Review

A Comparative Study of Narrative Style and Common Themes in *As I Lay Dying* and *Twilight in Delhi*

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This study conducts a comparative analysis of the common themes and writing styles in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. Despite emerging from distinct cultural backgrounds, both authors successfully convey intricate human experiences through their narratives. This study looks at the psychological complexity of individuals and family relationships by emphasizing cultural identity and its breakdown in reaction to society change. It examines the way individual and group histories interact as well as the theme of nostalgia and memory serve in characters' experiences. The analysis reveals how Faulkner and Ali address identity, family, and societal changes by examining their respective narrative techniques, language, and themes. Faulkner's use of stream-of-consciousness captures the chaotic journey of the Bundren family as they grapple with responsibility and personal conflict, while Ali's poetic style depicts the fading cultural identity, nostalgia, and societal transformation under colonial rule. Both writings contain prominent themes such as the inevitability of mortality, cultural identity, and familial roles, which provide profound insights into the complexities of the human experience. As *I Lay Dying* focusses on internal tensions in familial relationships, whereas *Twilight in Delhi* investigates the impact of colonialism on traditional beliefs. This comparative study reveals that both stories are important for comprehending the multidimensional structure of human existence, helping readers to grapple with the intricacies of identity and transition across cultural contexts.

Keywords: *Comparative study, Narrative Style, Themes, Twilight in Delhi, As I Lay Dying*

INTRODUCTION

William Faulkner and Ahmed Ali, two eminent literary figures from disparate cultural and historical contexts, employ creative narrative strategies to examine the intricacies of human existence. *As I Lay Dying*, written by Faulkner, a well-known American author influenced by the Southern Gothic style, takes place in the post-Civil War South, a milieu marked by degradation, disillusionment, and despair. His novel combines

psychological depth, social humour, and a shattered structure that reflects the characters' disjointed lives. In contrast, *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali, a pioneering figure in South Asian English literature, poignantly portrays colonial-era India with its fading cultural grandeur. Ali's work reflects a world in decline, marked by poetic elegance, cultural richness, and a deep sense of loss.

Although their backgrounds differ—Ali's description of the fall of Muslim culture in colonial India and Faulkner's investigation of disillusionment in a defeated American South—both authors are concerned with the human condition during times of social upheaval. In *As I Lay Dying*, the Bundren family begins on a sombre journey to fulfil their matriarch's last request, whereas in *Twilight in Delhi*, the Mirza family laments the decline of their traditional lifestyle as a result of modernization and British colonization. These familial narratives function as overarching reflections on identity, familial dynamics, and the influence of external factors on individual and communal existence.

This comparative analysis will investigate how Faulkner and Ali address themes of personal and cultural identity, the influence of family on individual experiences, and the broader societal transformations that confront their characters. Faulkner's fragmented, stream-of-consciousness style and Ali's more linear, descriptive prose reflect the internal and external struggles their characters endure. Through their works, both authors explore tensions between modernity and tradition, the significance of memory and loss, and the dislocation brought by cultural shifts.

This study compares the two novels to illustrate how the unique cultural and historical backgrounds of Faulkner and Ali influence their narratives while simultaneously emphasizing the universality of the issues they explore. This seminal work aims to illustrate how both authors enhance our comprehension of identity, family, and societal transformation across varied cultural contexts through their distinctive literary techniques.

Background of the Research:

Comparative analysis of narrative devices and shared themes in *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner and *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali uncovers important new perspectives on narrative across different cultural settings. While Faulkner emphasizes fragmentation and subjective reality by using a stream-of- consciousness approach with several first-person narrators, Ali reflects the sociopolitical scene of colonial Delhi by using a linear narrative with an omniscient perspective. Both books examine family and death; Ali shows the fall of tradition under colonial upheaval, while Faulkner exposes the hardships of the Bundren family during their mother's burial. They also cover cultural identity and loneliness,

stressing how changes in society affect personal relationships. This study emphasizes how story structure and subject material interact to expose universal human experiences across many origins.

Objectives of the Research:

The study examines the unique narrative techniques used in Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. The study compares Faulkner's fragmented, stream-of-consciousness narrative style with Ali's descriptive prose, examining how these techniques influence the reader's comprehension of character psychology and emotional depth.

The study aims to examine the representation of cultural identity and its disintegration in both works. The research also examines how Faulkner and Ali depict the collapse of traditional values in post-Civil War American South and colonial India, affecting characters' sense of identity and belonging.

The aim of this study is to investigate the features of both books addressing the dynamics of family relationships and the weight of obligation. This study aims to examine how both writers depict parental responsibilities in the framework of cultural and social changes, as well as how these obligations affect the emotional problems and conflicts the characters experience.

Research Purpose:

This study examines William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi,* concentrating on their narrative approaches and common themes. It analyses narrative strategies and investigates familial relationships, cultural identity, and societal transformation. The study seeks to enhance comprehension of narrative structure and thematic articulation in these works, so adding to comparative literature.

Significance of the Research:

Examining the junction of Southern Gothic and Indian English literature with an eye on issues including identity, family ties, and the collapse of cultural standards is the aim of this study. Apart from providing understanding of the social and historical dynamics of colonial India and the American South, it also illustrates the manner in which changing society influences the identities of people and groups. The study also enhances literary analysis by examining how narrative structure and style influence thematic development. Despite their cultural differences, Faulkner and Ali address universal themes like mortality, memory, and time passage, highlighting how literature

can transcend specific cultural contexts and offer insights into the human condition.

Research Gap:

William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* have been thoroughly examined; nonetheless, there exists a notable deficiency in comparative analyses of their narrative approaches and thematic parallels. Prior scholarship has predominantly concentrated on Faulkner's employment of stream-of-consciousness in Southern Gothic writing and Ali's significance in postcolonial India. However, few studies have explored how these authors engage with themes such as familial responsibility, cultural identity, and societal transformation. Despite their different cultural and historical settings, there is a lack of comparative research investigating how these societal changes are reflected in the authors' distinct narrative styles. This study aims to overcome this gap by providing a cross-cultural analysis, stressing thematic commonalities and delving into the psychological and social issues faced by the characters.

Literature Review:

The juxtaposition of *Twilight in Delhi* by Ahmed Ali and *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner amalgamates two literary classics from various historical and cultural settings, both of which investigate universal themes of identity, familial connections, and societal upheaval. Although these publications have been extensively examined, few researchers have analyzed them concurrently. This literature review identifies the gaps this research seeks to address, synthesizing essential perspectives on both works with a focus on narrative technique, thematic concerns, and cultural context.

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Its Narrative Complexity:

Because of its innovative narrative structure—especially its use of the stream-of-consciousness style and many first-person points of view—William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* has been much studied. Olga W. Vickery (1959) claims that Faulkner's shattered and erratic story captures the psychological challenges of the Bundren family navigating loss and familial responsibilities. Faulkner deliberately arranges the book such that he moves between 15 distinct voices, each offering a personal interpretation of events. This polyphonic approach produces a layered narrative that catches the shattered character of societal structure and personal identity in the South following the Civil War. Critics like

André Bleikasten (1973) argue that Faulkner uses the novel's structure to highlight the inevitable decay of Southern traditions and values. Several scholars, including Cleanth Brooks (1963), have emphasized the thematic concern with death, duty, and the burdens placed upon individuals within a family structure. Faulkner's portrayal of the Bundrens reveals the dysfunction and emotional strain that accompany family obligations, particularly in the Southern context, where honour, tradition, and personal sacrifice are often intertwined. While much has been written about Faulkner's narrative complexity, few studies have explored how this narrative technique compares to the more linear, lyrical style found in *Twilight in Delhi*, despite the thematic overlap between the two works.

Twilight in Delhi and Post-Colonial Nostalgia:

Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* also received compliments for showing a family trapped in the demise of a cultural age. Set in colonial Delhi in the early twentieth century, the novel examines the fall of the Muslim aristocracy and the consequences of British colonization on Indian identity and culture. According to critics such as Carlo Coppola (1998) and Priya Joshi (2004), Ali's work is profoundly entrenched in the postcolonial literary tradition, where themes of nostalgia, loss, and cultural displacement are prominent. The novel's richly descriptive language evokes a sense of melancholy as it laments the passing of a way of life, focusing on the tension between tradition and modernity. Ali's use of descriptive and poetic prose has been analyzed in depth by scholars such as Ahmed (2012), who notes that *Twilight in Delhi* draws heavily on Urdu literary traditions, incorporating a style that mirrors classical ghazals. Ali's use of Urdu poetry adds emotional depth to the story and conveys themes such as nostalgia, societal decay, and personal loss. Through this fusion, Ali not only reconciles Eastern and Western literary traditions but also develops a new linguistic style that combines local words into English writing. This cultural intertextuality enables Ali to evaluate the collapse of Delhi's traditional social structure as a result of colonial tyranny. While *Twilight in Delhi* has been extensively examined as a postcolonial text, there has been little investigation into how Ali's narrative style and topics relate to larger literary traditions, such as the Southern Gothic.

Common themes of Family, Societal Change and Identity:

Despite the geographical and cultural differences between Faulkner's and Ali's settings, both authors engage with similar themes of family, identity, and societal change. Scholars have long recognized how

important family is as a basic theme element in both books. Critics like Donald M. Kartiganer (1991) explored the conflict, shame, and obligation present in family connections in *As I Lay Dying*, therefore reflecting the general breakdown of Southern culture. Likewise, *Twilight in Delhi* shows a family struggling with the fall in social standing and the destruction of traditional values, topics Coppola (1998) and others who link the Mirza family's hardships to more general social changes brought on by colonialism. The theme of cultural identity, particularly its fragmentation and decline, is another point of convergence between the two novels. While Ali's characters face the loss of their cultural legacy as colonial control affects their environment, Faulkner's characters struggle with the fall of the Old South. Both pieces speak eloquently in terms of dislocation as the heroes strive to match their personal identities with the swift social changes they perceive. Examining the book from a postcolonial standpoint, Waseem et al. (2010) underline the pre-independence hardships Indian Muslims endured under British colonial control. Emphasizing the sociopolitical consequences of British conquest, the narrative attacks cultural degradation and colonial subjugation. Ali's portrayal of Delhi symbolizes the disintegration of individual lives and collective memory, evoking a sense of cultural and spiritual exhaustion. The study highlights the novel's early exploration of postcolonial issues. A comprehensive comparative analysis of how both authors tackle the fragmentation of identity and the effects of societal change on family structures is predominantly absent from the literature.

The Role of Memory and Mortality:

Faulkner and Ali's works share a fundamental thematic affinity in their investigation of memory and mortality. *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner's characters are troubled by the imminent death of their mother and the memories that arise throughout their journey to bury her. Scholars like John T. Matthews (1987) have highlighted how Faulkner's narrative delves into the psychological effects of memory, trauma, and loss. Similarly, Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* portrays the ageing patriarch Mir Nihal, whose memories of a more glorious past are a central aspect of his character's internal conflict. Zainab (2023) explores Pierre Nora's concept of "sites of memory" in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*. She further explores the relationship between place, identity formation, and cultural memory in *Twilight in Delhi*. The article highlights the protagonist's past and presents Delhi as a site of contesting claims. The paper advocates for including *Twilight in Delhi* in interdisciplinary discussions, considering the material dimensions of memory. The story explores post-1857 European colonization of India, focusing on the colonized's plight and the decline of Delhi. It uses

fictionalized and real memory, referencing historical events and monuments, to create a cohesive history that acknowledges the plurality of narratives and collective memories. Ali employs memory to examine the psychological impact of colonialism, especially the cultural degradation experienced by the older generation. Both authors employ memory not merely as a narrative tool but as a mechanism to reflect on the progression of time and the inevitability of transformation. Nonetheless, whereas Faulkner's exploration of memory has been extensively analyzed, Ali's utilization of memory and nostalgia about cultural identity has not been adequately juxtaposed with Faulkner's more psychological methodology.

Research Questions:

Q1. How could readers grasp the psychological complexity and family relationships of Faulkner's and Ali's characters in respective works?
Q2. How do both writers examine the issue of cultural identity and its dissolution in response to society change by reflecting their specific historical settings?
Q3. What functions do memory and nostalgia serve in influencing characters' experiences of loss and identity in both works, and how do these themes illustrate the passage of time and societal change?

Research Methodology:

Comparative Literary Analysis is a methodology employed to juxtapose William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi*, concentrating on their narrative techniques, thematic preoccupations, and cultural contexts. The research included passages addressing fundamental topics like family, identity, memory, and cultural disintegration, contrasting narrative methods like fragmentation and lyrical language, and catching important emotional moments for characters. These passages are collected after the comprehensive scanning of both the texts and reviewing the existing literature. This approach investigates common themes such as familial dynamics, cultural identity, memory, and societal transformation, yielding a thorough comprehension of the portrayal of human experiences across diverse cultural settings. The study focuses on certain aspects of every work, such as cultural identification, familial relationships, and narrative framework. While theme analysis can help to identify common issues, stylistic comparison will illustrate how each author's method shapes the resonance of the story. The research also interacts with secondary material to expose flaws in current knowledge and place the comparative analysis within pertinent literary theories.

Findings of the study:

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* both examine the themes of identity and memory within distinct cultural frameworks. Faulkner's disjointed narrative illustrates modernist preoccupations with personal alienation and fragmentation, whereas Ali's sequential narrative underscores continuity and communal identity. Both novels depict the family as a symbol of societal breakdown, driven by internal and external factors. Nostalgia in both works is seen as a personal and fragmented experience, while in Ali's work, it serves as a collective repository of cultural heritage. Despite their differences, both authors offer profound insights into the human condition and the struggle to navigate identity, memory, and change in times of societal disintegration. Despite differences, both novels use family as a metaphor for societal collapse, revealing universal struggles in diverse cultural contexts.

Data Analysis:

The comparative analysis of William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* and Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* reveals their unique narrative techniques and thematic concerns. Despite their varied historical and cultural settings, each of these works addresses universal issues connected to family, identity, and social change. Using several narrative techniques, each of these writers probes the psychological and emotional difficulties their characters encounter, therefore producing important new perspectives on the human experience.

Narrative Technique: Fragmentation vs. Lyrical Prose

The methods of storytelling used by Faulkner and Ali differ significantly. In *As I Lay Dying*, Faulkner uses a fragmented, multi-voiced narrative framework, as well as stream-of-consciousness and interior monologues, to produce an intimate yet chaotic depiction of the Bundrens' trip. The novel's 15 narrators offer their own subjective interpretations of events, highlighting the fragmented nature of personal identity and family togetherness. Darl Bundren's internal monologue demonstrates his alienation from reality: *"I cannot love my mother because I have no mother. Jewel's mother is a horse"* (Faulkner, 1930, p. 95). This incoherent mental process demonstrates Darl's psychological breakdown and represents the family's split, with each member entangled in their own grief and sense of obligation.

In contrast, Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* takes a more linear, descriptive approach, emphasizing the poetic and lyrical characteristics of language.Ali's narrative, rich in metaphor and imagery, captures the waning splendour of Delhi's Muslim aristocracy under British rule, evoking a

deep sense of nostalgia and loss. The reflective tone of the novel is particularly evident when Mir Nihal laments the changing city: *"The residents of Delhi resented all this, for their city, in which they had been born and grew up, the city of their dreams and reality, which had seen them die and live, was going to be changed beyond recognition. They passed bitter remarks and denounced the Farangis"* (Ali, 1940, p. 144). Ali's poetic technique offers a sense of sorrow as the characters lament the loss of their culture and legacy, therefore providing an ordered yet equally poignant commentary on social change.

While Ali's lyrical language catches the fading grandeur of Delhi with vivid images that invokes nostalgia, Faulkner's fractured structure reflects the disconnected emotional states of the Bundren family. Both writers clearly match style with subject to show how personal experiences intertwine with more general social changes.

Themes of Family and Identity

As each writer examines the consequences of outside pressures—social, cultural, or political—on family connections, both *As I Lay Dying* and *Twilight in Delhi* underline the value of family. The path the Bundrens travel to inter their matriarch, Addie, in Faulkner's novel represents the loss of Southern family customs. Every family member undergoes isolation while contending with individual guilt, obligations, and pain, ultimately depicting a fragmented and dysfunctional family structure. In a rare narrative moment from beyond the grave, Addie herself reflects on her detachment from her family: *"My father said that the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead. I knew at last what he meant and that he could not have known what he meant himself, because a man cannot know anything about cleaning up the house afterward"* (Faulkner, 1930, p. 169). Faulkner's portrayal suggests that tradition and duty, rather than uniting the family, serve only to deepen the emotional distance between them.

Conversely, Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* illustrates a family that is anchored by collective memories and traditions, despite the challenges posed by external forces, particularly colonialism. The Mirza family experiences a decline in their cultural and social status, with generational tensions arising from their varied reactions to societal changes. As the patriarch, Mir Nihal is steadfast in his commitment to traditional values and is opposed to the cultural shifts that were brought about by the influence of British colonial rule. When he considers the decline of Delhi, his disillusionment is palpable: *"Delhi had fallen, he reflected; India had been despoiled; all that he had stood for had been destroyed"* (Ali, 1940, p. 175). The Bundrens in Faulkner's novel experience internal struggle, whereas the Mirza family in Ali's novel deals with the external stresses of colonial control. This

illustration demonstrates the pervasive impact that societal change has on the identity of families and culture.

Cultural Disintegration and Societal Change

Both Faulkner's American South during the Civil War and Ali's colonial India under British rule are located within contexts of cultural breakdown. Faulkner's work examines the American South during the Civil War. As the Bundren family comes face to face with a world that no longer upholds the principles of honour and duty, Faulkner examines the dissolution of Southern conventions and traditions in his novel *As I Lay Dying*.Faulkner describes a situation in which conventional values have become outmoded, and the fragmented narrative highlights the degradation of Southern culture by depicting this reality. The writings of William Faulkner, as stated by Cleanth Brooks (1963), are evidence of the*"futility of trying to preserve the old ways in a world that is irrevocably changed"* (p. 109). The journey of the Bundrens, which is characterized by individual failure and estrangement, is a representation of the wider socioeconomic deterioration that the South is experiencing.

Similarly, Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* uses the decline of the Mirza family as a symbol of the larger erosion of Muslim aristocratic culture under colonialism. The novel is infused with a sense of mourning for a past that has been irrevocably altered. The imagery of decay pervades the novel, from the crumbling architecture of Delhi to the decline of Mir Nihal himself. As Priya Joshi (2004) notes, Ali's novel is both a "lament for a lost past" and a "critique of the present," where colonialism has disrupted the cultural and social fabric of Indian life. The characters' failure to acclimatize to the new order illustrates the profound cultural dislocation caused by British control, akin to Faulkner's portrayal of the South, which exposes the challenges of a culture in transition.Hence, Readers' perspective of the inner conflicts and more general society changes in *As I Lay Dying* and *Twilight in Delhi* reflects and depends much on the narrative technique applied for both.

Memory and Mortality

Memory is crucial in both works, influencing the protagonists' self-perception and their position in a swiftly evolving society. In *As I Lay Dying*, memory is fragmented and deeply personal, mirroring the psychological disarray of the Bundren family. The nonlinear structure of the novel allows Faulkner to present memories in a disjointed fashion, emphasizing how each character's perception of the past is shaped by their own experiences. Dewey Dell's memories of her

mother's death, for instance, are tinged with guilt and shame as she hides her own pregnancy. The fragmented nature of memory reflects the isolation and alienation felt by the Bundren family as they struggle to make sense of their loss.

In *Twilight in Delhi*, memory is more collective and cultural, tied to a longing for a pre-colonial past. Mir Nihal's memories of Delhi before British rule are imbued with a sense of pride and loss, symbolizing the collective memory of a community marginalized by colonialism. *"Memories of days and hours came swarming like flies upon him, and he thought of his life from childhood to the present day."* (p. 175). Their recollections conflict with the younger generation's aspiration for advancement, resulting in a tension between nostalgia and progress. Unlike Faulkner's fragmented treatment of memory, Ali's depiction reflects a broader cultural memory, underscoring the novel's exploration of historical displacement and loss.

In both novels, memory serves as a powerful lens through which the characters grapple with their sense of identity and the transformations occurring around them. Faulkner's fragmented narrative mirrors the chaotic and disjointed nature of memory itself, while Ali's more structured portrayal of memory highlights the cultural and historical dimensions of loss. Despite these differences, both authors use memory to explore the emotional and psychological impact of societal change on their characters, deepening the reader's understanding of the complexities of identity, family, and cultural disintegration.Both of the novels revolve mostly around the theme of Memory. Memory shows up in *As I Lay Dying* as a fractured and unstable force that reflects the broken identities of the Bundren family and their incapacity to come together under a common goal. While, in *Twilight in Delhi,* Mir Nihal's observations on the lost beauty of Delhi (Mughal Grandeur) reveals that memory is more collective and immersed in nostalgia. Both writers examine how memory could be a burden as much as a comfort, therefore confounding their characters' attempts to find meaning among change.In both of the narratives, mortality determines the path of the civilizations their characters live in as well as their own. Addie Bundren's death in *As I Lay Dying* starts off the family's journey and offers a lens through which every character examines their own existential worries and goals. Both writers explore the limitations of human relationships and the fortitude needed to ride the tides of life using death.

By all in all, Faulkner and Ali, despite their disparate cultural and historical backgrounds, employ new narrative methods to examine universal issues of family, identity, and societal change. Both authors provide remarkable insights into the emotional and psychological upheaval faced by people and families during significant cultural transition through their unique storytelling techniques—Faulkner's fragmented, stream-of-consciousness style and Ali's lyrical, descriptive prose.While Faulkner's

fractured narrative captures the psychological state the Bundrens experience as they negotiate the death of Addie, Ali's narrative reveals Mir Nihal's obligations as the defender of their family's fading legacy when one examines the complex link between personal identity and communal familial or social roles. Both works use narrative techniques to intensify the emotional and psychological depth of their themes; Faulkner's stream-of- consciousness captures the volatility and intricacy of loss and Ali's poetic descriptions show a communal weeping for a lost cultural identity. This variation in narrative style highlights their universality and helps to place their problems within their different cultural frames. Beyond their cultural context, Faulkner and Ali's works address universal issues of identity, family, and society transition, in the context of comparative study. Faulkner's shattered narrative emphasizes his characters' inner conflict, so mirroring the disintegrating moral fabric of the after South Civil War. By contrast, Ali's lyrical language conveys the overall disillusionment of a society living under colonial control. While exploring shared human experiences so strengthening in the field of comparative literature studies, both works show how themes emphasis and story form may shift to meet diverse cultural environments.

Conclusion

Faulkner and Ali's writings explore themes of family, identity, memory, and society upheaval using unique storytelling styles and cultural viewpoints, which corresponds to the research goal of examining how these authors depict the human condition during times of societal turbulence.Whereas Ali's elegant language communicates societal grief over the loss of cultural identity under colonial power, Faulkner's broken narrative structure shows the psychological disintegration of individuals and families in the post-Civil War South. Both writers show people grappling with the way their unique identities fit into larger historical events, notably the fall of the Southern nobility and the decline of Muslim aristocratic culture in Delhi.Memory emerges as a central tool for exploring dislocation and loss, with Faulkner's characters haunted by personal traumas and fragmented memories, while Ali's characters bear the weight of cultural memory and the irreversible changes brought by colonialism. Both works eventually demonstrate how historical circumstances beyond the protagonists' control shape—and usually disrupt—personal and cultural

identities, emphasizing the fragility of human relationships and the unstoppable march of time. This comparative approach underlines each work's cultural originality while simultaneously underlining its universal appeal, illustrating how literature can transcend geographical boundaries to engage with shared human experiences. By combining several cultural narratives and offering fresh viewpoints on the interaction of personal and social identity across periods of social revolution, the work adds to the subject of comparative literature.

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