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Indian Knowledge Systems and Environmental Sustainability: Insights from Kapil Kapoor's Works

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Abstract: Drawing from a civilizational perspective, Kapoor highlights that the Indian worldview is deeply rooted in a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness between nature and human life. In contrast to the exploitative tendencies seen in some modern development models, IKS advocates for balance, sustainability, and reverence for nature, as reflected in traditional practices related to agriculture, water management, forestry, and daily life. This research paper examines the relevance of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in addressing contemporary environmental challenges, with a focus on the ecological insights of Prof. Kapil Kapoor. This research paper emphasises how IKS exemplifies sustainability concepts even before the term became widely used. This paper argues that incorporating traditional ecological wisdom into contemporary policy and educational systems can offer alternative, sustainable solutions to ecological crises by examining Prof. Kapoor's interpretation of dharmic knowledge frameworks and his critique of contemporary Western epistemology. This paper connects classical knowledge with modern application by drawing on both literary and anthropological sources. It suggests that the resuscitation and contextualization of IKS can make a substantial contribution to environmental discourse. In line with Kapil Kapoor's demand for intellectual decolonisation and a return to contextually anchored knowledge systems, this paper ends by promoting a pluralistic knowledge paradigm that appreciates indigenous perspectives.

Keywords: *Indian Knowledge Systems, Environmental Sustainability, Kapil Kapoor, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Practices, Dharmic Ecology, Sustainable Development, Intellectual Decolonisation.*

Introduction: Prof. Kapil Kapoor (born 17 November 1940) has been a teacher for more than 50 years. In addition to his many students, he is somewhat of a legend among those studying Indian Knowledge Systems, of which he was a pioneer in India. His clear, energising, and consistently inventive explanations of the most obscure ideas in Indian literature, philosophy, aesthetics, languages, and textual studies, both as a speaker and a writer, have captivated generations of them. He has, above all, been an unparalleled defender

of India's intellectual traditions. Kapil Kapoor has taught 36 M.Phil. students and 41 PhD students. From 1996 to 1999, he served as the Dean of JNU's School of Language, Literature, and Culture Studies. From 1999 to 2002, he served as the University's Rector (Pro-Vice-Chancellor). He is also the Editor-in-Chief of the 11-volume Encyclopaedia of Hinduism published by Rupa & Co. in 2012. His research and teaching interests include Indian and Western literary and linguistic theories, the philosophy of language, British life and literature in the nineteenth century, and Indian intellectual traditions. On these topics, he has written and spoken extensively. He played a key role in the founding of JNU's Center for Sanskrit Studies and, subsequently, the School of Sanskrit and Indic Studies. Despite his 2005 retirement from JNU, he kept up his academic career. Language, Literature, and Linguistics: The Indian Perspective (1994), South Asian Love Poetry (1994), Canonical Texts of Literary Criticism (1995), Literary Theory: Indian Conceptual Framework (1998), Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition (2005), Dimensions of Panini Grammar: Indian Grammatical System (2005), Rati-Bhakti in India's Narrative Traditions (in Hindi, 2011) and Comparative Literary Theory: An Overview (2014), are just a few of Prof. Kapil Kapoor's extensive body of work. Additionally, he edited an 11-volume Encyclopaedia of Hinduism (2012), an Encyclopaedia of Indian Poetics (in progress), and Indian Knowledge Systems (2 vols, 2002).

Objectives of the research paper:

- To investigate the fundamental ecological ideas that are ingrained in Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS), using traditional customs and classical literature to support sustainability and environmental harmony.
- To evaluate critically how Prof. Kapil Kapoor has interpreted and promoted IKS as a comprehensive and morally sound substitute for contemporary environmental models.
- To investigate how modern environmental rhetoric and policy frameworks might reframe traditional ecological wisdom, such as that contained in Vrikshayurveda, holy groves, and dharmic practices.
- To examine and compile academic views on Prof. Kapoor's decolonising Indian epistemology strategy, particularly as it relates to environmental ethics and the reclamation of indigenous knowledge.
- To propose a model for integrating IKS-based environmental insights into modern educational curricula and sustainable development strategies, drawing from both textual sources and contemporary scholarly interpretations.

Research Methodology: Examining the value of Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) in advancing environmental sustainability, this study takes a qualitative and interpretive approach, paying special attention to Prof. Kapil Kapoor's observations. Based mostly on the content examination of primary and secondary sources, the study is textual and analytical.

Foundations of Indian Knowledge Systems and Ecological Ethics: The mechanistic and utilitarian worldviews that predominate in contemporary Western philosophy are fundamentally different from the civilizational viewpoint on the relationship between humans and nature offered by Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). The fundamental tenet of IKS is that the cosmos is a living, conscious whole ruled by ṛta, the principle of cosmic order, rather than being made up of inanimate matter. This perspective sees nature (prakriti) as a divine presence that should be harmonious with rather than as something to be exploited. By utilising primary texts and customs and placing them in the framework of Prof. Kapil Kapoor's interpretation, this chapter aims to investigate the fundamental ecological ethos of IKS. A worldview in which humans are a part of an interrelated whole is outlined in the Vedas, Upanishads, and Smriti literature such as the Manusmriti. The profound ecological consciousness ingrained in Indian culture is encapsulated in the Atharvaveda's declaration that "*O Earth! You are our mother and we are your offspring*." (Atharvaveda 12.1.12.) In a similar vein, the Atharvaveda describes the earth as sacred and urges that its constituents be kept in balance. According to Kapil Kapoor, these ancient writings are archives of complex knowledge systems that represent an integrated perspective on life rather than just being religious or mythological. He writes the following in *Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition: "Indian intellectual traditions do not dichotomise between the secular and the sacred, the material and the spiritual. Nature is not divorced from ethics, it is part of an integrated moral and metaphysical framework."*

Understanding how environmental care was ingrained in social behaviour, customs, and legal regulations requires this integration. In reality, dharma is a flexible, context-based concept of duty that encompasses environmental responsibility. In the West, it is sometimes misinterpreted as a strict rule. Penalties for damaging trees, contaminating waterways, or needlessly killing animals are stipulated in the Manusmriti. These laws were manifestations of a larger dharmic idea that all life is interrelated, not discrete regulations.

Practices such as Vrikshayurveda, the science of plants and forests, demonstrate how these ecological ethics are applied. It combines botanical knowledge with ethical and spiritual considerations to explain how to grow, conserve, and cure plants. According to Kapoor, old Indian sciences like Ayurveda, Shilpa Shastra, and Vrikshayurveda were not divided into "natural" or "social" sciences; rather, they were a range of pragmatic knowledge based on philosophical understanding. Additionally, customs like the upkeep of holy groves (devara kaadus, sarna, etc.) across India show community-driven conservation based on moral and religious obligation. Although the ecological benefits of these groves preservation of biodiversity, water retention, and climate regulation are now acknowledged even in contemporary environmental research, they were frequently neglected because of the belief in the supernatural presence of spirits or deities.

Given the current worldwide environmental issues, the applicability of these concepts becomes clear. Modern environmentalism frequently ignores morality and ethics, viewing nature as a resource that needs to be "managed." IKS, on the other hand, advocates

for a value-based strategy that views internal change as a necessary condition for external sustainability. Indigenous knowledge is essential for biodiversity protection and sustainable agriculture, according to academics like Vandana Shiva (Shiva 29). By highlighting their moral and scientific foundation, Michel Danino also highlights the persistence of ecological traditions in Indian civilization (Danino 117).

Kapil Kapoor's stress on going back to the indigenous frameworks is a demand for epistemic decolonization, or a change from borrowed paradigms to rooted thinking, rather than merely cultural nostalgia. He argues that IKS provides a whole way of knowing that is ecological, ethical, and holistic, rather than merely content. Reexamining IKS, with the interpretive clarity of scholars like Kapoor, offers a crucial path as the world looks for sustainable alternatives.

Decolonising Knowledge and Reclaiming Ecological Wisdom: One of the most significant modern voices in the reclaiming and reinterpreting of Indian knowledge systems is Prof. Kapil Kapoor. Kapoor offers a distinctively Indian viewpoint to the study of civilisation, culture, and the environment as a scholar of Sanskrit poetics, linguistics, and Indian intellectual traditions. What he refers to as "epistemic sovereignty" is based on his concentration on reading Indian literature and customs using indigenous frameworks rather than colonial or Western ones. The epistemological disruption brought about by colonial education, which Kapil Kapoor contends resulted in the systematic marginalisation of India's ancient knowledge systems, is at the heart of his research. He describes how postwar Indian academics adopted a Western paradigm that divided knowledge into discrete fields, separating the factual from the ethical, and the material from the spiritual, in *Text and Interpretation: The Indian Tradition*. IKS, on the other hand, promotes knowledge as integrated, dharma-based, and purpose-driven. He contends that moral behaviour and social duty, especially duty to the environment, have always been linked to authentic education in the Indian tradition. There are significant ecological ramifications to this notion. It urges a restoration to ṛta cosmic order as a tenet of environmental ethics and rejects the anthropocentric, exploitative models that contemporary industrialism promotes.

Although not strictly speaking an environmentalist, Kapoor's opinions have strong ecological relevance. His focus on ṛta and dharma situates the natural world in a moral framework, where human happiness depends on harmony with nature rather than being elective. Because it is based on observation, experience, and moral knowledge that has been passed down through the centuries, he believes that IKS is naturally sustainable, localised, and context-sensitive. Kapoor regularly criticises the artificial division between "scientific" and "traditional" knowledge in his writings. He points out that millennia of practical experience served as the foundation for Indian ecological, architectural, and agricultural practices, including holy groves, Vrikshayurveda, and traditional water collecting, which were then codified in philosophical and ethical discourses. This is in line with the viewpoint of academics such as Vandana Shiva, who sees Indian ecological traditions as "ecosophies",

knowledge systems in which cultural identity and ecological sustainability are inextricably linked. (Shiva 102).

Many modern academics have recognised and critically examined Kapoor's achievements. For instance, Makarand Paranjape praises Kapoor's contribution to intellectual decolonisation in his works on Indian knowledge traditions. In a speech about cultural revitalisation, Paranjape says: *"what Professor Kapoor has done is to help this process of recovery and renovation of traditional knowledge systems in our literary, aesthetic, and philosophical traditions."*

In order to highlight the ethical aspects of IKS, Michel Danino also uses Kapoor's interpretive framework in his writings on ancient Indian environmental wisdom. According to Danino, Kapoor's research is crucial in bridging the gap between classical literature and contemporary ecological theory, especially in highlighting indigenous forms of thought and civilizational continuity. (Danino 45) Even academics with a more activist stance on language and knowledge recovery, such as G. N. Devy, recognise Kapoor's contribution to the revival of Indian philosophical and linguistic traditions, particularly his work on Paninian grammar and its interpretive frameworks.

Kapoor's emphasis on language as a conduit for culture and information is a significant aspect of his work. He often makes the case that losing a language also means losing a whole way of thinking. His linguistic research highlights how ecological linkages are encoded in indigenous vocabularies, particularly in Sanskrit and regional Indian languages. In addition to being physical components, concepts like prithvi (Earth), jal (water), agni (fire), and vayu (air) also refer to moral and cosmic forces. He stresses how important it is to read literature within their specific linguistic and cultural framework. The growing demand for cultural ecology, a field that views language, culture, and the environment as intricately connected, is in line with this strategy. Students and academics are encouraged by Kapoor's interpretive model to view ancient writings as dynamic stores of enduring wisdom rather than merely as mythology.

The interpretive framework developed by Kapil Kapoor is a cultural and civilizational intervention rather than merely a scholastic activity. There are important ramifications for environmental ethics, education, and policy from his plea to revitalize and revalue Indian Knowledge Systems. Kapoor provides a compelling vision for reconsidering our relationship with nature by highlighting the unity of knowledge, the ethical underpinnings of sustainability, and the function of language in maintaining ecological consciousness. As a result, his writings provide a conceptual framework as well as useful motivation for rethinking environmental sustainability from an Indian perspective.

Recontextualising IKS for Modern Sustainability: It takes more than a backward appreciation of heritage to rediscover and reintegrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into modern frameworks of sustainability. It demands a radical change in how we approach

technology, education, legislation, and conservation. This chapter focuses on how conventional ecological wisdom can influence sensible and forward-thinking solutions to today's environmental problems when it is properly reinterpreted and revitalised. The chapter offers strategies for implementing IKS in practical contexts, drawing on the interpretive framework created by Prof. Kapil Kapoor, who advocates for a context-bound, purpose-oriented, and culturally embedded view of knowledge. To make a sustainable future rooted in India's civilizational ethos, they include community-based environmental management, policy restructuring, educational reform, and technological innovation.

India's sacred groves, which are potent emblems of indigenous protection, are home to one of the most striking examples of IKS in action. These groves, which go by different names like kavus in Kerala, sarnas in Jharkhand, and devrai in Maharashtra, are the remains of forests that local communities have protected out of ecological awareness and religious respect. They stand for a system in which moral obligation and cultural memory support biodiversity protection rather than legal enforcement. These hallowed areas, which are frequently devoted to regional deities, are guarded by taboos, customs, and rituals that forbid hunting or tree-felling within their boundaries. According to scientific research, these groves serve as hotspots for micro-conservation, protecting endemic and endangered plant and animal species, regulating groundwater levels, and acting as seed banks for forest regeneration. (Bhagwat et al.) However, many of these groves have been degraded as a result of shifting land-use patterns, fast urbanization, and the deterioration of traditional beliefs. It is possible to protect these ecological sanctuaries' ecological and cultural significance while empowering the communities that maintain them by designating them as Other Effective area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs) under international conservation frameworks. (Sharma and Kumar)

Despite the enormous ecological value of traditional practices, their incorporation into mainstream policy has frequently been symbolic or minimal. India's current environmental policy still mostly adheres to Western technocratic paradigms, which place more emphasis on extensive industrial interventions than on regional, culturally specific solutions. There have been some positive advances, nevertheless. By recognizing the importance of indigenous and forest-dwelling groups in the management and conservation of natural resources, the Forest Rights Act (2006) signalled a dramatic change. Through the legal recognition of tribal and rural groups' knowledge, customs, and management systems, this act presents a chance to integrate IKS into environmental governance. Moreover, groups and think tanks have suggested that indigenous women's expertise be incorporated into climate action plans, pointing out that women frequently have in-depth, site-specific knowledge of soil fertility, water cycles, and biodiversity. (Social & Political Research Foundation) These grounded and inclusive methods have the power to transform environmental policy from the ground up, promoting rural ecosystems' resilience and self-sufficiency.

In order to close the gap between conventional wisdom and contemporary sustainability, education is essential. Support for integrating IKS into formal education systems has grown in recent years. Integrating Indian epistemologies and traditional knowledge into curricula at all levels is emphasised explicitly in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This reform encourages colleges and universities to offer credit-bearing courses in heritage sciences, local environmental knowledge, and Indian philosophy. These initiatives represent a significant shift from previous educational methods that distanced students from their own cultural heritage. This move has the potential to have a major positive impact on education, particularly on climate change. Research indicates that local language, storytelling, and experiential climate literacy initiatives are more successful in promoting environmental stewardship than globalized, abstract curricula. (Social & Political Research Foundation) Students are more likely to integrate ecological ethics and put them into practice in their daily lives when they are taught about sustainability not only through scientific data but also through stories about holy rivers, festivals of seasonal change, or ancient methods of gathering water.

Another new area of discussion in sustainability is the integration of technology with IKS. Combining historical knowledge with contemporary digital tools may seem paradoxical, yet recent research have demonstrated that these hybrid approaches can improve ecological management. For instance, local indicators established by village elders or community forest groups are now being utilized in conjunction with artificial intelligence and machine learning to monitor water tables and forest cover. Additionally, digital platforms are being created to record and preserve ecological terminology, farming methods, and oral histories that have been passed down through the years. In addition to aiding in the preservation of indigenous knowledge, these technology interventions give it credibility in scholarly and policy contexts. Such initiatives must, however, uphold moral principles of cooperation, where benefit-sharing is guaranteed and knowledge holders are acknowledged as co-creators rather than data suppliers. (Raj and Sethi)

All of these elements, ethical technology, educational reform, policy inclusion, and community conservation combine to create a vision of sustainability that is strongly influenced by Indian knowledge systems. The research of Prof. Kapil Kapoor enables us to see that IKS is a dynamic, context-sensitive, and ever-evolving body of knowledge rather than a static repository of antiquated practices. We can observe how sustainability is ingrained in both ancient rituals and whole worldviews because of his commitment on reading Indian literature and practices within their frameworks rather than using foreign terms. Kapoor offers the epistemic foundations for a sustainability movement that is both ecologically successful and authentically civilizational by promoting the restoration of Bharatiya Jnana Parampara (Indian knowledge tradition).

Therefore, the recontextualization of IKS is about creating a future in which growth and the environment coexist peacefully rather than in opposition to one another, rather than just conserving cultural legacy. It calls for a mental change from considering nature as a

resource to be controlled to considering it as a relationship to be fostered. Indian Knowledge Systems provide a comprehensive and culturally grounded route to sustainability that the contemporary world can no longer afford to overlook through integrative methods of conservation, participatory governance, community education, and ethical innovation.

Future Scopes of the Present Paper: In a world that is increasingly battling the twin problems of environmental degradation and cultural disintegration, this research opens up a number of opportunities for additional scholarly investigation, interdisciplinary cooperation, and policy-level involvement. There is a pressing need to review and reintegrate indigenous and traditional knowledge frameworks as climate change picks up speed and contemporary development models show themselves to be inadequately responsive to the subtleties of regional ecologies. By critically analysing the Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) through the interpretive paradigm of Prof. Kapil Kapoor, this study helps bring about that larger change and lays the groundwork for further research.

Regarding current relevance, this work provides a culturally grounded substitute for purely scientific and technocratic approaches to sustainability. It highlights that environmental ethics are not new ideas in India but are ingrained in the culture and are communicated through language, rituals, myths, and customs. For today's environmental educators, legislators, and community leaders looking for comprehensive, inclusive, and locally relevant approaches to conservation and development, such insights are extremely helpful. By undertaking field studies that record and examine real-world examples of IKS-based environmental management, such as traditional water harvesting systems, seed preservation techniques, and sacred ecological spaces, all of which have lasting significance in both rural and urban contexts, future researchers can build on this work. This study also highlights the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies in mainstream academia, laying the academic foundation for a more comprehensive decolonisation of knowledge. By contrasting Indian ecological traditions with those of other indigenous cultures in the Global South, future research can broaden this trajectory and promote cross-border discussions on sustainable lifestyles. Furthermore, a deeper examination of Indian literary, philosophical, and legal writings can improve our comprehension of the historical encoding of ecological consciousness in cultural production.

The study has important ramifications for curriculum development as well. Strong, thoroughly researched materials that can direct syllabus design and pedagogical practice are needed as Indian institutions and schools start putting the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 into effect, which promotes the integration of IKS into education. IKS course modules, teacher preparation programs, and multidisciplinary content spanning environmental studies, philosophy, linguistics, and heritage science can all benefit from the research's conclusions. Building on this work, future scholars could produce bilingual educational resources that encourage IKS in younger generations, digital archives of oral ecological wisdom, or annotated repositories of traditional environmental practices. From a policy standpoint, the concepts covered here can help create policies for climate adaptation, community-based

conservation initiatives, and sustainable rural development plans. The findings of this study can help India take the lead in demonstrating how indigenous ecological knowledge systems can influence modern governance in morally sound, practical, and inclusive ways as international organisations start to acknowledge the significance of "biocultural" approaches to conservation.

This research offers a template for a more sustainable, contextually aware, and morally grounded future rather than just recovering pieces of a vanished past. The paper also provides theoretical clarity and practical pathways that future scholars, educators, and policy-makers can take forward in support of ecological and civilizational regeneration by highlighting Kapil Kapoor's ideas and placing his contributions within the larger IKS discourse.

Findings: This research paper demonstrates that Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) are profoundly ecological in their orientation in addition to having a wealth of spiritual and philosophical depth. It is evident from Prof. Kapil Kapoor's interpretive framework that IKS offers a comprehensive model of knowledge in which the ecological, metaphysical, and ethical are all deeply intertwined. One of the study's main conclusions is that IKS offers a sustainable worldview that is naturally resistant to ecological exploitation by viewing humans as an essential component of a wider cosmic order ruled by ṛta (universal law) and dharma (obligation), rather than as distinct from nature.

Additionally, the study reveals that regional conservation activities, sacred groves, and ancient farming methods long disregarded as "pre-modern" or "superstitious" are stores of intricate ecological knowledge. When considered in the cultural and linguistic frameworks that Kapoor promotes, these activities show promise as models for managing water resources, preserving biodiversity, and adapting to climate change. Another important conclusion is that the discussion of sustainability can benefit from Prof. Kapoor's research on decolonising Indian intellectual traditions. His concentration on interpreting Indian texts and traditions within indigenous frameworks contributes to the restoration of traditional ecological knowledge's legitimacy and makes it available for use in pedagogy, academia, and policy. His writings also refute the Western division between spirituality and science by demonstrating that knowledge in the Indian tradition is both ethical and scientific.

The paper also emphasises how important it is to incorporate IKS into environmental education and policy. There is an urgent need for academically based frameworks that can guide curriculum design now that IKS is part of India's National Education Policy 2020. By showing how IKS may improve climate awareness, promote environmental ethics, and support community-based sustainability, this study offers such a basis.

Lastly, the paper demonstrates that IKS is dynamic, adaptive, and very pertinent to the problems of the twenty-first century when viewed through Kapoor's civilizational lens. It presents a different way of thinking that prioritises harmony over dominance,

responsibility over entitlement, and continuity over disruption, values that are essential to building a more just and sustainable future.

Recommendations for Upcoming Research Scholars: It is recommended that future scholars consider Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) as dynamic and culturally relevant frameworks, especially when tackling issues related to education and the environment. Regional field studies that record traditional ecological practices, including indigenous farming methods, holy groves, and water conservation ceremonies, are becoming more and more necessary. These in-depth investigations can support the preservation of quickly vanishing knowledge and confirm IKS as workable models of sustainability. According to Kapil Kapoor, scholars should study classical Indian texts more closely using indigenous interpretive frameworks, such as the Vedas, Upanishads, and Dharmashastras. This method can reveal ecological philosophies ingrained in traditional Indian thought while avoiding the distortions of Western theoretical frameworks.

Impactful work can be produced through interdisciplinary collaborations across the humanities, environmental sciences, and digital technology. Examples include combining traditional knowledge with climate research, preserving oral traditions, and developing bilingual IKS learning modules. Since many Indian languages use vocabulary, metaphor, and structure to convey ecological worldviews, attention should also be given to language and ecology.

Lastly, scholars ought to convert these discoveries into frameworks for climate governance, rural development, and education that are pertinent to policy. Future scholars can make a significant contribution to a decolonised, durable, and culturally rooted academic discourse by firmly establishing their research in both classical scholarship and community-based realities.

Conclusion: Using Prof. Kapil Kapoor's interpretive framework, this research paper investigated the relationship between environmental sustainability and Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS). It is shown that IKS, far from being out of date, provides a logical, moral, and culturally grounded view of nature in which people are viewed as essential to a greater ecological order. The paper examined traditional ecological methods, community-based conservation models, and ancient Indian texts, drawing on Kapoor's focus on indigenous semantics and civilizational continuity.

The study showed that language-based ecological ethics, ritual-driven sustainability, and holy groves are still effective strategies for addressing today's environmental issues. Without the use of Western epistemic filters, Kapoor's research offered the required perspective for interpreting these systems within their own philosophical and cultural framework. It has been demonstrated that IKS can and should be incorporated into digital innovation, education, and climate policy, particularly under reforms like NEP 2020. Important conclusions emphasised IKS's flexibility and dynamic character, its ability to

influence climate ethics, and its usefulness for pedagogy and policy. To further develop this discipline, the study suggests interdisciplinary techniques, region-specific documentation, and deeper textual investigations.

This research paper essentially confirms that IKS, as interpreted by Kapoor's decolonized, contextual model, provides a viable worldview based on responsibility, balance, and cohabitation. Knowledge must be lived, shared, and recreated for a more sustainable future in addition to legacy preservation.

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