments i.e. Advancement of Sind Cultural board (1955), approval of 50,000 libraries in 1973, fixed 1% of the total Municipal budget for public libraries, getting the education is the basic right of every citizen according to 1973 constitution, Technical Working Group report in 1986, and Usmani (1996) reported the “public library pilot project” with the collaboration of UNESCO etc. Despite all these documented efforts these were not executed or implemented due to Political will, feudal mindset, bureaucratic setup, unrealistic plans and non-coordinated efforts of LIS professionals, and non-participation of libraries in education system.

The establishment of public libraries is not a cup of tea of politicians, feudal and elite class. This fact is evident with this news (15th July, 2013) that

“City district government, Rawalpindi, has failed to make newly built public library functional due to non-provision of books, stationery, furniture and other necessary things for the last one year. Punjab government had allocated Rs15.4 million for the construction of two public libraries in Rawalpindi city. The building department had completed the construction of a Public Library at Babu Lal Hussain Road and handed it over to the concerned authority a year back. But, nobody was ready to take over the charge of Public Library and it had been lying locked after its inauguration by a Member Provincial Assembly (MPA). Unfortunately, neither city district government, Rawalpindi, nor any private organization has been taking the charge of the public library for one year”.

Documentation and public library legislation is there in one or the other way, but it is neither implemented nor on the agenda of any government or NGO.

Future projection is always based on the current status and trends of any organization or phenomenon. In Pakistan, there is no comprehensive list available about the number of existing libraries, their condition, collection, staff, membership, budget and their functions. There is dire need of factual data to plan and develop a Public Library System. This is the first study on public library system based on primary data. This study covered one province (Punjab) of Pakistan.

## **2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

The key objective is to prepare a directory of public libraries in Punjab province and the secondary objectives are as follows:

- o To identify the number of public libraries and their administrative structure
- o To explore the condition of public libraries i.e., collection, staff, services, building and their IT infrastructure, etc.
- o To identify problems and suggest ways for future

## **3 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

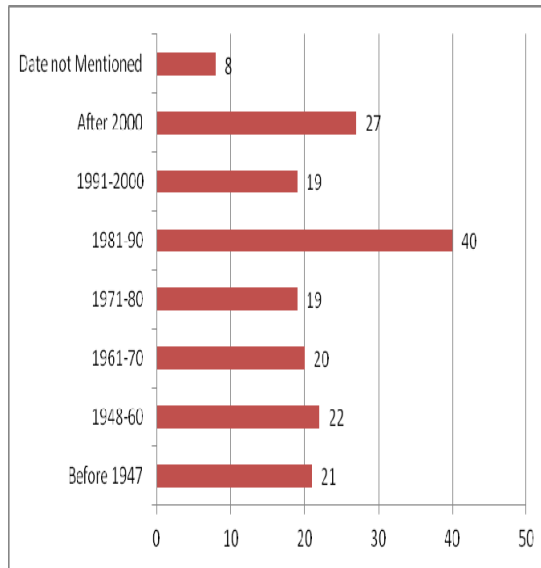
It is a multi-method study based on a questionnaire survey, in-depth interviews and a focus group. The present study is partially based on the findings of “Directory of Public Library Project” a joint venture of the Punjab Library Foundation and DLIS, PU, started in November 2012. Being the coordinator of this project the author has some experiences and qualitative data to share. It covers the one province of Pakistan i.e. Punjab that is administratively divided into 36 Districts. Twenty-three district coordinators appointed to physically visit the libraries in all (N=36) districts to collect data. District coordinators are paid on the basis of the libraries they visited and recorded data. Along with the questionnaire survey, the author also conducted interviews (N=20) with district coordinators and a focus group with LIS researchers to achieve the objective of this study.

## **4 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

This section describes the basic information about public libraries i.e. identification of libraries, the year of establishment, the number of libraries functional, the number of professional and non-professional staff, number of books and newspapers, reader services & sections, building seating capacity, IT infrastructure, availability of the internet, automated catalogue and electricity backup, etc.

### *4.1 Year of Establishment of Libraries*

One hundred and seventy-six libraries identified in the most populous province of Pakistan i.e. Punjab. Eight (4.5%) respondents were not aware of the date of establishment of their libraries. Some respondents are not library staff members and don't know about the history and collection of the library. It is interesting to note that 21(12%) libraries were established and developed under the British Colonial Rule and they need special attention to be maintained.

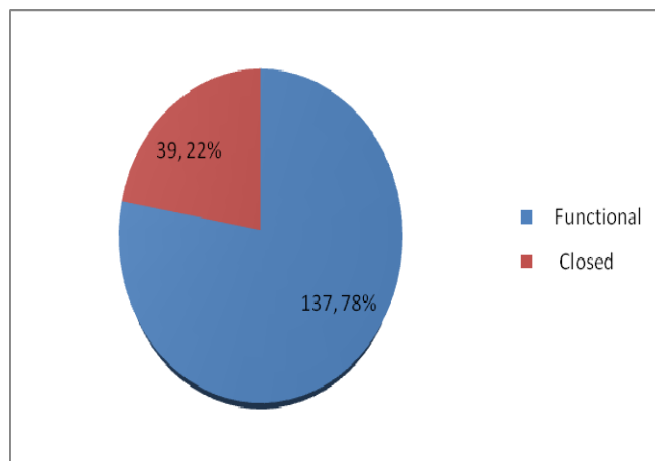


**Figure 1 Year of Establishment N=176**

After the independence of Pakistan from British Rule in 1947, almost one third libraries 61(34.6%) were established in the next three decades (1947-1980) in the province of Punjab. In the next decade (1981-90) 40(22.7%) libraries were established that is the largest number followed by 27(15.3%) after 2000, and most of them were private (Figure 1).

#### 4.2 Number of Libraries Functional

It is found that almost one fifth of libraries 39(22%) are closed and not providing services to users. These libraries are non-functional and their collection is either shifted or dumped in stores. Few libraries only exist in papers and other departments using their buildings. One hundred and thirty-seven (78%) libraries are functional (Figure 2) and the next section will provide the status of these libraries' services, collection and staff, etc.



**Figure 2 Numbers of libraries functional**

#### 4.3 Administrative Body of Libraries

These 176 libraries are operated in different administrative control. A significant number of libraries 73(41.5%) are run by Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) under the local self-Govt. ordinance 2001 followed by one fifth libraries, 36(20.5%), under District Government.

It is noted that 24(13.6%) libraries were run by welfare organizations and 11(6.2%) personal libraries. The same number of libraries 5(2.8%) were operated by the Directorate of the Public Libraries and Board of Governors. Four (2.3%) is under Union Administration that is sub-division of Tehsil Municipal Administration. In the category of any other, there were 2 libraries one is under the Department of Okaf and second is under the administrative control of the Punjab Horticultural Authority (Table 1).

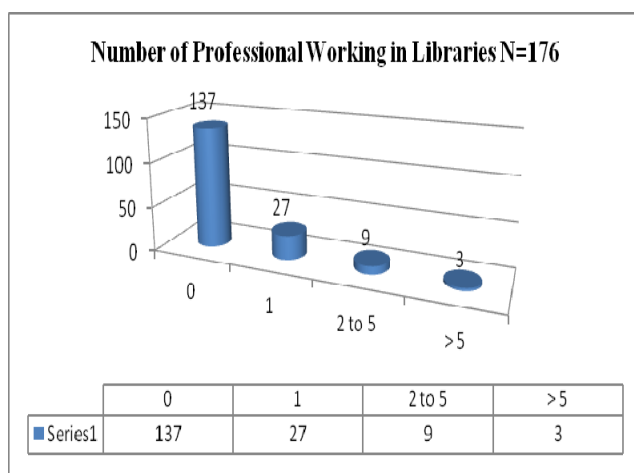
**Table 1**  
**Administrative Body of the Libraries**

Administrative Body	Frequency	Percent
Tehsil Municipal Administration	73	41.5
District Government	36	20.5
Welfare organization	24	13.6
Department of Education	12	6.8
Personal Library	11	6.2
Directorate of Public Libraries	5	2.8
Board of Governors	5	2.8
Union Administration	4	2.3
Under Cantonment,	4	2.3
Any Other	2	1.1
Total	176	100.0

These facts (Table 1) show the absence of single administrative authority to develop and maintain public libraries in the province resultant the wastage of resources and non-directive efforts.

#### 4.4 Number of LIS Professional Working in Libraries

Data shows that 137(77.8%) libraries are without LIS professional and the remaining 22% have professionals ranged from 1 to more than 5. Twenty-seven (15.3%) libraries had one professional having masters in Library and Information Science followed by 9(5.1%) libraries with 2 to 5 professionals.

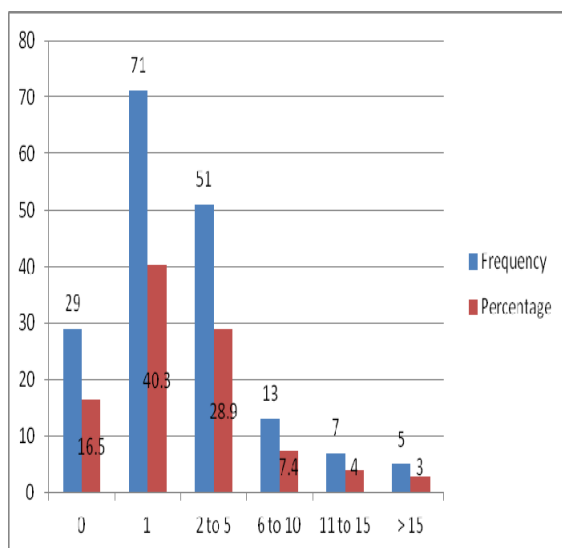


**Figure 3 Number of Professional Working in Libraries**

Only 3 (1.8%) libraries had more than 5 LIS professionals. It also shows that the number of professional staff is directly proportional to the collection of the library. Libraries with more staff have a more professional staff.

#### 4.5 Number of Non-Professional Working in Libraries

Respondents were further asked to mention the number of non-professional working in these 176 libraries. Twenty-nine (16.5%) libraries show the absence of any staff member, as 39 libraries have been closed (Fig. 2). The remaining 10 closed libraries have only one staff member. Each of them works as clerk in TMA and have additional charge of the library but provides no service.

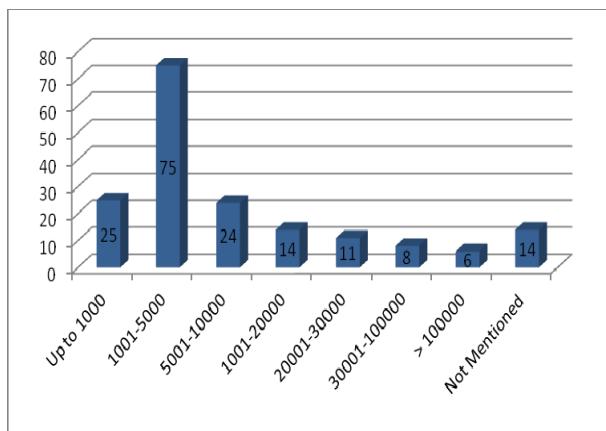


**Figure 4 Number of Non- Professional Working in Libraries**

More than one-third libraries 71(40.3%) have only one staff member who is non-professional followed by 51(28.9%) libraries 2 to 5 staff members. Only 5(3%) libraries have more than fifteen staff members and these three libraries with maximum collection.

#### 4.6 Number of Books in Libraries

Data reveal that majority of the libraries 100(56.81%) are small size as have up-to 5000 books in their collection. Thirty-eight (21.53%) libraries have books ranged 5,000 to 20,000. Only six libraries (3.41%) have more than one hundred thousand collection and these libraries are with more LIS and non-professional staff members. Fourteen (7.95%) libraries didn't mention the number of books because these libraries were closed or non-functional (Figure 5).



**Figure 5 Numbers of Books in Libraries**

**Table 2**  
**Number of Books in Libraries N=176**

Number of Books	Frequency	Percentage
Up to 1000	25	14.20
1001-5000	75	42.61
5001-10000	24	13.63
1001-20000	14	7.90
20001-30000	11	6.25
30001-100000	8	4.54
> 100000	6	3.41
Not Mentioned	14	7.95
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.7 Number of Newspapers in Libraries

They were further asked about the number of newspapers regularly receive in their libraries. One fourth libraries, 45(25.5%), got no newspaper at all, and among them 39 were closed. The remaining six functional libraries have no funds to purchase the newspapers. Sixty-three (38%) libraries get 1 to 6 newspapers regularly, among them more than half of libraries purchase and remaining receive them from Tehsil Municipal Administration (TMA) as donation (Table 3). Thirty-seven (20.9%) libraries got more than ten newspapers that are considered a good number (Table 3). Libraries got newspapers in different languages Urdu, English and local languages i.e. Punjabi and Siraki.

**Table 3**  
**Number of Newspapers**

	Frequency	Percent
0	45	25.5
1 – 3	34	19.3
4 – 6	33	18.7
7 – 10	30	17.0
11 – 20	26	14.7
>20	11	6.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 4.8 Readers and Technical Services offered

More than half of libraries 101(54.4%) provide reference service to their users. Many of them only provide the answers of directional and ready reference queries. Ninety-nine (56.2%) libraries offer circulation service and the remaining 44% libraries serve as reference libraries. Only 21(11.9%) libraries offer photocopy service.

**Table 4**  
*Readers' Services offered in the library N=176*

Services Offered	Frequency	Percent
Reference Service	101	57.4
Circulation Service	99	56.2
Photocopy Service	21	11.9

When respondents were asked about the status of technical services i.e. classification and cataloguing of collection in their libraries. One hundred and sixty-five libraries respond this question and the remaining 11 didn't respond to this question due to non-availability of library staff and non-functional libraries.

**Table 5**  
*Technical Services N=165*

	Yes	No	In- process
Library collection is classified	59	94	12
Library collection is catalogued	48	104	13

The collection of 59(35.75%) libraries classified followed by 48 (29.09%) catalogued. Almost the collection of 7% libraries was in the process and not fully classified and catalogued.

#### 4.9 Number of computers and IT infrastructure in libraries

Data shows that more than two third of libraries, 121(68.8%), have no computer and IT infrastructure. The remaining 55(21.2%) libraries have a varying number of computers for staff or readers' usage. Thirty-seven (21%) libraries have 1 to 5 computers followed by 15(8.6%) libraries have computers ranged from 6 to 20.

**Table 6**  
*Number of computers in the library N=176*

Number of computers	Frequency	Percentage
0	121	68.8
1-5	37	21.0
6-10	11	6.3
11-20	4	2.3
21-40	2	1.1
>40	1	.6
Total	176	100

Only 3(1.7%) libraries have more than 20 computers and have separate IT lab for users (Table 6). These three libraries also have a maximum number of LIS professionals. It shows that a professional can create awareness among the higher authorities about the modern library services and technology.



**Table 7**  
***Availability of the internet, WiFi and automated catalogue***

	Frequency	Percentage
Internet	35	19.9
WiFi	11	6.2
Library catalogue automated	14	8.0

Data shows that only 55(31%) libraries have computers and among them 35(19.9%) have internet access. Among them, 11(6.2%) libraries have WiFi internet connection. The catalogue of only 14(8%) libraries is automated. It shows a poor IT infrastructure in public libraries.

#### *4.10 Electricity Backup in Libraries*

Pakistan is facing energy crises and every organization and family unit try to manage the alternate electricity option due to extreme weather conditions in the region. Almost one fourth of, 45(25.6%), libraries have electricity backup, and use the following options.

**Table 8**  
***Libraries' Electricity Backup Options N=45***

Electricity backup Options	Frequency	Percentage
UPS	21	46.6
Generator	21	46.6
Any other	3	6.6
Total	45	100

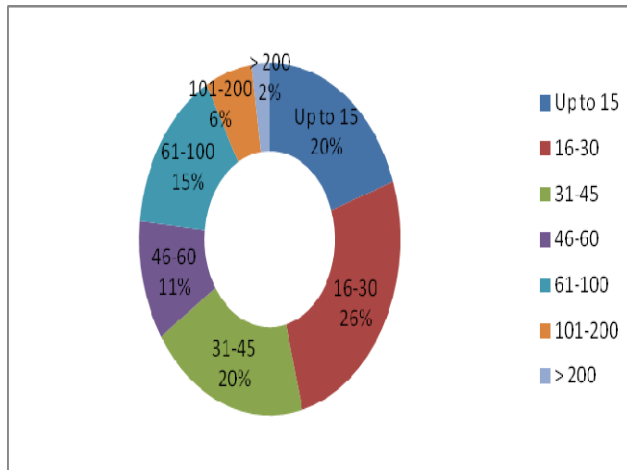
#### *4.11 Number of Section and Seating capacity in the library*

One fourth of libraries 44(25%) have women sections followed by 43(24.4%) libraries have sections for children. Only 28(15.9%) libraries have a separate section for senior citizens to sit, chat, read newspapers and other stuff.

**Table 9**  
***Library Sections***

Section for:	Frequency	Percentage
Children	43	24.4
Women	44	25.0
Senior Citizen	28	15.9

Twenty-three (16.7%) libraries' reading-rooms are air-conditioned. Seating capacity in libraries vary according to their size. One hundred and thirty-seven libraries are functional and providing services to users. Among these 137 functional libraries, 46% have up-to 30 seats for users followed by 31% libraries have 31-60 seats in their reading areas. Fifteen percent libraries have 61-100 seats for users. Only 8% libraries have more than 100 seats for their users.



**Figure6. Seating capacity of the library N=137**

## 5 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA AND FOCUS GROUP

Interviews were conducted with N=20 LIS professionals who collected quantitative data from these 176 libraries. Among them 17 were male and only three were female and their age ranged 25 to 55. They represent the different districts of the province. Qualitative data revealed the following:

Almost all the respondents agreed that the Government authorities and civil society do not give due importance to the libraries in Pakistan. Rather, is considered a liability. They also opined that libraries are in bad condition due to absence of the department responsible for the development of public libraries on all level, i.e. District, Tehsil and Union level. The organizational structure of these libraries is not clear and independent.

Libraries are in poor condition and 22% are closed. Even the functional libraries hardly come under the definition of a “library” only with few exceptions. A small room with small collection and a peon with no budget and no service are called a library in many Tehsils under the building of Tehsil Municipal Administration. These can be called newspaper reading room instead of a public library.

Some library buildings are being used for some other purposes e.g. Press club, councilor’s residence and TMA store rooms. They also pointed out the poor condition of library buildings that need repairing and extension and in some cases need a new building. There is no one to raise the voice for quality library services and even the nominal library budget (that is not fixed) has spent on other heads.

There is no library culture in the absence of LIS professionals, as 78% libraries run without them. However, respondents observed that even the available sources may not properly utilize without competent LIS professionals. Non-qualified staff is unable to manage the donation of books and IT related stuff, received from Punjab Library Foundation and other sources. Interviewees suggested to fill vacant seats, and create more professional & para-professional positions in each district, preferably the natives from that district should be hired.

They also emphasized on updated collection, purpose built building, IT infrastructure to develop a public library system in the province.

Respondents recommended the following:

- One poor/non-functional library should be selected at divisional level (9) to make it a state of the art library with good building, a budget, human resources, IT infrastructure and budget on regular basis.
- This state of art libraries should be expanded on district level and all tehsil libraries should be declared as branch libraries of the district library.
- All public libraries should be under one administrative hierarchy/department to make and execute plans and policies. There should be a uniform policy for all public libraries.
- Punjab Library Foundation needs to launch sustainable staff development programs for working professionals about marketing and promotion of library services and library automation in order to improve their services and visibility.
- Trained and competent LIS professionals & non-professionals should be hired in all libraries.
- Also web visibility of libraries and their services should be created by designing their web pages.
- Children section should be established in all libraries, especially in large libraries.

A focus group with LIS researcher was conducted to predict the future of Public Library System (PLS) in Pakistan. Eight LIS research students participated in the focus group. Among them 4 were male and 4 were female. Their age ranged from 25 to 35 and all were working librarians. They were optimistic about the future of PLS. They suggested a strong political and media campaign by LIS community and Civil Society to create awareness about PLS and its benefits among the elite, politicians and policy makers. They recommend the following for the future course of action.

Public library should:

- PLS should serve as social agency to support different welfare, social and cultural activities in the area to justify its existence.
- Public library should be redefined as “Public Information and Community Learning Centre” to serve the multiple target audience.
- Public library should be on top priority by the decision makers to design and expedite library friendly policies,
- Public libraries should have close liaison with local schools for the promotion of reading culture among the children and the citizens.
- Opt the marketing strategies to improve services and visibility
- There should be fixed budget (1% of the total budget of the District), the collection, IT infrastructure and trained staff in public libraries.
- For remote areas, mobile libraries should be initiated for children and senior citizens.
- LIS professionals should generate funds i.e. donations along with Government funding to provide value added services to the community.
- The location of the library should be accessible and convenient for the community.

## **6 CONCLUSION**

Public Library System (PLS) is not in infancy stage rather in deterioration stage. Existing libraries are closed and even the functional libraries hardly come under the definition of a “library” only with few exceptions. A small room with small collection and a peon with no budget and no service are called a library. These can be called newspaper reading room instead of a public library. However the future of PLS depends on the coordinated serious efforts of library community and higher authorities.

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