

## Comparing Women Empowerment issue in Bangladesh and Japan and Its Possible Impacts

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**Abstract** – *This research investigates women empowerment issues by comparing Bangladesh and Japan and finding out its possible impacts in those countries. By using qualitative method, the examination of the research provides a result that women's position is increasing in Bangladesh and Japan day by day, and this comparison keeps mainly positive impacts though it has negative impacts. However, countries societal mindsets cannot be changed by writing a research paper. Many societal, organisational, governmental long run and short run initiatives and frameworks are needed for improving women's position. Though several issues may create problems, we hope that women's social, economic and political position will be improved to their family, society and the whole world as well*

**Keywords** Women · Empowerment · Development · Bangladesh · Japan ·

### 1. Introduction

Women's empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that significantly impacts a country. It is one kind of realisation for women about their power to do anything according to their capability for the nation and the world. Moreover, most importantly, 'power' is not just a word written in books and girls would only memorise it or not a good which can be brought from a supper shop and automatically power will be transferred to them selves. In this harsh reality, power must be acquired, and after that, everyone should be practised to preserve it in-depth (Islam, 2014). Therefore, a vibrant society should be established where women can exercise their power. In the woman empowerment sector, Bangladesh has been progressed a lot in the previous twenty years (Haque, 2021). As a

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developing country, Bangladesh has arisen competition with developed countries like Japan on women empowerment, though it still faces many problems and limitations. However, Japanese economic diplomacy with a stable economic condition cannot get their women's rights or proper utilisation of their women talent yet (D'AMBROGIO, 2017). Consequently, it is crucial to make a woman's position better concerning man, which is a critical survival issue for a society (Tarique & Zafar, 2008).

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1 What refers to women empowerment?**

Empowerment refers to doing something with own strength or money or making own decisions oneself. At the same time, women empowerment reflects financial, social, political stability. Though development thinkers state that a country's natural development can achieve women's economic stability, other theorists believe that women's political position will be stronger in the meantime when a country reaches its political and economic stability (Tarique & Zafar, 2008). Women's saving nature, honesty, patience, moral character, loyalty, hospitality, warm regards to respected person word, health and beauty consciousness are core factors for empowering a woman (Islam, 2014). However, no single exceptional factor for women empowerment may improve their position in society without active participation.

### **2.2 Why does the term women empowerment come?**

Increasing inequalities made women vulnerable, and it impacted them badly to enjoy all kinds of human rights (Tarique & Zafar, 2008). Women work day and night endlessly at their house without any cost, giving their time and energy just looking after family members, and their only responsibility is to raise children. However, if they can invest their time, energy, intelligence, and experience in productive work besides working at home, they can financially be stable and support their family. We all want equal rights between men and women. However, we never overlook the challenges that make our long wishes impossible. In Bangladesh, the absence of primary education of rural women is the core challenge, besides lack of their practical intelligence, strong personality, inability to take their own decision create hindrance for women to look forward (Islam, 2014). Here we make laws, talk about women empowerment, and wish to make a women-friendly gender-equal society, but what are we doing in reality?

Without family and societal support, lack of women working friendly environment, violence against women, early marriage are crucial reasons women cannot become empowered. On the other hand, gender base wages gap, mate-harassment, lack of child care centres, less job security, long working hours are the main reasons that kept Japanese women under the darkness of unemployment (D'AMBROGIO, 2017). As women face obstacles, the term 'women empowerment comes.

### **2.3 Present condition of women in Bangladesh**

Here in Bangladesh, in most cases, women's productive capacity is never utilised correctly. Women have that much capability to produce something new that can contribute to Bangladesh's socio-economic development. However, fewer employment opportunities for women and men's control over production capital keep women behind men (Islam, 2014). Besides, early marriage badly affects girls' primary education, resulting in women being un-empowered. Due to the absence of the light of education, women have fewer job opportunities. So, Women empowerment is an increasingly important issue in Bangladesh, where 49.42% of the population are women (BBS, 2018). Our cultural values, social norms and conservative family structure are the main obstacles for the small number of female students participating in educational institutions. No woman can run faster or go further without family or societal support. Besides violence against women and male dominance, many rural women feel ashamed to talk with opposite gender people, outsiders of their family members are the reasons that create problems to educate a female child (Islam, 2014).

About 71.2% of Bangladeshi females took their primary education, whereas 75.2% of males and 76.7% of males took secondary education in Bangladesh (BBS, 2018). On the other hand, only 46% of female students enrolled post-graduate students (BBS, 2020). After completing secondary education, girls get married in most cases, resulting in fewer students participating in a post-graduate program. After graduation, females tried to get a job without experience and technological knowledge. However, it is a matter of sorrow that they hardly get a job with their educational qualification.

To think practically, rural and urban, women are now drastically taking part in economic activities. Rural illiterate women's participation in the national labour force is higher than urban educated women, with 37.6 for rural women and 30.8 for urban women (Khatun, 2018). Ready-made Garments (RMGs) is a significant sector where rural and urban women work and earn handsome salaries. Survey

results show that 60.80% of women work in RMGs published in 2018 and conducted by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (NEWAGE, 2020). However, female participation in RMGs fell from 2015 because of automation, and women were not experts to handle a machine (NEWAGE, 2020). More than 3 million females are currently working in the RMGs sector (Haque, 2021). Besides working in RMGs, women work in tourism, hotels and restaurants, telecommunications. Many more wanted to be an entrepreneur (Khatun, 2018). They are also involved in the mass media corporate job sector. Microfinance is an opportunity for Bangladeshi women to become an entrepreneur and a chance to become an empowered people. Most of the rural women are earning money by micro-financing.

A study conducted by Islam (2014) results that 60% of rural Bangladeshi women responded that their position became improved because of interacting with the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Islam 2014, p.6). Many national and international organisations are working together for empowering Bangladeshi women, and Japanese NGOs are also working to improve this sector. They are now trying to increase female education, strengthen women's leadership from the root level, build women's capacity, and increase social awareness about empowerment (Islam, 2014). In contrast, according to the World Economic Forum (WEF), Bangladesh has gained progress in four sectors- education, health, economic activities, and political participation- published in the 'Gender Gap Index of 2017' (Wazed, 2017).

Bangladesh's honourable prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, considers as a role model of women empowerment in this region (Wazed, 2017). Besides, in the parliament of Bangladesh, 22 female representatives servicing as a Member of Parliament (MP) (Anik, 2019). According to Article 28 (2) of the Bangladesh Constitution, women can enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, both national and public. However, this equal number of women representatives in both countries' parliament does not express that the women's position in Bangladesh and Japan is strong like males. Alternatively, constitutional declarations cannot allow women to actively join in the political sector or stop violence against women. Many women get harassed, sexually abused, and raped every day in Bangladesh, and those women do not get justice. In reality, a few rape incidents were informed to the police for investigation. An article published in Dhaka Tribune, March 2021, regarding the number of rape issue related police cases are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Number of the raped case file to the police (Bangladesh)

Year	Number of police cases
2018	6766
2017	4695
2016	4331

Source: Dhaka Tribune, March 2021.

We have legal frameworks and laws for women's rights, but our legislation is problematic. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), Bangladesh has progressed to bring a gender-equal society (Wazed, 2017). However, we may talk about improvement and achievements, but there are still many vacancies. So, to empower women, our mindset should be changed, and women should take advanced skill development programmes in higher education and acquire leadership power that may enhance their opportunities in our job sector (Khatun, 2018).

#### 2.4 Present condition of women in Japan

Still, Japanese society structure and mass people's thinking process supports male-female inequality and violence against women, though most of the Japanese government appeared as a women empowerment supportive government (Ahmed, 2007). More than three hours, on average, female members worked at home, and most of the Japanese males still think that women's roles are limited as a good wife and a good mother (Quick Take, 2020). The Japanese government and policymakers understand that they should include women in their active workforce to revive their economy. Former Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, took initiatives to promote women empowerment, called the 'womenomics programme' (D'AMBROGIO, 2017). However, Japan took 30 years to understand that violence against women is a big issue (Ahmed, 2007).

Japan is a recognised economic power globally and started its development activities many more years ago than other developed countries. In part of that, girls' education also started a long time ago. In Japan, the primary, secondary and tertiary level female enrolment ratio is increasingly higher. In 2019, 50.7% of Japanese women completed their secondary education, 45.4% completed their undergraduate degree, 32.4% graduated and joined their workforce, 82%, and 44.2% joined as part-timers (Quick Take, 2020).

After WW2, the allied power gave Japanese women the right to use their voting power and expand their opportunity to work in public office (Ahmed, 2007). However, traditional Japanese native politicians never supported Japanese women to become empowered. Therefore, without women's participation in the political sector and policymaking process, Japan cannot continue its sustainable economic growth in the long term and will not establish a gender-equal society where sexual-based violence against women has been abolished. Japan ranked 167 out of 192 countries in women's participation in government (Quick Take, 2020). Twenty-one female representatives are currently participating in the House of Representatives in Diet (Statista, 2021). However, many Japanese women sexually get harassed in their workplace. Due to poverty, lack of child education about human trafficking and less confidence in their ability and value, makes many schoolgirls get involved in odd jobs like (Joshi Kosei) JK Business, Pornography Industry, Junior Idol Culture, where schoolgirls are being used as like as sexual commodities (Banks, 2019). Besides those, many Japanese women became raped every day, and authorities have little knowledge about it. Table 2 presents the yearly number of rape cases.

Table 2: Number of the raped case file to the police (Japan)

Year	Number of cases
2018	1307
2017	1109
2016	989

Source: Statista Research Department (23 March 2021).

The Japanese government prioritised the phrase, 'power of women', which is not established in Japanese society yet. On 26 September 2013, in the 68<sup>th</sup> general session of the United Nations (UN), former prime minister, Shinzo Abe stated that Japan government is concerned about women empowerment and addressed it as the most vital source for Japanese economic growth, and they will create a society where women can shine (MOFAJ, 2021). He also emphasised continuous cooperation with international organisations to enhance its development assistance and cooperation with developing countries regarding the power of women and gender equality (MOFAJ, 2021). At present, Japan has a global agenda to increase women's position in developing countries with strong cooperation with national and local NGOs, civil society, business industries. However, nowadays, Japan

gives more importance to making a gender-equal society within the 21<sup>st</sup> century (MOFAJ, 2019). Besides, Japan also declared women empowerment and gender equality a global agenda (MOFAJ, 2021). Their constitution also supports gender equality. Article 14 of the Japanese constitution declared that 'all the people are equal under the law and there shall be no discrimination in social, political, economic or social relations because of race, creed, sex, social status or family origin' (Ahmed, 2007).

Japan is one of the most aged populated countries in the world. The childbirth rate in Japan was 1.36% in 2019 (The World Bank). Japanese women are not interested in having a baby because their maternity leave causes less job security and keeps a negative impact on their working career, and they can be fired from their workplace also (Hidge, Kristic, Trau & Zarina, 2018). However, women's participation in the workforce is increasing daily in Japan. More than three million women joined Japan's workforce from 2012 to 2019.

Due to long working hours, gender base different career paths, lack of baby care centre, absence of a women-friendly working environment are the main reasons Japanese women cannot participate in development activities (Quick Take, 2020). Another author mentioned a few more practical reasons for earning fewer wages than men have from their workplace: women's weak physical fitness, lack of experience, maternity leave, less knowledge about technology, a short length of service (Ahmed, 2007). That is why few women enter Japan's job market and get jobs in small sectors with low wages.

## **2.5 Comparative women empowerment in both countries**

Bangladesh and Japan, in both countries, most of the time, women do not disclose what is wrong happened with them, and they sometimes take it easy as it is part of their daily lives. As they become silent, those violent husbands or people remain safe, and their lousy side story remains untold. Though Japan is socioeconomically developed, they have political stability. However, their structural barriers, cultural beliefs and societal thought about women, and male-dominated political culture are the main reason the number of Japanese women representatives in the political sector and the policymaking process remain constant (Ahmed, 2007). On the other hand, Japanese society is known worldwide as a 'women friendly' society (Tarique & Zafar, 2008). However, the reality is quite different in Japan. However, the female primary and higher education ratio is higher in Japan, whereas the female education ratio is decent in Bangladesh. Moreover, in prospects of secondary education enrolment, life expectancy and

literacy rate gave them brighter opportunities for their future (D'AMBROGIO, 2017) rather than Bangladeshi women.

In the 1920s, the women's movement took place in Japan and courageously, they asked for their social, political, legal, educational rights, including job opportunities (Ahmed, 2007). This movement woke up all Japanese women to rethink their priority and concern of the working area, and they stopped staying under their husbands' shadows. The Japanese government arranged World Assembly for Women (WAW) in 2014, aiming to make a 'society in which all women can shine' (MOFAJ, 2021). On the other hand, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), these initiatives of the Bangladesh government playing a vital role in empowering women in Bangladesh. Both MDG and SDG these initiatives represent women's participation in Bangladesh's political sector (Tarique & Zafar, 2008).

Women's rights are also a human right, and they have the right to live with dignity and respect, can continue working without any harassment or risk; they also have the right to lead a life with social protection. Japanese woman's economic and political participation is still limited (Ahmed, 2007). Over 83% of female children work as household child labour (Alam, 2015). In the household, those female child labourers work day and night, and sometimes they face physical and mental torture and sometimes become sexually abused by the household members. As we know before, JK business is highly expanding in Japan where school-going female children are being used by paying a certain amount of money.

Consequently, empowering women from the root level is a matter of fact and a concerning issue for both countries. Since 2017, Japan has kept an eye on JK business and abolished female children, below 18, from JK business (Banks, 2019). On the other side, Bangladesh does not have these kinds of laws that can support them and encourage them to go further stage of their lives. However, the bitter truth is that Bangladesh started its developing activities many more years later than Japan, but Bangladesh did recognisable works in the women empowerment sector. So, we wish that Bangladeshi women can bring a brighter and shinier future for themselves (Wazed, 2017).

### **3. Objectives of the study**

The reviewed literature expresses the women's position in the society of Bangladesh and Japan. Most of the cases reviewed existing literature shows that women are improvising their position in Bangladesh and Japan, individually, of

course. However, there is no final authentic information about the comparison between Bangladesh and Japan regarding the women empowerment issue and which country is protecting women's rights appropriately. Besides that, finds the mention-able reasons for this comparison though Bangladesh and Japan have economic and political dissimilarities. Moreover, there is no possible way to determine the likely impacts of this comparison on women empowerment in those countries. Therefore, the following gaps have been identified in this research paper:

- A) Bangladesh or Japan, which country protects women's rights actively?
- B) Why has a comparison come between Bangladesh and Japan regarding women empowerment?
- C) Has this comparison kept any impact on the 'Women Empowerment' issue in those countries? Is this keeps a positive or negative impact?

#### **4. Methodology**

This research paper tries to interpret a past few documents where induction is the approach. Here mono-method qualitative is used for methodological choice, and case study is the strategy. Both primary and secondary data are being used for the findings. Primary data has been collected by taking four in-depth interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire written in English. A good number of documents, like books, articles, past research papers, organisational and governmental survey results, the newspaper has been exercised for collecting secondary data. Four interviews were taken in- 1 July 2021 and 9<sup>th</sup>& 10<sup>th</sup> July 2021, 19 September 2021, and 14 January 2022. The interviewee's lists are given in the Appendix section. To earn valuable data regarding the comparison between Bangladesh and Japan on women's position and to know its impacts, primary and secondary data has been collected through interviews and documentation. Thematic analysis of data used for presenting results of the study. All interviewees were informed about the background and aim of the study, and all interviewees consent was taken to cite names according to the necessity of the research.

#### **5. Discussion**

Empowering women is the demand of time and is highly concerning the issue at present. However, naturally, a mother is the first teacher of a child. It is a matter of unfortunate that our society ignores a mother's role as a primary instructor and

foundation builder of a child. A woman can handle everything on her own, like cooking, washing, cleaning, shopping, babysitting, taking care of other family members. Some of them may do part-time or full-time jobs with the permission of their father or husband or the eldest family members. Nowadays, some Japanese women are afraid to have a baby rather than have a baby; they are more focused on building a promising career (Responded 4, 2022). However, when doing something unusual like entrepreneurship, corporate job, or micro-business, women become nervous and hesitant. As we all know, naturally, women are unique but not confident enough to start something new (Responded 1, 2021).

### **5.1 Situation faced by women: Bangladesh and Japan**

Bangladesh and Japan, both countries people have a similar mentality that a mother has the only responsibility to take care of the baby and be a good wife and a good mother, nothing more than that. Most Japanese males still believe in that 'good wife, wise mother' concept (Responded 2, 2021). Bangladeshi people are also thinking like that; though it makes no sense, it still happens. So, in both countries, women are in a similar position because of their similar mindsets and thought processes. Male family members want that women should stay at home. Nowadays, many Japanese school-going female children are involved in various odd jobs, and they continue this after their adulthood as well, which has become a trend now. In this perspective, we may consider that Bangladeshi women are good. However, many Bangladeshi female children work as household workers due to poverty, broken family, and early marriage. Many of them are involved in prostitution because of the necessity to earn their own cost by themselves. In Japan, there is less job security, low-income family support or financial support, and a lack of early childcare centres (Responded 4, 2022). Keep women's limited participation in the Japanese workforce. Though the government has enacted laws, all remain in vain due to proper implementation.

A person cannot change their surroundings, education system, thoughts, or people's aspects alone, so problems, harassment, negative approach, and odd words will continuously come, but women should be determined to achieve their dreams (Responded 3, 2021). Like family, trade unions, business organisations, society, and government, every country entity must prioritise females. We should make women confident that their lives are critical sources of empowerment (Islam, 2014). By empowering women, there progress not only the women but also their families, society also progressed, which can open up opportunities for future socio-economic development of a country.

Awareness building regarding this issue is the most important thing, and mass education and general knowledge about women empowerment are also necessary. Besides that, we should give our family, society, and the world this opportunity to realise women's power. Moreover, the male should understand the importance of female members, and everyone should be respectful to the opposite gender. Family and societal support can make women confident, and society should encourage and support women to believe in themselves (Responded 1, 2021).

On the other hand, the government should enhance gender-friendly laws and policies. In 2016, Japan enacted a law, "The Act on Promotion of Women's Participation and Advancement in the Workplace," promoting a working-friendly environment for women to balance their work and private life (GoJ, 2017). Besides, constantly exercising those regulations and necessity basis modification is also important. In the workplace, the supplier should be more robust in their capacity-building policies and initiatives, and labour policies are also given more priority to create a women-friendly workplace. Family support is also needed for women to become empowered, and family is the root of where they can start up their dreams.

Those brave women who have faced various kinds of domestic or social violence should involve in women violence related consultancy profession to more robust their legal framework. Family and friends should provide psychological, health, and economic support. Legal support should be accomplished from police, local and national NGOs, organisations. These NGOs are working for the development of females and supporting them to utilise their skills and capability in the economic expansion of Bangladesh. They are also trying to make women confident to make their own decisions by themselves in every step of their lives and contribute more to their social development. However, the government and the international community should provide final and most important support and protection to a victim who faces gender-based violence.

The family must encourage their female members and support them in every spare of their life as well as we should also trust women's capability by which women can feel confident to do something new. Now it is high time for capable women to pursue their justice. Becoming empowering a woman means that we may empower a whole family as those women can take challenges in their different stages of life without other people's support. We should develop more assertive personalities to protest violence or crimes. However, women should not fear doing anything they want to do, and this should be their priority. Do not be afraid to take the first step; do not be afraid to make mistakes (Responded 1, 2021).

## 5.2 Comparison between Bangladesh and Japan

Comparison is always an encouraging thing, and it will be more exciting, competitive and fruitful when it happens between parties that still have dissimilarities in various sectors. In this sense, the comparison between Bangladesh and Japan in this influencing issue, women empowerment, will make Japanese people rethink women empowerment and inspire Bangladeshi women to continue their fight to improve their position in this society. Where still women are triggered if they got first in any official success, people started thinking that there must be political or relatives influence or any sexual attraction helps females succeed (Responded 3, 2021).

Everyone knows that Japan is a significant economic power with an educated, well behaved, hardworking population and sophisticated social structure. However, still, Japan cannot establish a gender-equal society where women can live with their dignity. As a result, women's position in Japan is not like what we think about them. Still, Japanese women work in small sectors with a small amount of money (Responded 2, 2021). Japanese people's mentality does not change yet. Japan cannot make well synchronisation between its development and women empowerment, and they only think about their economic growth without considering women's participation. As a result, this Bangladesh-Japan comparison comes on the women empowerment issue.

Our government is unitedly working in an urban and rural area to develop women's overall position. The Japanese government also aimed to establish a women-friendly society. Both countries should ensure a unique institutional framework for establishing a society where social, economic, and political awareness is acquired to empower women. Weak laws and less effectiveness make women weaker and males stronger. So, the government should strictly enact laws to reduce violence against women.

Bangladesh and Japan, both countries' women's position are improving gradually but not correctly. At present, Japan wishes to tell their history to the international community about its growth from the ashes of WW2 to a gender-equal society (MOFAJ, 2019). Now women are increasing their financial and economic resource access, creating social and economic networks to strengthen their business resources, and women are not going to keep silent against the oppression created by their family or husband. They raised their voice against violence (Islam, 2014) as Bangladesh and Japan started working on women empowerment, so all of us wish that they will bring their dream come true one day.

This comparison keeps both positive and negative impacts on women empowerment issues. This comparison will encourage Bangladeshi women to continue their struggle in a positive sense. We may find out our lacking, and our government should take initiatives to remove our weaknesses. Besides, both countries have a similar mentality, so we may take lessons from each other's policy, laws, and even our mistakes and improvise our lack (Responded 4, 2022). On the other side, Japanese people will be more concerned. Hopefully, people will change their thoughts about women in both countries and be more respectful to females.

In contrast, the negative site, Bangladeshi women will be more like Japanese women's mentality where Japanese women are not interested in getting married and having a baby due to less job security which makes their birth rate decline. As a result, the number of working-class and young generation people may be declined, and aged people numbers will be increased. It may keep a negative impact on our country as like Japan. However, we hope that this reality will be changed and women will shine like the star of the sky.

## **6. Limitations of the study and scope of future research**

This paper has examined comparatively which country is actively protecting women's rights and its possible impacts—secondary data used for clearing women's previous situation and primary data used for comparison. Due to COVID-19, three Bangladeshi and only one Japanese have participated in the interview. Besides, no recent data can present Japanese women's position to reduce cost. However, the in-depth interview has been taken from the Bangladeshi and Japanese interviewees. Therefore, fewer Japanese participants than Bangladeshi have attended an interview. So actual Japan's view regarding women empowerment is not visible, and recent Bangladeshi data are limited in the study. So, this paper's objective and discussion have a brighter opportunity for future research. This paper may diagnose comparative problems and solutions by exercising Japan's view and perspective directly by interviewing women empowerment issues.

## **7. Conclusion**

Success never comes within over a night. However, human beings believe that success will come one day. As we believed it, we have noticed empowering ingredients hidden in a female's subconscious mind, which is proven in our existing literature. Women are now improving their position, so they are being

promoted to our labour force. They can more muscular any countries development related activities. Without their participation, no country can continue their development projects. Women's position in Bangladesh and Japan is improving but not in a way that other countries can follow. Every human being has the equal right to live, grow, and be safely protected in society; unfortunately, women are sometimes deprived of their own families. They have the right to choose their aim, but society forces them to stay home. Religious values and conservative minds of family members put women behind and do not support women to become empowered. Every country should change their mentality and support women to do what it wants to do. Society should have changed its point of view regarding women and their rights. Family is the core of society, so families should change their mindset to help women do what they wish. So, every family, society, and country should encourage women to walk beside men, not behind anyone.

#### Appendix: Interviewee list

Respondent	Name	Occupation	Date of Interview	Sex
1.	Nafisa Nawal Khan Chowdhury	Territory Manager, Unilever, Bangladesh.	9 July 2021	Female
2.	Dr Abdullah-AL-Mamun	Assistant Professor & Chairman, Department of Japanese Studies, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh	1 <sup>st</sup> & 10 <sup>th</sup> July 2021	Male
3.	Sathi Biswas	Student, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh.	19 September 2021	Female
4.	Kohei Uno	Student, Kobe University, Japan.	14 January 2022	Male

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