



SOCIALSERVICESNETWORK

serving diverse communities

Layers of Diversity Within The South Asian Community

**A User-Friendly Booklet
About The South Asian Community**

Quick Facts

The South Asian community was the largest visible minority group in Ontario in 2006. Its population of 794,170 accounted for 28.9% of all visible minorities in the province.

South Asians are defined as any people who report ethnicity associated with the Southern part of Asia or who self-identify as part of the South Asian visible minority group.

South Asians are people who originate from Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka and also includes Diaspora who have migrated from other parts of the world but have ancestral routes to the South Asian countries.

The Canadian South Asian community is currently one of the most diverse visible minority groups that includes a range of ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. One remarkable quality that this group is recognized for is strong family interaction and social networks that are defined by ethnic customs, traditions and heritage languages.

Disclaimer

The booklet is meant to create awareness only. More detailed information should always be attained to completely understand an issue or belief. No intention is made to offend anyone or their beliefs. The opinions expressed herein are intended as a guide only. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents at the time of publication, neither the authors nor the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration accept any responsibility for any loss sustained as a result of using this booklet.

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This handout is funded by



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Overview

This handout is aimed at assisting human services agencies and the South Asian community to better understand the key cultural differences of the South Asian community from different religious and cultural backgrounds; different layers embedded within the South Asian fabric.

Social Services Network wishes to acknowledge the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, whose generous support has made this guide possible.

Social Services Network (SSN) is a not - for - profit charitable organization delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and services to the diverse South Asian community in York Region. SSN has developed a unique service delivery model whereby the services are delivered directly to the community at their places of worship and/or community meeting places. Social Services Network strives to promote and enhance the quality of life of the South Asian community.

Glossary of Key Terms

Culture:

Consists of the behaviours, ways of life, values and beliefs, arts and intuitions of a population that can be passed down from generation to generation

Diversity:

Differences among individuals or groups

Heritage:

The natural and cultural inheritance of an individual or community

South Asians:

In Canada, the South Asian designation has become a way to generally refer to people from the South Asian subcontinent

Greetings



Namaste, Aayubowan, Vanakkam

A slight bow with the hands pressed together in front of the face



As-Salaam O Alaykum

Raise the right hand to the forehead, palm curved and relaxed, in a salute-like gesture



Sat Sri Akaal

Hands pressed together below the head



Handshake

Today most people shake hands, though traditionally only with those of the same sex

Map of South Asia



Bangladesh



Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dhaka
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It is bordered by India on all sides except for a small border with Burma (Myanmar) to the far southeast and by the Bay of Bengal to the south
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tropical monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bangla or Bengali (official and national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islam
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kabaddi (players must hold their breath while making raids into the opposing team's half of the field.)

Bhutan



Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thimphu
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bordered to the south, east and west by the Republic of India and to the north by People's Republic of China
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tropical• Monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dzongkha (official and national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mahayana Buddhism
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Archery

India



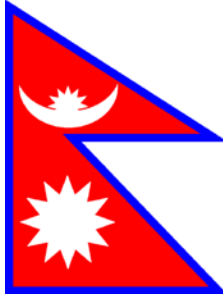
Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Delhi
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bounded by the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arabian Sea on the west, the Bay of Bengal on the east, Pakistan to the west; People's Republic of China, Nepal, and Bhutan to the north; and Bangladesh and Burma to the east. India is in the vicinity of Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Indonesia in the Indian Ocean.
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hindi (official and national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hinduism
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Field Hockey

Maldives



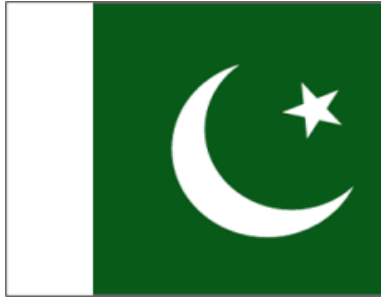
Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Male
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Island country in the Indian Ocean formed by a double chain of twenty-six atolls stretching along the north-south direction off India's Lakshadweep islands, between Minicoy Island and Chagos Archipelago. It stands in the Laccadive Sea, south-west of Sri Lanka.
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dry Season (Northwest Monsoon)• Wet Season (Southwest Monsoon)
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dhivehi (official and national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islam
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water Sports

Nepal



Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kathmandu
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bordered to the north by the People's Republic of China, and to the south, east, and west by the Republic of India.
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tropical• Monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nepali (official and national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hinduism
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dandi-biyo (played with a help of a stick (Dandi) about two feet long and a wooden pin (Biyo) about half feet long. The pin is a small wooden stick with pointed ends.)

Pakistan



Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islamabad
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coastline along the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Oman in the south, and is bordered by Afghanistan and Iran in the west, India in the east and the People's Republic of China in the far northeast. Tajikistan also lies very close to Pakistan but is separated by the narrow Wakhan Corridor.
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tropical• Monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Urdu (official and national language).
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Islam
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Field Hockey and Polo

Sri Lanka



Capital City:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colombo
Geography:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An Island off the south-eastern coast shores of India in the Indian Ocean
Climate:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tropical• Monsoons
Languages:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sinhala (official and national language).• Tamil (national language)
Largest Religion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Buddhism
National Sport:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Volleyball

South Asian Cuisine

The recipes presented in this section are intended to stimulate your curiosity. The best way to learn about, or fine tune recipes, is to ask individuals from the culture.

The cuisine of the Asian sub-continent is far more diverse than the word "curry" can ever describe. The 7 South Asian countries display a huge diversity of cooking.



Recipe from Bangladesh

Mixed Vegetables

Ingredients:

- 2 Carrots
- 150 grams of French beans
- 4 Onions, cut into rings
- ½ cup of Shelled peas
- 1 tbsp of Ginger, grated
- 2 Green chilies, chopped
- 3 Tomatoes, chopped
- ½ tsp of Turmeric powder
- ½ tsp of Garam masala
- 1 tsp of Coriander powder
- ½ tsp of red Chili powder
- 1 tsp of Tandoori masala
- 2 Cloves, crushed into a powder
- 3 tbsp of Oil

Preparation:

1. Peel Carrots and cut them length wise, diagonally.
2. Thread French beans and cut diagonally into ½" slices.
3. Heat oil and add Onions and cook them until they are transparent.
4. Add the Ginger and Green chilies and cook for ½ a minute.
5. Add the Turmeric powder and mix well.
6. Add the Tomatoes and cook for 4-5 minutes.
7. Add the Garam masala, Coriander powder and red Chili powder. Cook until the oil separates.
8. Add the Beans, Carrots and Peas and stir fry for 4-5 minutes.
9. Cover and cook mixture on low heat until the vegetables are fully cooked.
10. Add the Tandoori masala and powdered Cloves. Mix well and serve hot.

Recipe from Bhutan

Ema Datshi

Ingredients:

- 250 grams of Green chilies (adjust amount according to your tolerance)
- 1 Onion, cut into long slices
- 2 Tomatoes
- 250 grams of Danish Feta cheese
- 5 cloves of Garlic, finely crushed
- 3 sprigs of Fresh Coriander
- 2 tsp of Vegetable oil

Preparation:

1. Cut chilies into long slices (1 Chili = 4 slices).
2. Put Chilies and sliced Onions in a pot with 400ml of water.
3. Add 2 tsp of Vegetable oil.
4. Bring mixture to a boil over medium heat for approximately 10 minutes.
5. Add Tomatoes and Garlic and boil for an additional 2 minutes.
6. Add Cheese and let the mixture remain over low heat for 2-3 minutes.
7. Finally, add the fresh Coriander and turn off the heat, do not remove the pot from the heated stove. Stir the mixture thoroughly and keep the pot covered over for approximately 2 minutes.
8. Serve this dish with a generous portion of Red Rice or polished White Rice, along with other dishes, if you wish.

Note: The Cheese that is usually used to prepare this dish cannot be found outside of Bhutan. The cheese is from a local Farmer and has a unique texture that doesn't dissolve when placed in boiling water. Bhutanese citizens living outside of Bhutan have not been able to find a good substitute. Common substitutions are "Farmer's cheese" from a local Farmer's Market or grocer or a simple mixture that consists of various kinds of cheeses.

Caution: This dish is VERY HOT!

Recipe from India

Butter Chicken

Serves 4-6

If desired, you may use boneless, skinless Chicken thighs in addition to the portions of meat noted below to create a main dish that can serve more individuals.

Ingredients:

- 2 lbs of boneless, skinless Chicken breasts, cut into 1 inch pieces
- 2 tbsp of Lemon juice
- 2 tbsp of Olive oil
- 2 tsp of Curry powder
- 1 Onion, thinly sliced
- 3 cloves of Garlic, minced
- 1 tbsp of finely chopped Ginger
- 1/8 tsp of White pepper
- ½ tsp of Salt
- 2 cups of Tomato puree
- 2 tbsp of Butter
- ½ cup heavy Cream or Evaporated Milk

Preparation:

1. In medium bowl, place cut pieces of chicken and sprinkle them with Lemon juice, 1 tbsp of Olive oil and 1 tsp of Curry powder. Toss the Chicken pieces in the spices until each piece is fully coated. Set aside.
2. In heavy skillet, cook the Onion, Garlic and Ginger in 1 tbsp of Olive oil and 1 tbsp of butter until fragrant. Add the remaining Curry powder, White pepper, Salt, Tomato puree and 2 tbsp of butter and simmer for 10 minutes.
3. Stir in marinated Chicken pieces and bring mixture to a boil, reduce heat and allow mixture to simmer for approximately 15 minutes until Chicken is thoroughly cooked. Stir in heavy cream or milk and serve over hot Rice (Basmati Rice is preferred to give this dish its classic flavour).

Recipe from Maldives

Fish Curry

Ingredients:

- 500 grams of Tuna, chopped into 1 inch cubes
- 2 tbsp of Cooking Oil
- ½ cup of Onions, sliced
- 1 tsp of Garlic, chopped
- ½ tsp of Ginger, crushed
- 1 tsp of Chili Powder
- 3-5 Curry leaves
- 1 inch of Rampa Leaves
- ½ cup of thick Coconut Cream
- 1 cup of Coconut Milk
- 2 cups of Water
- 1 ½ tsp of Salt

Preparation:

1. Heat the Cooking Oil and sauté the Onions, Garlic, Curry leaves and Rampa leaves.
2. When the Onion has reached a light golden brown, add the Chili powder and stir for about 30 seconds.
3. Add the Curry powder and stir the mixture for an additional 30 seconds.
4. Add the Tuna and Ginger and toss until the Tuna is fully coated with the spice mixture.
5. Add the Salt, Coconut milk and Water and cook over medium heat and be sure to stir the mixture every few minutes to make sure the Coconut milk does not form into lumps.
6. Once the mixture reaches a boil, let it continue to boil over medium heat for about 10 minutes before adding the Coconut cream. Once the Coconut cream has been added to the mixture, allow it to simmer for 2 – 3 minutes.
7. Serve hot!

Recipe from Nepal

Dal Bhaat (Rice and Lentils)

Ingredients

Plain Rice (Bhat)

- 2 cups rice (Basmati or Long grain preferred)
- 4 cups (1ltr) water
- 1 tsp butter (optional)

Lentils (Dal)

- 1½ cups lentil (any kind)
- 4 to 5 cups of water (depends preference of your consistency of liquid)
- ½ tsp turmeric
- ¼ tsp (pinch) asafetida
- ¼ tsp lemon juice drops
- 1 tbsp fresh ginger paste
- 1 tsp garlic, minced
- 6 tbsp clarified butter (ghee)
- ¾ cup sliced onions
- 2 chilies (dried red chilies preferred) (depends on your preference)
- Salt to taste

Preparation

Rice: Wash rice and soak for 5 minutes. Boil the rice over medium heat for about 10 -15 minutes. Stir once thoroughly. Add butter to make the rice flavourful and make it soft and fluffy. Turn the heat to low and cook, covered, for 5 more minutes until done.

Lentils: Wash and soak lentils for 10 minutes. Remove anything that floats on the surface and drain with extra water. Add drained lentils in fresh water and bring to a boil. Add all spices. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, for 20 to 30 minutes until lentils are soft and the consistency is similar to that of porridge. In a small pan heat the remaining butter and fry the onions, chilies and garlic. Stir them into the lentils for a few minutes before you stop boiling. Serve with rice.

Recipe from Pakistan

Mutter Pulao (Rice Pilaf with Peas)

Ingredients

- 2 cups long grain white rice, rinsed and drained
- 3/4 cup peas, rinsed and drained
- 1 medium yellow onion, thinly sliced
- 4 cups chicken stock
- 3 cloves
- 1 large bay leaf
- 1 black cardamom pod (black elachi)
- 5 whole black peppercorns
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon turmeric powder
- 1/2 teaspoon coriander powder
- 1/2-1 teaspoon chili powder
- 1 tablespoon garlic paste
- 1 tablespoon ginger paste
- 4 tablespoons oil
- Salt to taste

Preparation

In a pot, heat up the oil on medium high heat. Add the onion and cook until it softens, becomes translucent and releases its water. Do not brown or dry out. Add cloves, bay leaf, cardamom, peppercorn and cumin. Fry for about a minute or so. Add turmeric powder, coriander powder and chilli powder. Stir and fry for a bit. If it looks a little dry add a little bit of the chicken stock that you have set aside. Add the garlic and ginger paste; stir fry a minute or two. Add the peas and chicken stock and let it warm up but not to a boil. Add rice and salt to taste. Stir well. Increase heat to high. Let the rice come to a boil and let it continue to boil for 5 minutes. Give a quick stir, cover with lid and turn the heat down to medium and let it cook for 15 minutes. Turn the stove off. Do not uncover the rice or move it from the stove. Let it sit in its steam for 5-10 minutes as the stove cools down allowing the rice to become fluffy. Serve hot!

Recipe from Sri Lanka

Kiri Buth (Milk Rice)

Ingredients:

- 250 grams of Rice, rinsed and drained
- 250 ml of Water
- 375 ml thick Coconut Milk
- ½ tsp of Salt

Preparation:

1. Wash the Rice and place it in a pot with water and bring it to a simmer. Allow the Rice to cook in the simmering pot until it becomes soft.
2. Add the Coconut milk and Salt and mix thoroughly.
3. Cover the pot and let the Rice continue to simmer over low heat until the Coconut Milk is fully absorbed by the Rice.
4. Empty the Rice into a shallow serving dish and smooth out the Rice mixture, patting it flat.
5. Once the mixture has cooled, the mixture should be firm. Cut the mixture into diamond and square shapes and serve this dish as a dessert or light snack.

South Asian Attire For Women



Saree: Poetry in Fabric

Composed of at least five yards of cotton, silk, or any material of a synthetic nature wrapped round and tapering down the lower part of the body. One end of the fabric is slung round the shoulders over a tightly-fitting bodice of cotton or silk, often baring the midriff.

Salwar Kameez

Refers to a tunic and pant ensemble usually worn with a dupati (scarf) by Muslim women living in Northern India, Pakistan and countries of the Middle East. Salwar (or Chalwar) are loose, draped, pleated or gathered trousers that are fitted at the ankle. The Kameez is traditionally a flared, long sleeved tunic top worn with the loose trousers.



Hijab

Often used to describe the head scarf or modest dress worn by women, who are required to cover everything except their face and hands in the sight of anyone other than the immediate family.

Niqab

A garment (often two pieces) that covers the entire body, including the hair and face, except for the eyes.

Burqa

A voluminous head-to-toe covering with a mesh grid over the eyes.



South Asian Attire For Men

Kurta and Pyjama

A *kurta* is a long cotton shirt with or without a collar, a *pyjama* is a matching cotton pair of trousers. The whole is a typical Indian traditional costume worn by a man.



Dhoti

The traditional dress for the lower part of the male body, consisting of a piece of unstitched cloth draped over the hips and legs. Worn in various ways in different parts of South Asia.

Sherwani

A coat-like garment buttoned in the front which reaches down to the knees or lower. Usually has embroidery or some other types of embellishment. Worn by men at weddings and other formal occasions.



Religions and Religious Celebrations

South Asia is home to many major world religions. Like other parts of the world, there will be those community members that are absolutely devout in their faith, others that choose to practice certain parts of their faith, and others that may not practice their faith at all.

Please note that there are many celebrations and beliefs that are not mentioned in this booklet. The information provided below is very basic. As well, in different geographic or cultural communities, these events can be celebrated on different days and in unique ways, despite being a part of the same religion.

In York Region the major religions represented in the South Asian community are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism. Other religions of South Asia are Christianity, Jainism, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, though the number of followers of these religions is much less.

Buddhism

Quick Facts

- 4th largest religion in the world
- 1% of the total Canadian population. (Stats Canada 2001)
- 3 parts of Buddhism: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana.
- Follow teachings of Lord Gautama Buddha

Religious Observances:

Holy days are based on their regional and cultural affiliation.
Buddhists use both the lunar and solar calendar

Special Celebrations:

- **Buddha's Birthday**
- **Buddha's Day Of Enlightenment (Rohatsu)**
- **Wesak**, a celebration of Buddha's birth, enlightenment and everlasting peace that is celebrated by all Buddhist groups
- **Buddha Day (Vishaka Puja)** celebration of Buddha's birth enlightenment and death
- **Dharma Day (Asalha Puja)** celebration of Buddha's first sermon after his enlightenment



Hinduism

Quick Facts

- 3rd largest religion in the world
- 1% of the total Canadian population. (Stats Canada 2001)

Religious Observances:

Holy days are based on their regional and cultural affiliation.
Hindus use both the lunar and solar calendar

Special Celebrations:

- **Diwali** – festival of lights, a festival to pay homage to Lord Krishna and Lord Rama.
- **Holi** - a popular spring festival.
- **Navarati (“Nine Nights”)** - festival of worship and dance.
- **Raksha Bandhan** - Rakhi is a special occasion to celebrate the chaste bond of love between a brother and a sister.
- **Shivaratri** - is the great night of Shiva, followers of Shiva observe religious fasting and the offering of Bael (Bilva) leaves to the Shiva.



Islam

Quick Facts

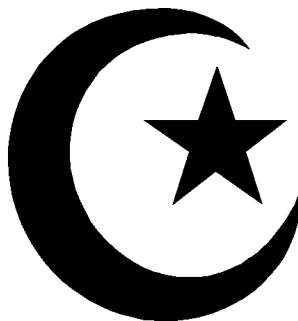
- 2nd largest religion in the world
- 2.5% of the total Canadian population. (Stats Canada 2006)
- 2 main denominations:
 - Shi'a
 - Sunni
 - Other Smaller Groups (e.g Ismaili and Ahmadiyahs)

Religious Observances:

Holy days may be determined by consulting an Islamic centre.

Special Celebrations:

- **Eid-UI-Fitr** - marks the end of Ramadan, the Islamic holy month of fasting.
- **Eid-UI-Adha (day of scarifice)** - commemorate the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God.
- **Mawlid-al-Nabi** - celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam.
- **Al-Hijra Muharram** - Muslim New Year, the beginning of the first lunar month.
- **Ashura** - celebrated on the 10th day of the Muslim month of Muharram



Sikhism

Quick Facts

- 5th largest religion in the world
- 0.9% of the total Canadian population. (Stats Canada 2001)
- Founder: Guru Nanak
- Sikh: means Disciple

Religious Observances:

Holy days are based on according to Nankshahi calendar, named after Guru Nanak Dev Ji

Special Celebrations:

- **Baisakhi** - is an ancient harvest festival in the Punjab region, which also marks beginning of a new solar year, and new harvest season.
- **Diwali** - The Sikhs celebrate Diwali because Guru Hargobind reached Amritsar on Diwali day after his release from Gwalior jail.
- **Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday**
- **Installation of the Guru Granth Sahib**
- **Guru Nanak's Birthday**



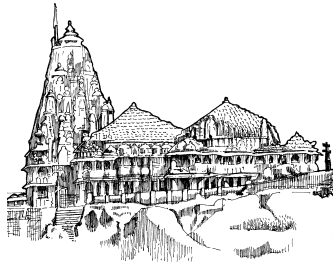
Visiting South Asian Worship Places

Visiting A Buddhist Temple:



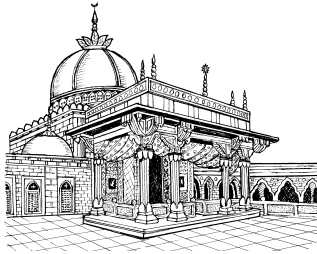
- Wear comfortable attire.
- Remove your shoes.
- Sit quietly on the floor with your legs crossed facing Lord Buddha

Visiting A Hindu Temple:



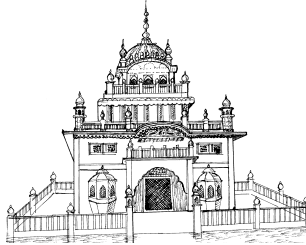
- Dress modestly.
- Remove your shoes.
- Bow before the Deities.
- Offer any donation such as flowers, food items or money.
- Sit quietly on the floor with your legs crossed facing the Deities.
- Accept *prasad* (Food offered to a deity which is afterwards eaten by the devotee.)

Visiting A Mosque:



- Women need to cover their head, arms and legs
- Remove your shoes.
- Perform Wudhu washing of arms, face, mouth, feet, and neck.
- Men and women sit separately
- Sit quietly in rows on the floor facing Mecca (East)

Visiting A Sikh Temple:



- Be modestly attired.
- Cover your head.
- Remove your shoes.
- Wash hands and feet if needed.
- Bow before the Guru Granth.
- Offer any donation such as flowers, food items or money.
- Men and women sit separately
- Sit quietly on the floor with your legs crossed facing Guru Granth.
- Accept *prasad*, a sanctified delicacy made from flour, butter, and sugar.
- Enjoy a meal from the free kitchen.

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Sri Lanka: www.srilanka.travel/

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The Sikhism: www.sikhs.org

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