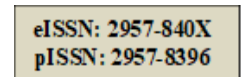


Revitalising Selfhood: Allama Iqbal's Concept of Khudi as a Blueprint for Contemporary Youth

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ABSTRACT

This research examines Allama Muhammad Iqbal's profound philosophical concept of Khudi (Selfhood), as articulated across his poetic and philosophical oeuvre, to establish its direct and immediate relevance for addressing the complex psycho-social and existential challenges confronting global youth. The primary objective is to transcend a purely theoretical exegesis of Khudi and present it as a practical blueprint for self-discovery, character refinement, and assuming a dynamic leadership role in societal development in the 21st century. The core analysis reveals that Iqbal's Khudi is a highly dynamic and essentialist construct, necessitating a continuous process of self-affirmation, rigorous self-purification, and purposeful self-expression. For the modern student, often assailed by the pressures of materialism and cultural dissonance, Khudi provides a profound moral and spiritual compass. Specifically, the concept addresses modern dilemmas by Countering Nihilism through asserting the ego's resilient and immortal potential; Fostering Ethical Leadership via the emphasis on Fakr (spiritual detachment); and Promoting Proactive Engagement by repeatedly invoking the youth to determined action (Amal-i-Paiham). In conclusion, the paper argues that the adoption and internalisation of Khudi's principles are critically essential for empowering the modern generation to transition from passive recipients of external forces into active agents of intellectual and social revival.

KEYWORDS

Khudi, Iqbal's Philosophy, Youth Empowerment, Selfhood, Globalization and Contemporary Challenges

INTRODUCTION

The global youth demographic operates within a complex socio-philosophical nexus characterized by profound identity fragmentation, spiritual vacuum, and pervasive alienation. The advanced structures of globalized late capitalism have fundamentally mediated the environment of self-formation, frequently privileging external, materialist metrics over intrinsic essence. This systemic context underscores an imperative need for robust, dynamic philosophical constructs, such as Allama Muhammad Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* (Selfhood), to effectively guide the modern generation toward authentic self-discovery and purposeful societal engagement.

The pervasive reach of commodity capitalism has significantly complicated the terrain of identity formation, rendering the processes of societal struggle and the discovery of authentic existence "more obscure and confusing" in quotidian life (Freire, 2017). Today's youth are immersed in a society characterized by spectacle, where daily experience necessitates navigating commodified representations of success and belonging. Consequently, meaningful bases for rebellion or the establishment of authentic selfhood are increasingly difficult to locate outside the dominant paradigm of material achievement (Freire, 2017).

This systemic pressure precipitates a pronounced materialistic imperative. Empirical research indicates that materialistic trends are escalating rapidly among young people, significantly amplified by the influence of social media and peer dynamics (Kasser, 2014). Success is often defined instrumentally, equated with external possessions such as vehicles, luxury brands, and the realization of a "wealthy life" (Masood et al., 2017). This pervasive consumer culture impacts societies globally, including collectivist nations such as Pakistan, where youth increasingly prioritize material acquisition for life satisfaction and social integration (Masood et al., 2017). Crucially, this inclination toward accumulation is often rooted in psychological fragility. Materialism intensifies when individuals experience insecurity, frequently stemming from economic anxieties (Kasser, 2014). This dynamic creates a critical psycho-social feedback loop: insecurity drives the craving for external, material validation; yet, despite the acquisition of increased resources and luxuries, the inherent "lust or craving for products is increasing rapidly," failing to deliver enduring satisfaction (Gregoire, 2014). This observation illustrates that identity constructed through external acquisition is inherently fragile and contingent.

The logical culmination of an externally contingent and commodified self is existential nihilism. Critical pedagogy must directly engage with the "spread of existential nihilism and loss of meaning amidst commodification and spectacle" (Freire, 2017). This

crisis is further exacerbated by an intensification of anti-foundationalist thought that rejects conventional morality and stable bases for meaning (Rastogi, 2018). Widespread youth alienation arises, in part, from the subordination of education to "instrumental reason" the valuation of knowledge and action based solely on utility and efficiency (Freire, 2017). This utilitarian approach critically undermines ethical purpose and spiritual ends. If every endeavor is judged by what one can *extract* from the world (instrumental reasoning), internal life and ethical substance are neglected. Iqbal's philosophy provides a decisive metaphysical counterpoint. By identifying the fragility of the externally dependent self, the material-spiritual conflict is revealed as a self-perpetuating cycle. *Khudi*, conversely, asserts the ego's resilient and immortal potential. The application of *Khudi* necessitates substituting instrumental reasoning with existential and spiritual reasoning, shifting the fundamental focus from external acquisition to internal *becoming*. This framework provides an ethical foundation rooted in self-knowledge, thereby stabilizing the self against the pressures of an externally defined, perpetually craving material world.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Khudi is not merely an Eastern psychological ego; it constitutes a profound and dynamic metaphysical construct that functions as the ultimate central principle of human being, aligning with the Quranic concept of *Ruh* (Spirit) (Iqbal, 1915/193). Iqbal's philosophy is fundamentally structured by the tenets of self-affirmation and growth, postulating that self-knowledge is the essential prerequisite for a deeper understanding of the Divine and the cosmos. Iqbal conceived *Khudi* as a "complex unity called the mind," a psycho-spiritual system endowed with the critical flexibility necessary to process and respond to environmental pressures through the internal capabilities of perception, judgment, and volitional execution. This defines *Khudi* as inherently dynamic, constantly evolving, and fundamentally free. Yet, this freedom is inextricably linked to responsibility: the mind's freedom to act is exclusively the responsibility of the individual. For Iqbal, all personal experiences, including pleasures, sufferings, and desires, belong to the individual, asserting the ontological centrality of the ego (Rafiq, 2024).

Iqbal deliberately developed the doctrine of *Khudi* as a challenge to philosophical systems, particularly certain prevalent strains of Sufism and pantheism that promoted self-annihilation (*fana*) or viewed the material world as an illusion unworthy of engagement (Iqbal, 1915/1930; Antonio, 2023). His central thesis is Self-Affirmation, asserting that the revitalization of humanity requires embracing the resilience of the Self, rather than its negation (Iqbal, 1915/1930). The objective of *Khudi*'s continuous effort is to assimilate the Divine attributes and master the material domain, conceptually reversing the pantheistic

aim of self-absorption into the Absolute. The movement of the ego toward perfection is a demanding, ethico-religious trajectory, structurally mirroring the path of growth articulated by thinkers such as Kierkegaard (Iqbal, n.d.). This process demands strenuous effort and continuous self-refinement. The three stages defined by Iqbal for the perfection of the ego are (Iqbal, n.d.): Obedience of Law (mandates adherence to moral and divine discipline, establishing structure), Self-Control (*Istiqlal*) (defined as the highest expression of self-consciousness, involving conquering one's immediate, base self, which is a critical precondition for effective social and political organization: "Self-control in individuals builds families; in countries, it builds empires" (Iqbal, n.d.) and Divine Vicegerency (*Niyabat-i-Ilahi*) (the ultimate stage, wherein the perfected individual achieves the status of *Mard-e-Momin*, realizing their infinite potentialities, mastering the material world, and acting as God's representative on Earth (Iqbal, n.d.). The reconciliation of *Khudi*'s intrinsic freedom with the necessity of Law establishes a framework for *responsible freedom*. Iqbal mandates that genuine power (Vicegerency) is unlocked only when liberty is channeled through the rigorous moral structure provided by Obedience and Self-Control.

The impetus driving the self through these stages is *Ishq* (Divine Love). The attainment of self-awareness fundamentally depends on purifying the heart, which Iqbal regards as the dwelling place of the Divine (Iqbal, n.d.). Love is affirmed as the "foundation of life" and the primary agent of purification (Iqbal, n.d.). Conversely, an impure heart leads to what Kierkegaard termed "self deceit," rendering the search for self-awareness futile (Iqbal, n.d.). Iqbal employs a powerful metaphor to directly link the metaphysical requirement of monotheism (*Tawhid*) to the dynamic process of self-refinement: "The *khūdī* is only a blunt sword, there is no god, but He is the stone that sharpens it" (García-Hoz, A., 2023). The ego, left unchecked, is inert (the blunt sword). Submission to the Divine standard and the pursuit of unity (*Tawhid*), symbolized as the sharpening stone, provides the necessary friction, the discipline of Obedience and Self-Control required for the self to achieve its moral and penetrative power.

Table I: The Dynamic Stages of *Khudi* (Self-Perfection)

Stage of Khudi	Core Requirement (Iqbal's Principle)	Function for Modern Youth	Sociological Challenge Addressed
Obedience to	Adherence to	Establishing moral	Normlessness

Law	moral/Divine discipline (Iqbal, n.d.).	boundaries and defining purpose outside of material success.	(Anomie) and Ethical Relativism.
Self-Control	Highest form of self-consciousness (<i>Istiqlal</i>); conquest of the immediate ego (Iqbal, n.d.).	Cultivating resilience, discipline, and the internal fortitude to resist consumerist pressures.	Instant Gratification and Materialistic Addiction.
Divine Vicegerency	Ultimate mastery, purposeful self-expression, and acting as the Divine representative (Iqbal, n.d.).	Assuming dynamic leadership (<i>Amal-i-Paiham</i>) and shaping destiny through proactive engagement.	Passive Recipient Mindset and Nihilism/Fatalism.

To fully articulate the revitalization blueprint offered by *Khudi*, it must be positioned within the context of global intellectual history, particularly against competing philosophies of vitalism and existentialism. *Khudi*'s primary strength derives from its divine foundation, which enables it to assert meaning against anti-foundationalist nihilism. Iqbal's philosophy is fundamentally designed to restore human confidence and agency. It directly counters nihilism by asserting the ego's resilient and immortal potential, thereby confirming the profound meaning inherent in its relationship with the Universe and God (Iqbal, 1915/1930). The Quranic injunction, which Iqbal upholds, is to awaken man to the "higher consciousness of his manifold relations with Allah and the universe" (Iqbal,

1915/1930). A critical divergence from self-negating philosophies is *Khudi's* mandate for mastery. The objective is to absorb Divine attributes into one's own ego and to achieve mastery over the physical world (Qureshi, n.d.). This stance is the decisive metaphysical reversal of pantheism, which advocates for the dissolution of the self into the Absolute (Iqbal, 1915/1930). This framework directly addresses the psycho-sociological failures observed in contemporary youth culture:

Table II: *Khudi* as a Response to Modern Existential Failures

Modern Youth Crisis	Underlying Cause	Khudi's Counter-Principle	Practical Outcome
Existential Nihilism	Rejection of foundational grounds; belief in the illusionary nature of existence (Rastogi, 2018; Iqbal, 1915/1930).	Self-Affirmation and Essentialism: Assertion of the Ego's immortal, dynamic, and purposeful potential (Iqbal, 1915/1930).	Spiritual Resilience and Intrinsic Worth.
Hyper-Materialism/Craving	External validation; insecurity driving commodity capitalism (Kasser, 2014; Freire, 2017).	<i>Fakr</i> (Spiritual Detachment) and Self-Control: Internalized standard of success, mastery over desire (Iqbal, n.d.).	Ethical Autonomy and Inner Peace.
Passive Fatalism	Belief that destiny is predetermined; lack	Determined Action (<i>Amal-i-Paiham</i>):	Proactive Engagement

	of agency (Nasar, 2015).	The elevation of selfhood to shape destiny, demanding God's will (Qureshi, n.d.).	and Societal Agency.
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The intellectual engagement between Iqbal and Friedrich Nietzsche is essential for understanding *Khudi*'s unique contribution. Iqbal acknowledged his profound engagement with Nietzsche, whose philosophy he considered "very near to Islam" in its anti-Platonic vitalism (Rastogi, 2018). Both concepts emphasize the importance of strength and greatness—that "hardness that gives glamour to life" in the movement toward an Ideal Man. However, the distinction between Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Superman) and Iqbal's *Mard-e-Momin* (Perfect Man) is fundamental and metaphysical. Nietzsche is an anti-foundationalist, rejecting religion, conventional morality, and all foundational grounds, which he held responsible for propagating nihilism (Rastogi, 2018). Conversely, Iqbal is a foundationalist, grounding his Ideal Man in the Divine and ethical law. Iqbal utilized Nietzsche's vitalist energy and critique of passivity to challenge the decadent Muslim world. Yet, the source of power creates a critical moral boundary: Nietzsche's concept is driven by the *Will to Power*, which is autonomous and secular; Iqbal's concept is driven by the *Will to Perfection*, which is bounded by Love (*Ishq*) and delegated through Divine Law (Rastogi, 2018). This framework promotes ethical leadership, contrasting with purely dominating secular authority.

The theoretical architecture of *Khudi* translates into a practical blueprint for ethical leadership by establishing two core doctrines: *Fakr* (Spiritual Detachment) and *Amal-i-Paiham* (Determined Action). These principles are designed to cultivate an agent of change who is both morally sovereign and highly effective in societal reform. *Fakr*, interpreted as spiritual independence or detachment, constitutes the cornerstone of *Khudi*'s ethical framework. It signifies ultimate spiritual autonomy: freedom from dependency on materialistic outcomes, external validation, or the pursuit of ephemeral rewards. This detachment is not withdrawal but a profound independence from the world's controlling forces (Iqbal, n.d.). The principle of *Fakr* functions as a necessary safeguard for the developed *Khudi*, enabling the Divine Vicegerent to fulfill responsibilities without succumbing to corruption, greed, or the temptations of temporal power. It directly counters the pressure exerted by external forces the "invasion of tension from the environment" (Rafiq). It directly counters the capitalist indoctrination that equates value with

accumulation, asserting that true wealth resides in self-sovereignty and internalized moral authority (Kasser, 2014).

Iqbal's philosophy is fundamentally an exhortation to action and struggle, explicitly rejecting fatalistic passivity (Nasar, 2015). The doctrine of *Amal-i-Paiham* (Continuous/Determined Action) mandates an incessant, purposeful engagement with life and the environment. This relentless effort is the practical manifestation of a strong *Khudi*. The ultimate aspiration of this determined action is articulated in the famous Persian couplet: "Elevate your selfhood so high that before destiny unfolds, God Himself asks you, what is your will?" (Qureshi, n.d.). This assertion dramatically redefines human agency, implying that through persistent moral and spiritual elevation, the individual gains the authority to influence their own destiny, thereby becoming an active co-creator of fate. Iqbal's political ethos reflects this call to dynamic engagement. He stood firmly against the forces of ignorance, poverty, and slavery, directing his critique of capitalists, religious rigidities, and workers alike (Nasar, 2015). He rejected both pure capitalism and a government based purely on the proletariat, instead demanding proactive social and political engagement rooted in the true education of Islam (Nasar, 2015). This engagement is highly relevant amidst contemporary crises of moral leadership and political corruption (Hidayat, 2023). The fully developed *Khudi* is not an isolated entity; it must integrate with collective life, a theme explored in *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi* (Secrets of Selflessness). The individual's pursuit of self-realization requires balancing personal development with the needs of the community (Qureshi, n.d.). The core objective is to empower the modern generation to transition from "passive recipients of external forces into active agents of intellectual and social revival." Divine Vicegerency is a leadership role earned through character perfection, particularly through Self-Control (Iqbal, n.d.). This framework insists that 21st-century leadership must be derived from internal refinement (purity of heart and discipline) rather than merely acquired through material resources or positional power.

3. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

The hermeneutic-analytical approach applied to Iqbal's oeuvre allows for the extraction of three critical, practical dimensions of *Khudi* that serve as an actionable blueprint for contemporary youth grappling with the challenges outlined in the introduction.

(a) Existential Dimension – Self-Affirmation against Nihilism

The primary function of *Khudi* in the modern context is its role as a decisive counter-measure against existential despair and nihilism. Iqbal's philosophy is fundamentally anti-nihilistic, asserting the ontological reality and infinite potentiality of the individual ego

(Iqbal, 1915/1930). In a global culture that increasingly commodifies identity and reduces worth to instrumental value (Freire, 2017). *Khudi* insists on an intrinsic, spiritual essence that cannot be negated. The pursuit of the ego's resilience confirms the profound meaning inherent in the individual's relationship with the Divine and the Universe (Iqbal, 1915/1930). This essentialist assertion provides a philosophical and psychological anchor for youth experiencing chronic insecurity and the instability of consumer culture (Kasser, 2014). By embracing self-affirmation, the individual replaces the void left by anti-foundationalist thought (Rastogi, 2018) with a sense of purposeful destiny, stabilizing the self against fragmentation.

(b) Ethical Dimension – Discipline through *Fakr* and *Ishq*

The second major dimension of *Khudi* is the establishment of a rigorous ethical discipline necessary for moral sovereignty. This is achieved through the dual principles of *Ishq* (Divine Love) and *Fakr* (Spiritual Detachment). *Ishq* serves as the fundamental engine of purification, transforming the heart, the dwelling place of the Divine into a "deeply transparent" mirror of absolute truth (Iqbal, n.d.). This purification process addresses the "self-deceit" inherent in an impure heart and ensures that the self-realization journey is founded on integrity, not secular ambition. *Fakr* then provides the ethical framework for leadership by mandating freedom from external pressures, specifically dependency on material outcomes, temporal power, or validation (Iqbal, n.d.). This spiritual independence is crucial for youth destined for positions of influence, as it acts as an intrinsic safeguard against the corruption and greed prevalent in systems driven purely by capitalist accumulation (Nasar, 2015). *Fakr* elevates the pursuit of wealth from mere acquisition to a form of internal wealth and self-mastery.

(c) Social Dimension – Leadership through *Amal-i-Paiham*

The ultimate objective of the perfected *Khudi* is social and political agency, expressed through *Amal-i-Paiham* (Determined Action) and culminating in Divine Vicegerency (*Niyabat-i-Ilahi*). This dimension counters the contemporary tendency toward fatalism and passive resignation (Nasar, 2015).⁹ Iqbal's doctrine is a categorical rejection of passivity, demanding incessant, purposeful engagement with the physical and societal environment. The powerful couplet, "Elevate your selfhood so high that before destiny unfolds, God Himself asks you, what is your will?" (Qureshi, n.d.) summarizes this mandate: the individual's ethical elevation allows them to influence destiny and become an active co-creator of fate. This philosophy provides a robust foundation for ethical 21st-century leadership, insisting that true power is derived from moral perfection (Self-Control) rather

than just positional authority or material force (Iqbal, n.d.). The final stage of *Khudi* is, therefore, a leadership role that balances individual potentiality with collective responsibility, as detailed in *Ramuz-e-Bekhudi*.

4. Materials and Methods

The methodological framework employed in this investigation is a rigorous qualitative and hermeneutic-analytical approach, designed to move beyond a mere textual commentary toward a philosophical and sociological interpretation of *Khudi*'s relevance.

The study utilized critical readings and thematic analysis of Iqbal's primary philosophical and poetic works, specifically *Asrar-i-Khudi* (The Secrets of the Self) and *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*. Secondary literature, including scholarly journals and academic monographs relevant to Islamic philosophy, existentialism, critical pedagogy, and comparative thought (Nietzsche, Kierkegaard), was selected to establish a robust comparative framework. The selection criteria focused on peer-reviewed sources that critically engaged with Iqbal's concepts in a modern socio-philosophical context.

The choice of a hermeneutic-analytical methodology is justified by the study's objective: to interpret an early 20th-century philosophical construct within the distinct context of 21st-century youth alienation. Hermeneutics, drawing on the theories of thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, provides the theoretical grounding for this interpretive task. Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" is central, suggesting that genuine understanding occurs through a dialogue between the horizon of the text (Iqbal's worldview) and the horizon of the interpreter (the contemporary socio-philosophical crisis). This approach mitigates the risk of anachronism by allowing the historical meaning of *Khudi* to encounter and illuminate the modern problem of selfhood. Furthermore, Ricoeur's theory of interpretation, which treats texts as self-contained worlds requiring structural analysis before deep philosophical meaning can be extracted, ensures that the analysis of Iqbal's metaphors (Antonio, 2023) is both rigorous and relevant to the study's ethical concerns. Thus, hermeneutic interpretation is the most effective approach for demonstrating the dynamic and continuously reconstructible nature of *Khudi* in addressing modern socio-philosophical issues.

5. Universal Applicability and Implementation Challenges

To utilize *Khudi* as a global blueprint, its universal principles must be critically assessed against contemporary issues of gender, secularism, and socio-economic access.

5.1 Contextualizing Gender and Secular Relevance

5.1.1 Secular Relevance and Critical Consciousness

Although Iqbal's philosophy is rooted in Islamic metaphysical tradition, its dynamic nature and emphasis on continuous reconstruction (*Ijtihad*) provide a powerful moral compass relevant to secular modernity and its crises (Hidayat, 2023). *Khudi*'s focus on perception, judgment, and the capacity for action (Rafiq)⁵ aligns conceptually with Freire's critical consciousness (Koshul, 2015). When applied to the challenges of modern power structures, *Khudi* provides the conceptual ability to perceive and then act against the *Fitna* (discord) inherent in established systems of knowledge and power (Koshul, 2015).

5.1.2 The Gender Critique and Universal Principles

Iqbal's specific sociological prescriptions regarding gender roles warrant critical contextualization. He critiqued the Western demand for 'equality,' arguing that the natural responsibilities and perceived roles of men and women are fundamentally different, necessitating separate scales for evaluation (Ashraf, 2011). He viewed Western feminist movements as potentially a "trap and intrigue of the capitalists" designed to serve economic ends rather than genuine emancipation (Ashraf, 2011). However, the core metaphysical principle of *Khudi* Self-Affirmation, dynamic resilience, and Divine Vicegerency—is universal and comprehensive (Iqbal, 1915/1930). To maintain global applicability, particularly in alignment with the worldwide responsibility for achieving gender equality (SDG5) (Putnick et al., 2023), the foundational metaphysics must be decoupled from Iqbal's historical sociological prescriptions. The principle of Vicegerency, which demands maximum self-perfection, applies equally to all individuals, irrespective of gender.

5.2 Socio-Economic Barriers to Implementation

Practical attempts to implement Iqbal's vision for youth empowerment have revealed significant socio-economic barriers. Projects designed to increase youth participation in public affairs often inadvertently exclude the less educated and poorer youth, frequently assuming baseline literacy, internet access, and the time required for centralized efforts (UDF, 2014). This failure to ensure mass inclusion risks confining the powerful message of *Khudi* intended to combat poverty and ignorance (Nasar, 2015) to an educated elite demographic.

To overcome this "risk of intellectualizing *Khudi*," practical application must prioritize accessibility and decentralization. Programs that operationalize *Khudi* must translate its abstract challenge into concrete, community-based action. For instance, initiatives such as the conceptual *Iqbal Youth Dialogue Fellowship* could serve as decentralized hubs focusing on action-oriented learning (*Amal-i-Paiham*). These hubs would mentor youth not just in theoretical knowledge but in local advocacy, social entrepreneurship, and democratic participation (UDF, 2014). Furthermore, integrating *Khudi* principles into modern delivery systems, such as digital education platforms and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), can democratize access to these self-mastery tools, ensuring that socioeconomic barriers do not preclude participation. Digital inclusion strategies, combined with structured mentorship focusing on self-control (*Istiqlal*) and ethical detachment (*Fakr*), would ensure that the developed *Khudi* is universally available and effectively exerted by all members of society, regardless of educational background (UDF, 2014).

6. CONCLUSION

Allama Muhammad Iqbal's concept of *Khudi* remains profoundly relevant, serving as a comprehensive, dynamic, and essentialist blueprint for addressing the complex psycho-social and existential challenges confronting the modern generation. By demanding self-affirmation and rejecting the fatalism and self-negation associated with decadent philosophical systems and pervasive consumer capitalism, *Khudi* provides the metaphysical foundation for spiritual resilience. The rigorous triadic path Obedience, Self-Control, and Divine Vicegerency offer a structured mechanism for character development, transitioning the passive recipient of globalization into an active, responsible agent. The synthesis of spiritual detachment (*Fakr*) with determined action (*Amal-i-Paiham*) ensures that the resultant leadership is both ethical and effective. The revitalization of *Khudi* necessitates overcoming implementation challenges, particularly by ensuring socio-economic inclusivity and responsibly contextualizing historical sociological prescriptions. Ultimately, the internalization of *Khudi's* principles is critically essential for empowering youth to transcend the constraints of materialism and cultural dissonance, thereby leading intellectual and social revival in the 21st century.

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