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Anthropology has always grappled with the problem of explaining human differences and to explain them in a way that these differences do not produce a categorization of the human species in any kind of value specific maner. Culture is the one dimenssion of human existence where the species Homo Sapiens displays a remarkable range of variation. Culture is the system of meanings which human beings assign to the world around them and the processes of interaction with this meaningful world which is expressed in overt bebaviour and symbols assigned to these. This unique ability of relating to the world, mediated by the abstract thought processes of the mind rather than by genetically constituted impulses, is an unique human ability whch leads to the definition of humans as culture bearing animals.

When human populations came in contact with others, they realized that their own ways of doing things and understanding the world was very different from the other people they came in contact with. Almost

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universally, this realization was understood in a manner labelled ethnocentric by later day anthropologists. What this means is that people brought up in a culture are so entrenched or conditioned by that culture that they find it difficult to think or comprehend the environment in any other way. 'Others' is therefore either equated with the incomprehensible or the inferior. Such feelings have been at the roots of all modes of interaction between different social groups at all historical times. All tribes call themselves by a name, which in their language means 'humans', 'the best ones', 'the exalted ones' and use words for others which means either 'sub-human', 'slugs' 'monkeys' and other derotgatory terms. Such feelings are at the roots of racism and the social bounderies into which the world is divided.

Anthropology, as a discipline, to begin with was plagued with the same kind of enhnocentrism which lead the 19th century evolutionists like Tyler, Bachofen, Morgan etc. to take the 19th century Western Europeans to be the epitome of human civilization. All others were viewed as lagging behind at various stages of the evolutionary ladder. These scholars, committed to proving the unity of the human race, as against the blatant racism of their times, which denied even the human character of the 'non-whites', were firm believers in the hypothesis of 'psychic unity of Mankind'. A point of view which professed that all humans think alike by virtue of having the same human quality of mind except some have reached levels of intellectual maturity, a little earlier than others, who have the same potential, but which is yet to find full expression, The 'stages' of human evolution was thus nothing but the unfolding of this innate and shared potential. The contemporary 'primitives' were thus viewed as residues of the infancy of the human race (Channa 1994).

However, by the first half of the twentieth century, with the development of the very specialized anthropological methodology which involved the technique of 'fieldwork' and what came to be known as 'participant observation', there was a conscious effort on the part of anthropologists to break this barrier between 'we' and 'others'. This

immediately lead to a dynamic transformation in the understanding of differences between human cultures. The concept of 'cultural relativism' replaced the concept of 'evolution'. Cultures were seen as unique configurations each meaningful it its own eontext: devices which enabled the culture bearing populations to cope with their own problems of existence. Cultures thus represented not stages, but simply different systems of meanings. In his pioneering book, 'The Mind of Primitive Man', Franz Boas, the founder of the Historical Particularistic School, emphasized the role of the individuals, as active components of production of cultures. Cultures are different because of the differential cognitive qualities of the people who constitute them. History and environment were seen as two key variables to explain the differences in cognitive development, but later the Culture Personality school also emphasized upon the role of child rearing patterns or enculturaltion, to explain the differences in perception developed early in infants, in the process of absorbing the culture. The human personality was viewed as a combination of genetic and cultural components with the latter playing a crucial role. Another major soholar of the American cultural Tradition, Paul Radin, wrote his major classic, 'Primitive man as Philospher', where he showed that intellectual abilities were the same among all people, dealing a severe criticism to the view that the 'primitives' were akin to children and neurotics, a hypothesis put forward by Sigmund Freud, in his classic work 'Totem and Taboo'. Radin had shown that there are philosophers, thinkers and intellecturals among even the most 'primitive' or 'pre-literate' cultures and that all categories of religious believers, including rebels, agnostics and aethists exist among them.

Meaing systems and not mental abilities were seen as culture specific. For example, Boas came to recognize that what ultimately determines how a people percieve the colour of water is the "body of ideas regarding colour held by a people" and which is part of the cultural meaning system (Herskovits: 1953:9). An important off-shoot of the recognition of diverse meaning systems engendered by different cultures was the recognition of the importance of language as a vehicle for the communication of meanings.

Anthropologists working in the field make a necessity of learning the native language with the basic assumption that all types of nuances of meanings can not be translated. Anthropological explanations and descriptions therefore, make use of the native categories which can only be understood in the linguistic term assigned to it by the users. A case in point is M.N. Srinivas' introduction of the terms 'jati' and 'Varna' to understand properly what the westerners designated as the Indian caste system. Ward Goodenough (1970) referring to the Nayars of South India has shown the difficulties of translating even basic terms like family and marriage, across cultures. The 'Tavari' of the Nayars does not correspond to the unit of family as commoly understood, yet performs all the basic functions of such.

As a theoretical point of view, the branch of Cognitive Anthropology developed in the sixties. It is a formal analysis of culture, attempting to understand the organizing principles underlying behaviour i.e., the cognitive anthropologists do not confine themselves to a descriptive account of culture, but look for the cognitive organizations that express themselves as the material phenomenon, of which cultures are composed. In essence, cognitive anthropology seeks to answer to questions; what material phenomena are significant for the people of some culture; and how they organize this phenomenon (Tyler 1969). For example snow is more important to the Eskimoes than to people in Delhi; cattle is more important to the Nuer than to the Kalahari Bushmen: there is likewise differential cognition of kinship categories; two persons categorized as 'uncle' in the western culture may be viewed entirely differently in India where one is the mother's brother with a different terminological denotation than the fathers' brother. While behaviour towards different types of 'uncles' in the western culture may be of the same undifferentiated type; behaviour towards the father's brother and mothers' brother in Indian society is markedly different and characterized by a different set of rights and obligations.

Anthropogists, working in different societies across the world discovered the close relationship between language and the environment,

cultural and physical in which a people live. The influence of the
environment, as well as the mode of adaptation to the invironment were
seen as strongly determining variables in shaping cognition. Studies among
the Eskimoes have snown that they can distinguish between handereds
of shades of colour of the snow. The Pastoral Nuers from the East African
cattle belt can describe their cattle in terms of numerous colours and shades.
In fact, as Evans-Prichard discovered, the Nuer language draws heavily
upon metaphors and similies which center around their cattle, who are the
central focus of Nuer existence. Important cognitive concepts such as that
of time and space are shaped by the Nuer's relationship to their buffaloes.
They concieve of time in terms of their daily and annual routines concerning
the animals, such as grazing time, milking time, camping time, migration
time etc., a perception which Evans-Pritchard calls "ecological time".
Language, thus is an important vehicle in structuring cognitive categories
as well as reflecting meterial conditions of existence.

Many of the studies in cognitive anthropology have sought to look
for underlying organizing principles, in the codes that are mapped in
language. Nearly all of this work has been concerned with how other people
"name" the things in their environment, including their relatives, and how
these names are organized into larger groupings i.e. the principles which
underlie classification. For example, the classification of blood relatives
'kin' and relatives by marriage- affines, is distinctly different in different
societies.

What is important to understand is that meaning is a phenomenon
guided by a culturally constructed system of perception. There is nothing
in the basic character of the objects and events in the material world which
tells us that certain things go together and others do not. Therefore, all
methods of classification are products of the human mind and not dictated
by any quality or property of the classificed objects.

Taking a clue from linguistics, where the grammer of logical
principles underlying language is seen as similar, even though different

languages are entirely different in speech content, some anthropologists have sought out a formal analysis of culture, looking for universal or comparable codes underlying cognitive classification.

One of the foremost and well known proponents of this school is C. Levi Strauss: While acknowledging the empirical variants introduced by history of chance events, environment and the unpredictable character of human interpretations, one neverthless discovers a certain invariant quality of the human mind's basic structures of classifications. These mental codes have their orgin according to Levi-Strauss in the primondial origins of human thought, hundreds of thousands of years ago, and are recognizable in the analysis of Myths. No human culture exists without Myths and a formal analysis of myth, an excercise to which Levi Strauss devoted most of his scholarly career, enables us to discover the basic rules of logic underlyin human cognition. For e.g. the binary mode of classification of understanding something only in relation to its opposite i.e., black as against white, light against dark, high against low etc. is one of the primary character of the structure of the human mind.

Thus whether through an empathetic understanding or through a formal analysis-anthropologists seek to discover the rules behind human diversity, taking diversity itself as an invariant character of human nature. Like Michael Carrithers puts it, one of the universals that unify the human species is, "that set of capacities that allows us to create cultural diversity" (Carrithers: 1992. 5). Language provides the basic categories through which a people grasp their environment as well as their experience; an important element is the process of 'chunking', or 'lumping', an important device used for memory as well as understanding of phenomenon. By lumping together certain process under a general category, which is fitted into a larger meaning system, the complex events of the world are classified and understood. In fact cultures exist as complex systems only by the help of linguistic symbols which help in the process of "chunking" and classification.

For example studies of ethnozoology reveal the mechanism of focal vs extended range of terms. The basic or focal range includes those attributes that are seen as basic or defining features, such as "green and leafy", "tubers", "berry" etc; the extended range will include those plants which are more closely related than others to the features recognized as focal. The manner in which this categorization is done follows cultural prescriptions; which need not coincide with any standard terminology. An essential component of such classification is the understanding of an item in terms of its essence or overall quality; like if a linguistic term corresponding to fish refers to the essence of all creatures living in water, it may include crustaceans, molluscs, mammals etc; but which will fall within the cognitive category of the general compartment "fish". Further such an essence is of a wholistic character and cannot be broken down into items. Like even if one understands a Tiger as somthing with a tail, whiskers, paws, claws etc; if a cub is born without tail, arms and legs, would still be a tiger cub, but a deficient one. Such an essence is more often a quality of living things and natural objects then man-made ones; for e.g. a chair without legs or back-rest will perhaps not be recognized as a chair.

Such a notion of generalized essence may be attributed to the central themes employed by cultures to understand entire range of phenomenon; something which in cognitive anthropology is know as "cultural schemas". These serve not only to categorize but also as processors which filter the phenomenon under consideration.

A major work done in the field of kinship using this perspective was the analysis of American kinship by David Schnieder, who showed that Americans understand kinship through a number of interrelated schemes such as blood, marriage, conjugual love, erotic love, the family, in-laws etc. An interesting example in this respect is the use of the term 'uncle' in Indian society. The North Indian kinship terminology uses specific, descriptive terms for all relatives such as mother's brother, father's, brother, mothers' sisters' husband the etc, who are referred to as 'uncle'

in western society. The Indian mode of thinking does not allow the use of personal names to any person older than ones' self. Thus while Dennis may call Mr. Wilson, Mr. Wilson, no Indian child would call a person in the ascendent generation as Mr. So & So. The term 'uncle' thus comes in useful as generalized category to classify all unrelated, elder males and its counter part 'antie' applies likewise to older females. Although transposed from the West, the term undergoes a cognitive transformation to fit in with the Indian cultural schemes to understand not kin, but outside-of-kin relationships. The designation of kin terms is one of the most well researched and interesting fields of anthropology and in which some very startling revelations came out: the most fundamental being the fact that actual biological relationships having practically nothing to do with cognitive categories of classification. As Louis Dumont has shown for South Indian kinship; the affinal (or marriage) relationship between a man and his wife's brother continues into the next generation, so that for a ego, the mothers' brothers' child as well as the mothers' brother is not a relationship of blood, but of marriage; is designated terminologically as one and marriage takes place between a girl and her maternal uncle or his son; and between a boy and his mother's brother's daughter. What kin terms do to is to fit people into certain cognitive categories such as 'marriageable', 'non-marriagable' 'of one's own blood', 'of different blood', 'respected' 'loved' etc.

Eclogical anthropologists have used the term 'cognitized environment' to refer to a people's cognition of what their environment is like. The cultural patterns of behaviour towards the environment is largely shaped by this cognition. For example, one of the basic requirements of all living beings is food. Unlike other species, where food habits are instinctively determind, humans put a cultural screen between themselves and what they percieve as edible or non edible, Infact there is such a great variation in what is percieved as food by different cultures that people of one culture would at times feel totally repulsed or amazed at the food habits of others. In fact cultural indentities are often drawn around food

habits or food taboos. Religiously prescribed food prescriptions such as taboo on eating beef of pork form strong social boundaries as also evoke strong sentiments around them. Such perceptions also condition the way people relate to the environment and the manner of their exploitation of environmental resources. Very important in this regard are notions of the sacred and the supernatural. For Hindus certain parts of the environment such as trees, rivers, glaciers, mountains etc are sacred. A recent work done on pollution control of the river Ganga showed that a very different cognition about the material state of the river exists in the minds of the people who are the Hindu devotees of the river and the agencies who are attempting to clear up the rivers. For the former any pollution is a ridiculous idea, for the Ganga is the supreme purifiying body which purifies anything that comes in contact with it. As such there is no question of it being polluted. As Spiro has shown is his work on Burmese religion, the Burmese concieve of their social world as composing of both humans and supernatural beings called Nats, which, for them are as real as living humans. Thus a part of the environment may not be just a tree, or earth or stones, but the abode of one's ancestors or the source of one's spiritual strength. Thus the tragedy of uprooted people is they leave behind their social worlds, their spirits and ancestors and a whole cultural ethos associated with them. No one except the people who share in that particular cultural schema can actually comprehend the tragedy of such a loss. The cognitized environment may not coincide with the objective environment but it is absolutely real for the people who share in the belief system and it informs their actual behavioural interaction with it.

Like the environment, key concepts such as 'time' and 'space' are important mirrors of the central ethos of any culture and provide a basic understanding of the cosmology of a people; which is the core of meanings which a people attribute to the world of their existence. As Leach (1961) has shown, time itself shows remarkable variations in perception. Apart from the lineal concept of time to which we are accustomed, there are cyclical as well as oscillating concepts of time; significantly observed

through rituals and myths.

For example 'ecological time' of the Nuer as described by Evans Pritchard is cyclical time. It is time that keeps coming back at regular intervals; this concept of time not as a lineal sequence but as a regular interval; also contains within it the notion of oscillation or reversal. Certain times may be seen as reversals between two fixed, or liminal points. These are variously symbolically expressed, like sexual intercourse as symbolic of dying, from which new birth takes place; the liminal points of certain transition rituals symbolize dying, or a symbolic withdrawl into the mother's womb, from which a new person (personhood) emerges. Many anthropologists like Leach and Turner have viewed rituals as cognitive mechanisms which, in an encapsulated form; reveal the cosmological truths to the members of society. In the absence of written language; or even with it, the rituals are powerful cognitive vehicles which appeal to the deepest emotional and intellectual levels of the participants; to imbibe in them very'deeprootedly the basic cultural schemes around which the culture operates.

A most central concern of all world views is notions regarding "Self", How people view themselves in relation to the world at larger including nature and other human beings- what Hallowell (1960) calls, "ethnometaphysics" Human beings in whatever culture are provided with cognitive orientation in a cosmos; there is "order" and "reason" rather than chaos. There are basic premises and principles... even if these do not happen to be consciously formulated and articulated by the people themselves. "(Ibid:20). Within this "ethno-metaphysics" are encompassed fundamental philosophical orientations regarding, "personhood", "good", "bad". "animate", "inanimate", "supernatural", concepts of time, space, life, gender etc. It is interesting to know that these fundamental cosmological notions are held as invariants by the members of each culture; and it is very difficult to convince anyone regarding their possibility of variation. For e.g. no one who is brought up in a western culture would believe that stones are

"animate" or that crocodiles can be one's ancestors, but cross-cultural studies show that for people who believe in them such a cognition is real and absolutely unshakable. As Hallowell has shown from his fieldwork among the Ojibwa tribe; there is a distinctly different cognition of the categories "animate" and 'inanimate" among them; for example the Ojibwa consider myths as, "conscious beings with powers of thought and action". Among many people, social relationships are extended to include not only other than human beings but other categories of "persons" who may be supernatural beings like the Burmese "Nats", dead ancestors, like among the Ojibwa; also animals, plants, shells, natural phenomenon like rain thunder etc. The Agami Nagas percieve some categories of stones as animate, the Todas keep meticulous records of the lineages of their buffaloes who like the Todas themselves are supposed to have originated from the Goddess Toshiksy.

Startling revelations come to us regarding some basic orientation regarding one's person like sickness or age, Remarkable variations exist in cognition of disease and their cure. The "germ theory of disease" as known to the western system is unknown to most people. Many of the disorders and ailments recorded.in medical books do not figure as disease in a people's cognitive system. During my fieldwork in Rajasthan people would look unbelieving if I told them that "snake-bite" was a medical problem for which one went to a hospital. Without exception "snake-bite" is regarded as a concern of the "Bhopa" or Shaman, not a medical problem at all: Clyde Kluckhohn (1944) had done a remarkable, pioneering work on the concepts of disease and cure among the Navaho Indians; showing clearly how the concept of disease was a part of the overall Navaho world view, which viewed any disorder, including illness as result of the disturbance of the natural harmony of the world, caused not by external factors such as infection, but internal, disharmonic, evil states of persons, specifically the innate evil of the witches. The evil was not seen as an abstract state of mind, but a definite organic substance which existed in the stomach of the witch. The tremendous literature on medical

anthropology that followed produced arrays of cognitive systems centred around disease and their cures. Specially fruitful in this area were concepts of mental diseases and psychoanalytic process of cures. Recently multidimensional scaling analysis has been used to analyse feature by item matrices of data about diseases and their cures. The distinction between criterial and salient features about any phenomenon such as "incurable", "infections", "mild" etc are used to understand and describe diseases in a culture, rather than criterial features which may not even be known to the general people, except qualified physicians. It is now well recognized that the social perception of a disease is very important in treatment as well as prevention.

In the long history of cognitive anthropology or the anthropologists attempts the unravel the question of transcultural cognition, a number of theoretical constructs have emerged. Anthony Wallace, in his paper on 'revitalization movements' (1966) used the concept of 'mazeway'-" it a mental image of the society and its culture and which includes perceptions of the "maze" of physical objects of the environment; and which includes like the Navaho world-view include notions of the internal and external aspects of the body, of human and non-human; and also the ways in which "maze" can be manipulated by self and others in order to minimize stress. By the mid-seventies it became apparent that human cognition is a very complex process which involves much more than the features of particu lar terms or the combination of them into systems,...... As already discussed the term 'cultural schemes' involved describing not merely terms and interactions but 'orientations' which are wholistic in overall application. As George Lakeoff (1987) has described, there may be as many kinds of schemes as there are kinds of things, like event schemes, orientational schemes, narratives schmes, propositional schemes, metaphysic schemes, image schemes etc (D'Andrade 1995 : 132).

The concept of, cultural model', was introduced by Kenneth Craik in the 1940's; in his book 'The nature of explanation'. The concept of a cultural model basically tells that people cognize not in terms of discrete

items but in terms of interrelated phenomenon; i.e. things are understood
not separately as discrete items but as 'interrelated set of elements which
fits together to represent something'. As D' Andrade (1995) has
described,one of the best examples of cultural models is Thomas Gladwins
book 'East is a Big Bird', where he describes how Melanesian navigators,
navigate long distances on sea, without using compass, or any modern
technology. They have a mental map of islands which are located with
the help of stars in the sky. In their process of cognition the boat is held
as constant against a moving skyline and set of islands. This process works
very well and the Melanesians are expert navigators rarely known to lose
their way. Cultural Models were also used by Clifford Gentz (1960) to
describe the construction of personhood among the Balinese. All cultures
as already discussed have certain models of self and of the mind; which
D' Andrade calls the 'Folk model'- these include perceptions about what
happens inside people's mind, what contributes to the conscious self etc.
Such models are intersubjectively shared by the people belonging to a
culture and for them they constitute the natural order of things; never
consciously mentioned, but taken for granted- What Bordieu (1971) calls
'Doxa'.

This nature of human cognition, its interconnectedness as well as
its submergence in the 'taken for granted' aspects of the human mind lead
to a criticism of the methodology of the earlier anthropological works on
cognition which relied greatly on language as vehicle of cognition.
Cognition was seen to be a process far too complex and interconnected
to be translated into language which relies upon linear, logical connections.
In other words the coherence and order characteristic of languages--- is
not recognized in the process of human cognition. The very process of
human cognition involves quick invocation of a whole set of interrelated
phenomenon, which by its very complexity can not have a smooth, linear
correlation. People think and percieve in chunks and complex schemes
of stored information, not necessarily apparent in words which may be
used expressively to describe such phenomenon. The use of a single word

or sentence may set off a whole interrelated mental process, recognized and shared by people of the same culture but not necessarily communicated to the outside observer through the media of language. The earlier theories of cognition described culture as the 'veil' through which people relate to their environment.

However later theories of culture such as that of Bordius' concept of Habitus (Bordieu 1977) and the connectionist theme in cognitive Anthropology recognized culture as variable and fluid, conditiong but not fully explaining or controlling behaviour. Quinn & Straus (c.f. D' Anradrade 1995 : 148) refer specifically to this nondeterministic nature of culture and to the process of socialization or learning which is determined both by communication of ideas and the learner's experience of the physical world. They give examples of the way in which cultural schemes for things like self-reliance are learned so that such schmes become, for some people, strong values and motives, while for others they are only cliches. Bloch (1992:129) also advocates the Leonnectionist' methodology for a proper insight into the cognitive system of other cultures which, "provides scientific ammunition against the logic-sentential folk model of thought implied by language and suggests another way in which thought is organized..., the newer theory of thought intuitively seems to correspond to the way informants actually operate in everyday situations". Further the connec-tionist model is described as, "only partly linguistic, they also integrate visual imagery, other sensory cognition, the cognitive aspects of learned practices, evaluations, memories of sensations, and memories of typical examples, Not only are these mental models not lineal in their internal organization but information from them can be accessed simultaneously from may parts of the model through 'multiple perallel processes. This is what enables people to cope with information as rapidly as they, and probably other animals, do in normal, everyday situations." (Ibid 129-150).

Bloch goes on to use this approach to describe the Zafimaniry's conceptualization of the world, a people among whom he had done extended f ield work and who are a group of shifting cultivators, located in the eastern

forest of Madagascar. This he does through contructing, by a combined process of absorbing the culture through observation and understanding effected by fieldwork, the central principals of their social organization through five interlinked models. These are:

1.   The mental model of what people are like and how they mature

2.   The mental model of the differences and similarities between women and men

3.   The mental model of what a good marriage is like

4.   The mental model of what trees and wood are like

5.   The mental model of what houses are like

The important point that Bloch makes is that when we describe a culture in this way it seems to consist of those very ordinary, day-today, 'taken-for-granted' things that everyone knows but no one talks about. Unlike some other models of culture given by the anthropologists and to which the informants do not feel any affinity, and when described to the culture bearers evokes the response, "Oh, well everyone knows these things". But the crucial thing is everyone within the culture known it but people do not know across cultures. Quite often when asked certain things informants have the tendency to respond "Ohl you do not even know this thing" "what the informant does not know that the 'obvious facts' derive partialy at least, the product of specific and in short term arbitrary historical processes"....." The anchoring of conceptualization in the material, the body, houses, wood, styles of speaking. and in practices-cooking, cultivating, eating together means that the cultural process cannot be separated from the wider processes of ecological, biological, and geographical transformation of which human society is a small part". (Bloch 1992 : 144) The Important thing that comes out in this approach is that they way an anthropologist understands how people in a culture percieve things is very close to the way the people think they do.

There is thus a conscious attempt to get closer and closer to removing the cognitive barrier between cultures and to do away with 'ethnocentrism'; also to view things not in terms or abstraction but closer to the reality or everyday existence. This includes viewing thought processes not simply as mental states but mental states in active interaction, with the physical structures of the environment; as also ones' experiential history of such interaction. Cognition may thus not only vary transculturally but also interculturally, according to the specific life situations of people. This also explains way there is variations within cultures between people who internalize culturally given perceptions differently. That is how for example; given the same religions or moral input; people vary from being deeply religious, agnostics, aethists, cynics, other-wordly, this-worldly and so on.

As one goes through a history of the anthropological approach to the study or other cultures or even culture per se; one comes across a striving to get closer to an unified expression or human thought process or to remove barriers as much as possible. What comes out clear from the enormous anthropological work done in this area is that it would be a distortion of reality and create grave misunderstandings; if the outsiaci s would impose their own cognitive categories on others. The important dimension of understanding the cognitive categories or others is not that it tells us anything about the reality; which is an unsolved philosphical question anyway, but that a people's cognitive categories shape their behaviour and actions.

Unless we understand the cognitive categories of others we cannot understand the behaviour itself leading to false classification of people from other cultures as being prelogical, illogical, irrational, immature etc. Recognition of the existence of transcultural cognitive categories is the only antidote to ethnocentrism..It is an essential quality to develop in interaction with other cultures. Educationists, planner development workrs need to inculcate this special empathetic quality.

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