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E-Mail

[editor.ijmece@gmail.com](mailto:editor.ijmece@gmail.com)

[editor@ijmece.com](mailto:editor@ijmece.com)

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# TRIBAL WOMEN IN INDIA: THE GENDER INEQUALITIES AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS

Sadia Khan<sup>1</sup> and Ziya Hasan<sup>2</sup>

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## Abstract

There is a common misconception that tribal women have always held a higher social position in their communities than Indian women as a whole. Legal studies, however, challenge this view. Females play a significant and overt role in the lives of tribal peoples. Tribal people make up 8.6% of the country's overall population, according to the 2011 Census, and the numbers show that they have been disadvantaged for decades due to the large number of tribal people living in various rural zones. Tribal women, like other socioeconomic groups, have struggled with issues such as poor reproductive health, economic disadvantage, and a lack of access to quality education. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study, which focuses on the negative impact of gender inequities on tribal women through an analysis of GDI indicators such as literacy, health, labor participation, poverty, and economic resources. The persistent inequities in tribal communities, lack of awareness, illiteracy, land alienation, and isolation from the outside world have been identified as the fundamental source of these challenges by the GDI indicators. It is for this reason that the primary objective of this research study is to identify and critically explore the fundamental aspects that contribute to gender discrepancies in terms of important gender concerns.

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**Keywords:** health and well-being of women in indigenous communities. It is impossible to think about the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is impossible for a bird to fly on only one wing.

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## Introduction

More than any other country in the world, India's tribal population (104.28 million people, or 8.6 percent of the overall population) is more than any other country's. There are only 10% who live in cities, with the majority residing in rural areas, putting them all at a severe disadvantage in terms of socioeconomic development and political power. In the country, the tribal peoples have been rightly characterized as the victims and and occupation." Additionally, they

have developed a well-assessed system of reciprocity and mutuality of obligation. The colonial administration used the term 'tribe' first time for identifying the primitive communities with distinct culture and language. The realm outlooks of tribes are dominated by some influences such as animism, naturism, shamanism, and occultism.

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<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP 202002. 1Email: sadiakhan171993@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, UP

202002. 2Email: hasanziya9@gmail.com

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They are also assumed as 'Adivasis' because they are deemed to be the autochthones of the nation.

'Adivasis' are also known as

'Vanyajati' as they are habitually dwelling in forestry, undulating, mountain terrains, and remote areas.<sup>2</sup>

After India's independence, there was a rebirth in the country. The political elites, who drafted our Constitution, were well aware of the condition of the indigenous peoples they represented. To this end, a variety of steps were taken to safeguard and advance the interests of tribal residents. Since centuries, tribal people have been neglected, secluded, exploited, discriminated against, and left behind the national mainstream. The establishment of the welfare state has given them fresh hope.

Despite this, for many years, there have been heated discussions among Indian tribal groups concerning gender and concerns pertaining to women and men. Tribal women continue to face discrimination in a variety of areas, including their social and economic standing, education, health, and gender equality. The great majority of women living in rural or tribal areas still face systemic barriers and poverty due to the lack of resources available to them. These women are fighting for more than just gender equality; they're fighting for their lives.<sup>3</sup>

Signatories to CEDAW 1979 include the United States, the European Union, and the United Kingdom. All types of discrimination against women must be abolished, and they have the right to equal treatment with men, as stated in the Convention. Gender discrimination and gender stereotyping are recognized as root causes in the Convention and are also defined broadly as any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on sex that has been intentionally or unintentionally impairing or nullifying recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women of their rights<sup>4</sup>. Male dominance and oppression of women are prominent in India, a country where gender inequality is widespread.

Review of Literature

Azra Musavi and Juhi Gupta (2020) have represented a comprehensive analysis of different aspects of concerns about the exclusion of women of marginalised communities of India. It explored a fruitful discussion on the various magnitudes where women confront challenges and complexities of the life associated with them. The study is not limited to explore issues and challenges, but also it has thrown a light on constitutional, judicial, and political aspects on the concerned topic. It also provided fresh perspectives for understanding the present scenario of the marginalised women in India.

Nadeem Hasnain (2007) has glimpsed the concept and definition of 'Tribe'. The study provided the ethnographic profiles of the selected Indian Tribes. A detailed history of their culture and community has been evaluated.

1 D.N. Majumdar, — Races and Cultures of India (4th ed.), Asia Publishing House, Bombay, (1944) p. 15.

2 S. Sahu, — Tribal Women and their Participation in Developmental Activities, In S. Tripathy, Unorganised Women Labour in India. Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi (1996), pp. 53-54.

3 M. Mukhopadhyay, — Silver Shakes: Women and Development in India, Oxford, Oxford, (1984).

4 UN. Convention on Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination Against Women. United Nations, General Assembly, New York, (1979).

Ashwini Deshpande & Smriti Sharma (2015) concerning India, the study has identified disadvantages that multi-faceted, caste, and gender are recognised as two identical factors of social stratification. Women and girls of lower caste groups experience a range of inequalities: in health and nutrition, education, wages, occupation and ownership, control, and access to assets and resources. It is one of the studies on women in economic development in India. This study has examined the difficulties and issues of women in India. It

concluded with an observation that illiteracy, poverty, early marriage, and under nutrition are massive hurdles in their way of development and empowerment.

majority of tribal women are in rural areas, and they got less education, health, and productive resources, among others, are inadequate.

### **Objectives**

- To assess and review the status of tribal women in India.
- To explore the plight of tribal women concerning the extent of gender inequalities.

### **Methodology**

The present study has been undertaken based on a secondary source of data. We have utilized published data in many forms, which encompass books, journals, newspapers, Governmental reports, Census reports, websites, etc.

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is a considerable negative impact of gender disparity on the socioeconomic condition of tribal women in India.

2. Tribal women have been facing problems related to reproductive health, economic backwardness, and education due to gender disparity. Status of Tribal Women in India  
705 unique Indian subcontinental tribes have been inhabited in various places. Most of India's tribal population lives in the north-eastern states of Mizoram and Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, and Nagaland (86.5 percent). Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, and Pondicherry are the non-tribal states. For the record, we previously said that India has an 8.6 percent overall tribal population. In patriarchal tribal areas, women are subjected to a particularly harsh form of prejudice. The fundamental rights of tribal women are also violated in urban areas. It's all or nothing for them. Without their agreement, important decisions about people's lives are made. Many cultures have stringent rules and rigid cultures that keep women from being aware of their rights and oppressed. This is a common cause of gender discrimination. The study did, however, demonstrate that women in tribal society generally have a non-tribal

socioeconomic standing. The reality is that, like other social groupings, they are subjected to oppression, sexual harassment, and other forms of dominance.

In addition, the indigenous women's society is prone to sexual harassment. In cities, where they go to work, they encounter the same challenges. Women from the indigenous communities of the world are considered sexual symbols, dark beauties, and can be used in every way conceivable, including being ridiculed and trolled, or even pushed to sell their bodies for a little sum of money. Tribal society will never be able to enjoy sexual liberation because of the influence of the urban community. The women of the tribe are said to be disorderly and used to unrestricted sex. To avoid sexual harassment and exploitation, they must travel to remote areas in search of jobs, where they may be compelled to work as sex workers. Unemployed and unskilled, the majority of the indigenous women tend to be. Because they have no other choice, they sell their bodies for money. Some women work to help support their families and children as physical labour in agricultural fields and forests to meet their daily needs. The hardships and struggles of the powerless and defenceless tribal women go unnoticed by society, and no adequate measures are taken to protect and support them.

It's possible that the tribal women's timid temperament is to blame for this type of dealing, as they are always afraid of their social defamation and rarely submit a complaint about a violation of their rights. The majority of the tribes live below the poverty line and are economically insecure because of the tribal community's educational backwardness / illiteracy. In other words, the marginalization of indigenous peoples and the oppression of women is not going away. Achieving gender equality is a lengthy process. Gender issues are seen differently by different people.

### **Gender Biases in Education**

The growth of a country is made possible because of the civilizing effects of education. It also helps to keep human ethics' customs

and values alive. A person's socioeconomic rights can be envisioned in the future through education. In order to keep tribal girls from advancing as quickly as other girls and boys in their community, they are deliberately denied this fundamental right. Parents and other family members around the world have an illiterate mindset and a restrictive view of what constitutes a good education for girls because of financial restrictions, financial backwardness, poverty, modesty, and early marriage. There is no other option for an educated tribal girl than to speak up. Any and all decisions are left to the sole discretion of the parent(s). The education of women and girls may be a goal for some tribes in the tribal world. There is a big difference, though, in price. Some parents wanted to send their daughters to school, while others thought it was pointless. In order to improve the household's financial situation, they are urged to get jobs and contribute to the labor force. In order to receive a basic education and learn how to write and read their names, they only send their daughters to school for 3 to 4 years. Parents have a strong preference for educating their sons over their daughters because of the widespread belief that women deserve fewer educational options than men. 5The Constitution of India recognised the 'right to equality' as a fundamental right of all citizens of India. All children in the Indian age group of 6-14 have the right (under article 21A) to free and compulsory education as part of their right to live stated in article 21. Further, the Article 46 is exclusively emphasis the 'Promotion of Educational and Economic' interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and other weaker sections (that also include women), as the fundamental duty of all the state of India. Besides these constitutional rights, the government of India has taken up many policies and schemes specifically for women as well as STs.

There are some significant measures taken up by the ministry of tribal affairs that aim to safeguard the inclusive educational

**Table 1: Literacy Rates(%) in India from 1961 to 2011.**

development of the tribal women, are given below:

- The scheme of Ashram schools in tribal areas.
  - The scheme of girls and boys hostels for STs.
  - The scheme for ST girls of low literacy districts to strengthen the education level among them.
  - To promote higher education, there are some schemes in the form of scholarship such as Pre-Matric and Post-Matric Scholarship, Rajiv Gandhi National Fellowship, etc.
- 5V. Bhasin, — Status of Tribal Women in India. *Studies on Home and Community Sciences*, 1(1), (2007) pp.1-16
- Women and Child Development Ministry also administers the 'Beti Bacha O Beti Padha O' initiative, which is intended to benefit women of various backgrounds, especially those of the SC/ST community. 6However, despite the Constitution's inclusion of specific measures addressing the educational needs of women in the ST group, the situation has remained far from ideal. Exclusion is more likely to occur if the children are female and from a tribal territory. Other groups' levels of development don't matter. The educational disadvantages faced by the women of the indigenous tribes are particularly severe. There are large gaps in literacy across race, class, geography, and gender. There is a lack of literacy in ST communities as a whole.
- Table 1 shows that indigenous women have a lower literacy rate than their male counterparts. It doesn't indicate a downward trend, but rather a snowballing one from year to year. The gender gap in ST literacy was only 10.67 percent in 1961. However, in 2011, the rate of 28.18 percent was recorded. However, if we look at the literacy rate as a whole, we see the opposite tendency. Compared to 1961, when it was 25.05 percent, that's down to 16.3 percent in 2011.

Year	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Persons(ST)	8.53	11.30	16.35	29.60	47.10	59.00
Male(ST)	13.83	17.63	24.52	40.65	59.17	68.53
Female(ST)	3.16	4.85	8.04	18.19	34.76	40.35
Gender gap in Literacy Rate (ST)	10.67	12.78	16.48	22.46	24.41	28.18
Persons(All)	28.30	34.45	43.57	52.21	64.84	73.00
Male(All)	40.40	45.96	56.38	64.13	75.26	80.90
Female(All)	15.35	21.97	29.76	39.29	53.67	64.60
Gender gap in Literacy Rate(All)	25.05	23.99	26.62	24.84	21.59	16.3

**Source: Office of the Registrar General of India.**

Furthermore, the image of Dalit and Adivasi students in higher education, despite an extremely well-planned effort to positive discrimination, is not sufficient. In addition, their depiction of women is tame. These people join conventional training programs and do not have access to elite training programs and schools. India's all-India GER (Gross Enrollment Ratio for Higher Education) for the 18-23 age group is 25.8%, according to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report for 2017-18. In this area, the GER is 26.3 percent for males and 25.4 percent for women. The ST students made up 15.9 percent of the student body, compared to the GER's 25.8 percent.

6 Govt. of India, Welfare of Tribal Women. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Press Information Bureau, (2017).

which 17.0 percent it is for ST males and 14.9 percent it is for ST female students<sup>7</sup>. The chauvinism in higher education hit tribal women very hardly in getting employment, particularly professional training, and in conquering top leadership in any economy as well as the political field.

#### Gender Biases in Work Participation

Economic Development is a critical factor for development. In this respect, Scheduled Tribes is the most vulnerable section in India in comparison to other social groups of the country. Now, the study tries to understand gender roles in the workplace or gender discrimination in employment, which is commonly encountered by tribal women in various areas of work. Tribal women have been working shoulder to shoulder with tribal men to make a financial contribution to the household economy. Quite often, they do more physical labour in their agricultural fields and forest than that of the tribal men. The position of the tribal women usually depends on the economic roles they play. The tribal women in India have virtually no role to play in the social and political spheres. They contribute positively to economic pursuits by participating equally with the menfolk.<sup>8</sup> A vast majority of the tribes (almost 90%) are engaged in agriculture, their other economic activities being food gathering (including hunting and fishing), pastoral, handicrafts, trade and commerce, and industrial labour. Rarely are they engaged in only one occupation. Tribal women are very

free and get the freedom to do the work outside their home as per the demand of the society. Though, in a few states or some instances, females are restricted and not allowed to do work. Generally, tribal women do work in informal regions, for example, as agricultural labourers, do husbandry related work as animal husbandry management, household work. They cope with their domestic matters themselves. They work as partners in the farming professions since gender discrimination, and gender partiality is not at all noticeable in informal zones.

Nevertheless, now, the scenario has changed for some reason. Firstly, informal sectors have allowed guarantee of work. Most tribes are losing their lands and forests because of commercialisation and urbanization, prompt migration, or random displacement. Secondly, women are not getting equal for equal work or paid less than the menfolk. So, women prefer the formal sector for their upliftment, although illiterate, non-skilled, and inexperienced women fight even more in this field against their marginalization. Women and girls face several issues such as gender biases, lack of community support, less accessibility, lack of knowledge, communication and language barriers, financial, physical, and sexual exploitation, lack of employment opportunities, and many others. These are cumbersome obstacles that deteriorate their situation. Such a negative impact continues to create a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment that is hard to break. Gender inequality is a universal phenomenon and is not only a women's issue but also a development issue. Tribal women could become independent, work-oriented, in fact, leaders of the society if they retaliate and stand up for themselves against social injustice and gender stereotyping.

#### **Gender Biases in Health**

Unlike many countries around the globe, in our country, women do not enjoy equal opportunities and access to health care and nutrition. Usually, women are still under-represented in various prominent fields. However, women's equal involvement in the decision-

making process at all levels is necessarily required to achieve the desired women's positions worldwide. Furthermore, it would help in eliminating all women related issues and provide encouraging procedures to improve the status of women.

Most studies have demonstrated that different facets of gender disparity have remained an undying problem. It is widely entrenched in tribal regions and backward class of the Indian society,

7 Govt. of India, ALL India Survey on Higher Education 2017-

18, Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi (2018).

8 G. Menon, & W. Fernandez, — In Tribal Women and Forest Economy: Deforestation Exploitation and Status Change . (W. Fernandez, Ed.) Indian Social Institute, Delhi (1987).

tribal women, had lower nutritional status than men that is deeply associated with the ambiguous status of women in the Indian society. Women suffer implicit biases. Subsequently, they are at a more considerable risk of abuse, financial hardship, social exclusion, and domestic violence and are more marginalized due to various health issues. Many health-related research findings affirm that society with strong son preference plays an important role that led to the rise of intense gender discrimination that historically prevalent practice has adverse effects on women's health and infant survival. Prenatal preferences perpetuate gender disparities and severe violations of women's rights. Most Indian families have been practicing sharp gender disparities where girls are seen as burdensome liabilities and can be relieved through marrying off them that leads to early marriage that drives early pregnancy. Girls often suffer recurrent pregnancy loss, stillbirth, sex-selective abortions (preference to son), and several other reproductive problems. Added to this, inadequate nutrition – partly due to monetary insufficiency and partly due to lack of ignorance – limited prenatal check-ups or

less opportunity to bed rest and relax further worsens reproductive health.<sup>9</sup>

Several remarkable attempts have been made so far to improve women's socio-economic status and to ensure the security and safety of women. Still, they are far behind, especially in tribal areas women have been encountering various problems in terms of health of infants and also contribute significantly to high IMR (Infant mortality rate) and MMR (Maternal mortality rate).

**Table:2 Infant Mortality Rate (%)**

Indicator	Persons(All)	Scheduled Tribe	Report
Infant Mortality Rate	57	62.1	NFHS-3(2005-06)
	40.7	44.4	NFHS-4(2015-16)

**Source: National Health Family Survey-4, 2015-16.**

For instance, as table 2 is showing the NFHS 3 and NFHS 4, the infant mortality rate was relatively high among the tribal women in comparison to the overall population of the country. During the financial year, 2005-06 IMR was recorded 62.1 and during 2015-16, the reported IMR was 44.4. While overall, it was stood at a rate of 57 and 40.7 among the total population, respectively.

Tribal women are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because limited attention has been paid to HIV/AIDS among tribal society. Only 38.6 percent of women had heard or knew about AIDS. While AIDS awareness among tribal men was higher compared to that is 63.9%.<sup>10</sup> Tribal Men are aware of the causes of HIV than women. However, tribal women are usually unaware or misinformed. Community members described gender inequality that HIV-positive females are less accepted by society, although males are treated typically.

Tribal people are known to have sexual practices that vary from those of mainstream cultures. Less or nothing is known about the prevalence of HIV and AIDS among tribal people in India, except perhaps in some of the tribal states of the North-East of India as these have a high incidence of drug use. HIV and AIDS have become the fourth largest killer worldwide and in Asian countries.

of hygiene, sanitation, and lack of safe drinking water, resulting in significant health issues such as diarrhoea, malaria, filarial, TB, anaemia, and others. More, lack of pre- and post-delivery care facilities, non-accessibility to hospitals in tribal areas, irregularity of postnatal check-ups, and poor nutrition standards constitute a severe threat to the health of infants and also contribute significantly to high IMR (Infant mortality rate) and MMR (Maternal mortality rate).

interparts, which are scattering at an alarming rate.

9S.R. Balgir, —Impact Of Gender Bias On Health And Nutrition Of The Tribal Women In Relation To Dynamics Of Development In India. The Internet Journal of Biological Anthropology, 3(1)(2008) pp.4-6.

10De, Dr. Kankana. —Health Awareness Among Tribes of Rural India. Journal of Molecular and Genetic 11(1):(2017) pp.2-4.

Age at the marriage in tribal females in India is recorded low, minor medical check-ups during pregnancy, mostly deliveries done at their homes, and less awareness about maternal health among scheduled tribes. Women are pressured to have children soon after their marriage to prove their fertility and worth. Hence adolescent marriage becomes synonymous with adolescent childbearing. Early marriage increases health risk for mother and child. The high rate of pregnancy complications, premature birth, and infant deaths are devastating outcomes of early marriages.

The only need is to understand and disparity among the tribal communities and implement schemes/policies accordingly. Tribe-specific facilities, voluntary actions, and program surely bridge the gap. A sustainable model for



infant survival and trained staff from within the tribal community must be hired to reduce the risk of infant mortality rate.

### **The Repercussions of Gender Disparities**

- Less access to education would degrade their employment opportunity, which further deprives women of economic empowerment.
- The wrong belief of society that only boys should have the right to get an education because they will become one day the bread earners for the whole family empower them in the mindset of patriarchal nature.
- Women are facing barriers to work in state mines or factories in night shifts; hereby, they are permitted to work in private mines but the administration typically does not hire women to employ to avoid maternity costs, paid leave, equal wage, rest shelters, and amnesty schemes.
- Tribal women are forcefully sent and kidnapped for immoral trafficking by labour contractors.
- In rural and tribal families, send their daughters in schools only up to the secondary level, and most girls are often married off at puberty due to social pressure.
- They tribal females regularly perform the dual role of taking care of the dependent family members and kids and working outside to support the family and reduced financial burden. Nevertheless, the juggling act is hard to maintain, especially in a male-dominated society. Despite the various government privileges, the tribal women population is still illiterate and tribal women have neither the economic wealth nor the adequate skill for a job in the formal sector. As a result, she either remains unemployed or gets very low-status jobs in this sector. However, women get much respectful status relatively in the informal economy because the tribal population is the weakest section of the society where girls start working too early to become a helping hand in the family.
- Tribal areas are under-developed so that it is more difficult for them to arrange necessities, and in the scenario, the female child remains at home. In contrast, the male

child gets a preference to access education and economic opportunity. Women's subjugation reveals inevitable barriers to their development, male supremacy, and economic exploitation, and the capitalist system gives absolute priority to men to oppress women. Patriarchal male power creates both class and gender disparity to control women's participation and representation in society.

- Chances of experiencing sexual harassment, bullying, physical abuse, mistreatment, exclusion, promotional bias, terminations, and rape threats are ever higher in the workplace. These prevalence barriers make women more vulnerable, disempower, and discourage, and this unfair organizational conduct contributes to sex-based discrimination.

- Irrespective of recent advancement, women are still marginalised and disadvantaged due to their family commitments and impaired chance to get a healthy life and productive jobs. Women are double prejudiced, such as facing historical gender disparities and systematic human rights violations since ages. However, many women have gained equality of treatment through far-ranging legal rights. Still, gender inequality is an unresolved issue. It remains with inadequate healthcare, insufficient education, and limited income to drive

these deprivations among women, and conventionally paternalistic policies and programmes are made to comply with the demand for women's economic upliftment.<sup>11</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Tribal Women in India: Gender Inequality and its Repercussions was written to investigate the causes of gender imbalance in tribal communities and its corrosive effects on the lives of women, particularly women in tribal areas in general, in particular.

India was ranked 112th out of 153 nations in the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap 2020" report. It has fallen from the 108th place it held in the previous year's report. In the top three are Iceland, Norway, and Finland. As a measure of gender parity, employment, literacy, political involvement, and health are all considered in the report's evaluation of the States' development.

In practically every aspect of their lives, Tribal Women are subjected to discrimination. Certain tribal communities have a number of taboos that discriminate against women, signifying impureness and low social standing. Their social behavior is at its peak, but they are among society's most disadvantaged groups and far behind in a variety of areas, including employment, education, healthcare, and political representation. In addition to remaining confined to their native forest habitats, they also engage in agriculture and other forms of allied occupation, which has contributed significantly to their plight.

However, the indigenous people were granted a prominent role in the Indian Constitution by its framers in 1950.

Even today, they continue to work tirelessly to improve the lives of those in their community.

However, they continue to be India's most "deficient" ethnic group. It is empowering for tribal women to have access to education, work, social inclusion and the practical application of current laws, as well as a shift in the social structure. Finally, it is advised that the notion of 'Gender Sensitivity' should be used to eliminate the gender disparity against tribal women.

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11AzraMusavi,JuhiGupta,WomenofMarginalisedCommunities:ConcernsaboutExclusion,SarupBookPublishers,NewDelhi,(2020),p172.

12WorldEconomicForum,GlobalGenderGap2020.WEM, Geneva, (2019).

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