

An Ancient History: Ethnographic Study of the Santhal

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Abstract: The Santals are one of the Munda peoples who live mainly in the state of Jharkhand, Bihar, west Bengal, Odisha and Assam. There is also significant Santal minority in neighbouring Bangladesh and small population in Nepal. The Santhal society, is one of the most primitive caste among the oldest tribal of India, and it is also the largest tribal of India (Social Geography, Ahmad Aijazuddin). The Santhals, who number more than 5 millions, consider themselves as a tribal people speaking a different language (austrasiatic) and sharing a way of life which implies values different from those of the Hindus (Tambas Lyche, M.C. 2007). The people of the Santhal society mainly depends on subsistence farming. They lead a very simple and distinct life. They believe in superstition, and these are the main cause of their backwardness. The Santal tribes of India have a typical tribal life style. Basic needs are fulfilled by forest trees and plants. The tribes are also engaged in fishing and cultivation. These tribes in India also possess a magnificent skill of making musical equipment, mats and baskets out of which is worth watching. The study concentrates on the influences of modern values and institutions in the day by day of the Santal spread of education, modern technology and migrants, sociologists have noted changes in the social, economic and cultural life of tribals due to such migration. More particularly they have been exposed to the processes related to modernisation and globalization. The impact of such changes can be seen in their changing cultural values, occupational structure and role perception. More particularly, the diminishing significance of patriarchy in the social life of the Santal is evident. In the traditional tribal society, specific roles were assigned to men and women for maintenance of their age-old traditions, customs etc. Dependency on forest-based economy also influenced their cultural norms, traditions and values. But as a result of tribals have come close to new forms of life, institutions and values that have encouraged social transformation in their society. By the scanning of this paper, it can be said that the Santhal people (tribal group) have maintained their individuality from the ancient period.

Keywords: Hor, Olchiki, Khuli, Ornaments, Marriage, Maran Buru.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Santhal (also spelled as Santal, and formerly also spelt as Sontal or Sonthal) are one of the Munda peoples who live mainly in the states of Jharkhand, West Bengal, Bihar, Odisha, and Assam. There is also a significant Santhal minority in neighboring Bangladesh, and a small population in Nepal (known as Satar in Nepal). The Santhals speak the Santali language, one of the Munda languages. They are the largest tribal community in India. Santhals are the third largest tribe in India. They are mostly found in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand and Assam. Santhals belong to the Pre-Aryan period. They were the great fighters during the British regime in India. They waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1855. During the late 1850s Santhals hero Sidhu had accumulated around 10 thousand Santhals to run parallel government against the British government. Baba Tilka Majhi was the first Santhal leader who raised weapons against the Britishers in 1789 (Free Encyclopedia/google India).

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cultural values, occupational structure and role perception. More particularly, the diminishing significant of patriarchies in the social life of the Santal is evident. In the traditional tribal society, specific role was assigned to man and women for maintenance of their age old tradition, custom etc. Dependency on forest based economy also influenced their cultural norms, traditions and values. But as a result of tribals have come close to new forms of life, institutions and values that have encouraged social transformation in their society. The basic objective of this chapter is to understand evolution of Santal ethnographic study.

Now-a days the society has been modified. As a result the Santal have overcome their inertia and announce themselves as the important part of this beautiful world.

2. SOURCE OF DATA

1. PRIMARY DATA:-

Field Survey –

- a. Observation,
- B. interview (face to face)

2. SECONDARY DATA:

- a. Books
- b. journals
- c. Internets
- d. Other:

- > “Jharkhand: Data Highlights the Scheduled Tribes”. Census of India 2001. Census Commission of India. Retrieved 2010-01-10.
- > “West Bengal: Data Highlights the Scheduled Tribes” . Census of India 2001. Census Commission of India. Retrieved 2010-01-10.
- > “Bihar: Data Highlights the Scheduled Tribes”. Census of India 2001. Census Commission of India. Retrieved 2010-01-10.
- > “Santali: Also spoken in Nepal”. Retrieved 2011-04-01.
- > a b c "Library of Congress Country Studies". U.S. Library of Congress (released in public domain). Retrieved 2007-10-06.
- > L.S.S O Malley, Bengal District Gazetteers Santal Parganas.
- > Charles Dickens, Household words, Volume 35.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To find out of the Santhal life-style, as a tribal group.
2. To find out the ethnographic study of the Santals.
3. To find out the ancient history (including all) of the Santhals.
4. To find out the nature, habit, culture & society of the Santhals.
5. To find out the difference between traditional & transitional life-style of the santhals.

4. METHODOLOGY

The basic objective of this chapter is to understand evolution of Santal ethnographic study. Purpose of this study, mainly use Descriptive method.

Ethnographic Discussion:

Origin and history of the santhals:

Santhals belong to the Pre Aryan period. They were the great fighters during the British regime in India. They waged war against the permanent settlement of Lord Cornwallis in 1855. During the late 1850 Santhals hero Sidhu had

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The name of the community is Santals or Shantals. According to Sreiferud (1968) it is a corruption of Saontar. This was adopted by the Santals when they lived in the area around Saont in Midnapur district of West Bengal. The word Santal is an English word adopted from Hindi which corresponds with Saontar used by Bengali speaking people (O. J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 27). Ordinarily they call themselves as hor (man). There is another similar term as hor which stands for the way or means. A hor (man) is in search of hor (way or means) and effort continues till he finds a satisfactory result (P.C. Hembram, SariSarna: Santhal Religion (Delhi: Mittal Publication, 1988). They also call themselves as hor hopon which means child or children of human beings.

Different language of the santhals (santhali):

Santhali is the prime language spoken by the Santhal Tribe. This Indian tribe also has a script of their own called Olchiki. Apart from Santhali they also speak Bengali, Oriya and Hindi. The Santhals have been more tenacious of their language than many of the other people to whom they are racially allied. They are the largest tribe in India to retain a good language to the present day. The Santali Language is part of the Austroasiatic family, distantly related to Vietnamese and Khmer. It is closely related to Mundri as well as to Ho, Korku, Savara and Gadaba, languages spoken by smaller tribes. The relationship of the Santhals with these tribes is racial and cultural as well as linguistic, and as they live in neighbouring territories it is very likely that they have a common origin. They have nevertheless been separate long enough to develop their individual languages and to possess distinct though allied cultures. The Santali script is a relatively recent innovation. Santali did not have a written language until the twentieth century and used Latin/Roman, Devnagri, Oriya and Bangla writing systems. Paul Olaf Bodding (born Gjøvik, Norway on 2 November 1865, died Odense, Denmark on 25 September 1938) was a Norwegian missionary, linguist and folklorist. He served in India for 44 years (1889–1933), and operated mainly from the town Dumka in the Santal Parganas-district. Bodding created the first alphabet and wrote the first grammar for the Santali-speaking native people in eastern India. In 1914 he also completed the translation of the Bible into the Santali Language. In 1925 Akilman Raghunath Murmu created Ol Chiki script for the Santali Language.

The Santals have their own independent language known as Santali which belongs to the Munda, Ho, Mahli, Bhumij, and Kharia family of languages. Peter W. Schmidt has classified these groups as the Austro-Asiatic language group. As the Santals belong to the Munda family of languages, they have been classified by anthropologists as Pre-Dravidians, Kolarians, Dravidians, Proto-Australoids, Nishadies and Austrics (J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 27). But in the recent year they also have developed their own written script which goes by the name OlChiki. Many books have been printed in OlChiki. The Santali script, or OlChiki, is alphabetic, and does not share any of the syllabic properties of the other Indic scripts such as Devanagiri. It uses 30 letters and five basic diacritics. It has six basic vowels and three additional vowels, generated using the GahlaTudag (N. Patnaik, "The Santhal World of Supernatural Beings" in Santal World View, 135).

Santhals habitation pattern:

The Santhal tribes of India have a typical tribal lifestyle. Basic needs are fulfilled by forest trees and plants. The tribes are also engaged in fishing and cultivation. These tribes of India also possess a magnificent skill of making musical equipments, mats and baskets out of the plants. The way this articulate process is carried out is worth watching. The Santals' cottage stands on the both side of a straggling Kulhi (village road). Each cottage consisted of two or three rooms. The walls of the house are made of bamboos or Sal logs and are generally plastered over with coat of mud on the both sides. The frames of the roofs are of polas and asan made of Sal planks, and the roof is supported on Sal post. But people use different material to make house in different places according to the availability of the materials. The village is always situated near to the forest where natural resources are available for their living. The Santals always try to live together in group and therefore the houses are built close to each other.

Santhals religion:

Some areas though ironically, Santhals don't have a temple of their own and neither do they worship any idols. These tribes of India follow the Sarna religion, with Marangburu, Jaheraera, and Manjhi as their god and goddess. Santhals pay respect to

the ghosts and spirits like Kal Sing, Lakchera, Beudarang etc. Animal sacrifices in order to appease the Gods is a common practice amongst these energetic tribes of India. Santals are mixed with other communities and religious groups etc. But the Santal prefers to live in group them with other community. For they do not mixing with other group.

One of the most studied tribal religions in India, Santhal religion worships Marang buru or Bonga as supreme deity. The weight of belief, however, falls on a court of spirits (bonga), who handle different aspects of the world and who must be placated with prayers and offerings in order to ward off evil influences. These spirits operate at the village, household, ancestor, and sub-clan level, along with evil spirits that cause disease, and can inhabit village boundaries, mountains, water, tigers, and the forest. A characteristic feature of the Santhal village is a sacred grove on the edge of the settlement where many spirits live and where a series of annual festivals take place.

The most important spirit is Maran Buru (Great Mountain), who is invoked whenever offerings are made and who instructed the first Santhals in the brewing of rice beer. Maran Buru's consort is the benevolent Jaher Era (Lady of the Grove). A yearly round of rituals connected with the agricultural cycle, along with life-cycle rituals for birth, marriage and burial at death, involves petitions to the spirits and offerings that include the sacrifice of animals, usually birds. Religious leaders are male specialists in medical cures who practice divination and witchcraft. Similar beliefs are common among other tribes of northeast and central India such as the Kharia, Munda, and Oraon. Smaller and more isolated tribes often demonstrate less articulated classification systems of the spiritual hierarchy, described as animism or a generalized worship of spiritual energies connected with locations, activities, and social groups. Religious concepts are intricately entwined with ideas about nature and interaction with local ecological systems. As in Santhal religion, religious specialists are drawn from the village or family and serve a wide range of spiritual functions that focus on placating potentially dangerous spirits and coordinating rituals ("Library of Congress Country Studies". U.S. Library of Congress (released in public domain). Retrieved 2007-10-06).

The santhal food and drink patterns:

The Santals uses utensils like pot (kanda), lota, plate (kasa tari) bowl (bati) for drinking water. Boiled rice is the staple food of the Santals like the rest the neighboring population (Charulal Mukherjea, The Santal: With illustration (Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co, 1939) 70). They eat almost all available kind of fish and crabs and have great relish for meat, which they preserve in a way of their own. Added to these many worms and insects like red ant and termite, the flesh of various animals like tigers, bears, crows, mice, frogs and snakes constitutes their menu and suit their palate. Different varieties of cakes are prepared like Jil-pitha, chor pitha and rice power mixed with meat and placed on a sal-leaf and place on the pan and thus baked. Various kinds of edible leaves are eaten by the santals among them Sin arak (a small tree, Baubinia) Purai arak (Beng. Pui Sang, Basella Alda), Kedok arak (The supper pot-herb), Matha arak (a pot-herb), Munga arak (drum stick leaves) etc. They also prepare different kinds of food items made of various food grains (Charulal Mukherjea, The Santal: With illustration (Calcutta: Mukherjee & Co, 1939) 71-75). The drink they prepare is the rice-beer. This is used for all function in the village, the ritual purpose and in offering to the bongas. A well-to-do Santal family has meal three times a day, while the poor, who is a daily wage earner have twice a day.

Santhals dress and ornaments:

1. Type of dress worn by a) Adult male/ Adult female – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment. b) Male child/Female child – i) head gear, ii) Upper garment, iii) Lower garment.

The Santal women now generally wear bordered saris not less than seven cubits in length. Half of this serves as the lower garments being knotted at the waist; the other is passed over the left shoulder and hangs in the front. They use no veils for their heads of raven dark mass of wavy hair. They keep them combed in a nice knob at the back of their head and decorate them with flowers of all hues and frequently with tufts of red silk. The Female children up to the age of five wear a very short loin cloth, worn around a coulered string tied at the waist (danda jbinjbir). They call this cloth gendre. Girls after ten years wear a thick cloth called panhand in Santali. Some of these have a bright violet border. Such saris reach only up to the knee as they measure three cubits in length and one and half cubits in wide. But they take care to cover the upper part of their bodies with another part of measurement called gamcha. But the dress of santal women varies from place to place. But women still retained their primitive style intact, makes several pleats in the portion bound round the waist at the front and the end thrown over the shoulder from behind falls over the breast, and the edges are tucked in one either side into the

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portion round the middle. A second dress is of katntha cloth (pieces of old cloth sewn together) which is bound by women round the waist and completed with other piece of cloth thrown over the shoulder and covering the breast. Men are scantily dressed. On generally see them wearing a short cloth tied at the waist, the end being passed on and secured near the end of the spine to free movement. Santals wear loin cloth, which they call Panchi at home but they put on long sheet of thick cloth five cubits in width which they term kutchu. (Charulal Mukherjea, The Santal: With illustration, 83-85).

There is as such no special dress used by the priest, headman, and person practicing medicine.

The Santal women struck colourful flowers to their hair, and over their ears but those who can afford use ornaments of various kinds, the special features mentioned are as follows. These ornaments are made of nickel and silver, which are frequently used. The average woman wears convex-shaped anklets (paina). They also use on their feet ornament called kharua and with a ring on her first finger of the toe. Their wrist has ornamented wristlets called phora sakom. They use several varieties of rings like taka mudam, tunki mudam. While some well to do santal wear a head ornament called jhipjhipi a silver tiara-like ornament, with a crescent moon glimmering a locket. Next is the danda jhinjhir decorated on the wrist. They decorate their ear lobes with jhinka. And the upper ears sparkle with khutla with five chains of silver swinging from it. Whereas the necks have beautiful aids in the shape of hansulis (Charulal Mukherjea, The Santal: With illustration, 85-857).

The materials used for preparing ornaments are brass, bronze, silver, nickel and gold.

Analogous division of the santhal:

The types of household that is seen among the Santals are joint family and single family. When a couple gets married usually they live with the parents of the bride groom or if it is divided then they have to live alone and start a new family of their own. Son is considered as a blessing for the family for the family descent is to be carried on by him. He is the heir to the property of the family. But in some cases the right to heir may be the daughter when the family has no son as heir. They usually look for a son so that he may carry out the work of the father after him.

The head of the family (Father) has the important role in the maintenance of the family. He along with mother is bread earner. The father is the main decision making member of the family. The mother takes care of the household activities. The children help their parents in both house and in the field.

The kisku became the royal tribe and assumed the title as king. Murmur as the princely tribe and were named as Murmur Thakur. Hembrom was ennobled and known as kuar. Marandi were appointed the king's treasurers and stewards and named as Marandi Kipisar. The Tudu took to music and received the title as Tudu mandariya. There is no office conferred upon the others (Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 29).

There are twelve clans among the Santals, they are Hasdak, Murmu, kisku, Hembrom, Marandi, Soren, Tudu, Baske Besra, core, and pauria. Among these clans the last two have been lost. The marriage with besra and core are avoided by other clan since they were considered as inferior. But today this thought pattern is no more (J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals). The main function of the clan organization is to regulate marriage relationship within the tribe. A Santal cannot marry a member of the same clan. If he or she does then they are committing clan incest. They are both cast out of the community and the village. A Santal was also prohibited from marrying a girl belonging to his mother's sub-clan.

Profession of the Santhals:

The Santhals are an agricultural tribe (About 95% of the Santals are involved in agricultural operations), from time immemorial they have cleared forests, tilled the land, and produced food for subsistence. In fact, the Santals depend mainly on paddy cultivation as their chief source of livelihood. In Assam only 5% of the Santals are in the tea garden. Santal laborers were considered very efficient and they easily found employment in coal mines. Besides agriculture they also domesticate animals like cows, buffaloes and pigs. Apart from these the Santhals also are well versed in the art of hunting, where their exceptional skills with bow and arrows is noticeable. After the ban on hunting by the Government of India, the Santhals do not get chance to practice their archery skill but recently a new venture of organizing village level archery competitions during festive seasons has given a chance to culture this unique legacy. Those adopted and educated by the Christian missionaries were in a better position. There were a few Santhals in Government jobs holding high posts.

The Santhal Deputy Commissioner, the village Heads, the Darogas, musicians and the teachers. Santhals have taken up profession in every field. There are good number of Santhal doctors, engineers, governments servants, the opening up of new avenues after the arrival of the Christian missionaries, and the English education have changed their lifestyle and made it typically urban.

Culture & festivals of the santhals:

Santhals love dancing. It is in their blood. Dance is the important part of the Santhals fairs and festivals. After the long day hard work, Santhals relax themselves with the light music music and dance. Santhal women dress in the red bordered white sari and dance in the line sequence. Apart from dance Santhals play great music using Tirio (bamboo flute with the seven holes), Dhodro banam (which consists of belly called lac covered with an animal skin on which rests the bridge(sadam, lit, horse), an open chest(korom), a short neck(hotok)and a head(bohok), Phet banam (a fretless stringed instrument with three or four strings), Tumdak, Tamak, Junko and Singa.

Santhals mainly celebrate the Karam festival which falls in the month of September and October. They celebrate this festival to please the God to increase their wealth and free them from all the enemies. It is the tradition among the Santhals to grow the Karam tree outside their house after the purification process. Other festivals of the Santhal community include Maghe, Baba Bonga, Sahrai, Ero, Asaria and Namah. They also celebrate haunting festival called Disum sendra on the eve of Baishakhi Purnima.

Santhal marriage:

The average marriage age of a Santal boy is twenty and that of the girl is sixteen. There are seven traditional forms of marriage present among the Santals:-

1. Kirin bapla takes place when a man brings his son a bride (bahu) for whom he has paid (kirin) the bride price.
2. Kirin Jawaee bapla, when a husband is acquired for the girl who is made pregnant by a man and who either does not want to marry the girl or because of the same clan. Here the cost of the acquiring a husband is borne by the offender.
3. Tunki Dipil bapla: This is also called the poor man's marriage because here there is no bride price. The bride takes all her belongings in a basket and she is brought to the groom's house with the basket in her head.
4. Sanga bapla is the contract made by the widow or a divorced woman, and widower or the divorced man. Here the bride price is half of the kirin bapla.
5. Ghardi Jawaee bapla: it is the marriage that is arranged by the girl's parents, where the Ghardi Jawaee is brought in to help in the work of the household, when there is no son or son is minor.
6. Itut bapla it is the boy who take the initiative. When the boy is not sure whether the girl accept him as her husband or when the parents refuses. The boy forcibly applies sindur in the public place claiming her to his wife.
7. Nir bolok bapla: it is the girl who takes the matter in hand. By intruding into the house of the boy, who after having sexual relationship and force the boy to take her as his wife(23 J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals).

Practices of widow marriage, widower marriage, remarriage, and divorce are prevalent still in the community. But practices of polyandry, polygamy, levirate, sororate and Child marriage are not prevalent presently. There are various customs and practices associated to marriage and the Betrothal is one of the customs. There are various forms of marriage traditions among the Santals. Here let us see mainly the procedure and customs of ceremonies observed in the kirin bapla. In this type of bapla the bridegroom parents starts the procedure by commissioning a raebaric (marriage-broker) to try and find out a suitable bride for their boy. They make enquires as to where an eligible maiden be found. When he has found the discussion between the two parties take place(P.O. Boddington, Traditions and institutions of the Santals, 35).

Once the boy and girl are regarded as suitable match, they arrangement for the first meeting between relatives take place. Next, a day is fixed for the informal inspection of the house of both parties (Orak-Duar- Nepal). On the appointed day the raebaric is accompanied by the girl's father, village headman and other relatives to the boy's house. On the way ominous sign are strictly noted. If there is a bad omen on their way then they will return back but if the omen is a good then they

will proceed to the boy's house accompanied by headman and Jog Manjhi of the boy's village. Then there is the ceremony of greeting and washing of the feet of the guest. Next the girl's father inquires for the behaviour of the boy. They have discussion of bride-price (gonon). Presently sum of fifty five rupee has been fixed as the amount of bride-price but it may also differ from place to place. When both parties come to an agreement and pleased then the day of betrothal is fixed known as Horok Cikhna (For further reading confer, J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 166-175).

Among the Santal there is as such no practice of dowry but there exist some kind of brideprice, which exist even today, the bride price differs from place to place. This bride price is called gonon.

Death:

For the Santals does not natural death, they attribute death to the malignancy of certain bongas, impersonal power and witchcraft. Their belief about the future life is rather confused but they also believe in the life after death. They also believe in the existence of heaven (svorog) the abode of the righteous and hell (norok) the place where the sinners are punished (Cf. Charulal Mukherjee, The Santal: With illustration, 228-229).

The body of the deceased is anointed with the oil and turmeric, dressed in new cloth and laid in a parkom which is brought out into the courtyard. In the case of the a woman whose husband is still alive, vermilion is put on her forehead by a female relative. A piece of cloth containing some money, a brass plate, drinking vessel and other gifts are donated by the family and near kinsmen as a token of mourning, are placed on the cot which is carried by four of the deceased male relatives or friends. Women do not go to the burial place.

The dead body is disposed out skirt of the village, where grave is dug facing the north to south. All the ornaments are removed from the body and the entire gift placed on the cot. These are taken by those present and sold, buying handi and paura in return. A cloth is laid in the grave and the dead body is carried around the grave three times. The chief mourner puts burning embers into the deceased's mouth. The body is lowered into the grave facing north and south. Branches are put into the slot prepared. The cot is broken and the wood is placed on the top of the branches. The chief mourner followed by other villagers throws mud into the grave. An earthenware water pot and a winnowing fan containing some paddy are left beside the grave. The mourner goes for the purification bath, after which they anoint themselves with the oil and turmeric. The chief mourner has his head shaved completely (J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 192).

Traditional system of social control of the Santal:

The political organization and administrative unit of the Santals village are mostly governed by councils of elders who regulate the life of the people within the village and the order of the village outside world. The political organization and administrative is generally democratic in nature. The Santals govern by their own laws and have their own method of treating different kinds of offences. The offices of the political organization were generally hereditary and passed patrilineally but now days the offices are not only hereditary but are conferred by selection of person. These officials are responsible to the community for their functions.

The village council of every Santal village usually consists of seven officials: The Manjhi (a headman), Paranik (a deputy headman), Jog Manjhi (an overseer of village morals), his assistant Jog Paranik, Godet (a messenger), Naeke (a village priest) and his assistant Kudam Naeke. These officials have to perform their functions in accordance with the tribal system and that is why they are expected to be well acquainted with the Santal traditions, customs, religious beliefs and practices (J. Troisi, Tribal Religion: Religious Belief and Practices among the Santals, 56). These traits are still prevalent in the village, where the community live.

5. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, it is clear the ethonography of the Santals (Tribe). Day-by-day their life-style are developed. The spread of education and technology has helped them to adopt about new method of agriculture, cooking style and food habits, language, dress pattern, accustomed to ready-made clothes, aware to political mobilisation, and also medi-system etc. Migration to cities and towns, understand the need of education for their children, get exposure to

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modern health practices and could doubt superstitious practices and witchcraft and sorcery performance by the priests and ojha. In short, this report I have mainly highlighted the Santhal Ethnography and change for the impact of modernity.

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