

The Quest For Self And Nation In The Novel 'Jasmine' By Bharathi Mukerji: A Postcolonial Analysis

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Abstract:

The issues and outcomes of a nation's decolonization are the subject of postcolonial studies. It questions about the political, economic, and cultural independence of people who were oppressed in the past. Postcolonialism offers a variety of scholarly resources and perspectives to investigate the social, cultural, and psychological effects of colonialism and imperialism. As a component of post colonial studies , postcolonial literature recurrently address the themes like Colonization, nationalism, cultural identity, family, the future and the past, slavery, migration, subjugation and resistance, discrimination, race, gender, and place. Bharati Mukherjee as a first generation diasporic writer investigates the theme of immigration, emigration, identity, alienation, gender differences and transformation of culture in her works. The decolonized people develop a postcolonial identity through cultural interactions between various identities- personal, cultural, national, ethnic, gender-based, and class-based. An identity crisis is when people examine themselves and their perceptions of themselves. The identity crisis emerged as a result of the postcolonial conditions and difficult circumstances that newly freed nations and countries faced in their search for and

formation of self-identity. In recent times Diaspora literature is considered part of postcolonial literature. Hence Diaspora writers tend to write about the problem of quest for identity in their writings. The broad objective of this paper is to examine how Mukherjee's "Jasmine" addresses themes of personal and national identities, in addition to themes of alienation, multiculturalism and the love story and struggles of the protagonist. The research's specific objective is to demonstrate that these themes are postcolonial. The analytical method is used by referring to primary and available critical resources by well-known authors.

Key words: postcolonial, migration, identity, alienation, multiculturalism

Introduction: postcolonial literature explores the practice and legacy of colonialism, as well as the postcolonial experience of those whose ancestors were colonized. Tensions between the colonizer and the colonized or between the old colonial society and the new postcolonial society are other characteristics of postcolonial fiction. The purpose of post colonialism is to both acknowledge and combat the persistent effects of colonialism on cultures. Slavery, migration, suppression and resistance, difference, race, gender, alienation, exile, identity, confusion, and location are all common experiences in post colonialism. It is a historical, philosophical, and linguistic discourse in opposition to European imperialism. It also questions the political and cultural independence of people who were once under control. **Catherine Keller, in his book 'Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming'** precisely observes post colonialism as

"The abiding western demonology can with religion sanction identify anything dark, profound, or fluid with a revolting chaos, an evil to be mastered, a nothing to be ignored. 'God had made us master organizers of the world to establish system where chaos reigns. He has made us adept in government that we may administer government among savages and senile peoples.' From the vantage point of the colonizing episteme, the evil is always disorder rather than unjust order; anarchy rather than control, darkness rather than pallor. To plead otherwise is to write 'carte blanche for chaos.' Yet those who wear the mark of chaos,

the skins of darkness, and the genders of unspeakable openings -- that Others of Order keep finding voice. But they continue to be muted by the bellowing of the dominant discourse."

Diaspora writing is considered a postcolonial discourse in contemporary critical theories. According to postcolonial theory, individuals who came to the Euro-American regions as immigrants or workers and continue to have some degree of contact or affinity with their native cultures are considered members of their respective Diasporas. In postcolonial literature, Diaspora writing frequently discusses the dislocation of a shared identity, particularly in Caribbean, Asian American, and other country writings. Literature from the Diaspora reflects the settlement-induced immigrant experience. Themes of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, and identity search are frequently discussed. Additionally, it discusses matters pertaining to the assimilation or division of cultures. Literature from the Diaspora reflects the settlement-induced immigrant experience. Themes of alienation, displacement, existential rootlessness, nostalgia, and identity search are frequently discussed. Additionally, it discusses matters pertaining to the assimilation or division of cultures.

Okwui Enwezor explains Diaspora literature as

"The formation of a Diaspora could be articulated as the quintessential journey into becoming; a process marked by incessant regroupings, recreations, and reiteration. Together these stressed actions strive to open up new spaces of discursive and formative postcolonial consciousness."

The present study, specifically aims to reveal how postcolonial themes personal and national identities are addressed in Diaspora literature by using Bharathi Mukerji's novel *Jasmine* as an example.

Literature Review: By reading publications such as Pramod K. Nayar's "Postcolonial Literature: An Introduction, J. P. Sartre and Albert Memmi's "The Colonialist and the Colonial zed," Edward Said's "Orientalism," Cambridge's "History of postcolonial literature," and a few research articles all contributed to the review of the existing literature on post colonialism. Pramod K. Nayar has negotiated with and

responded to the experience of colonial subjugation as a whole, as well as postcolonial writing from Africa, Asia, and South America. Insightful perspectives on colonial inheritance and resistance that are still relevant today are provided by Albert Memmi, who presents colonialism as a disease of Europeans and, most importantly, he demonstrates that colonialism destroys both the colonizer and the colonized. According to Said, Western explorers, poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators created a fictitious image of the Orient or the East. This serves as the primary foundation for his theory of post colonialism.

The term "post colonialism" is used by the authors to describe the time period immediately following European colonization of the world. All works that oppose colonialism are referred to as "postcolonial literature," It includes literature written before and after colonization. The theory focuses primarily on how imperialism and colonialism use power, culture, religion, and economics. As a result, the term "post colonialism" does not refer to a specific era in history. Instead, it focuses on texts, theories, and methods that advocate for change, offer solutions to inequality, and initiate social change. According to Boehmer...

'Post colonialism is, as a result, a process of situation analysis, scenario challenging, and the development of societal awareness. Postcolonial theory-based works of literature are also the subject of analysis by a subset of postcolonial critics'. Due to the focus on social issues, the writers expanded to include newly marginalized societies.

Hypothesis: The study is based on two hypotheses

- i) The Diaspora is regarded as a postcolonial discourse, and Bharathi Mkeerji's novel "Jasmine" reflects postcolonial themes.
- ii.) The emigrants search for their identity and nation in the dejected foreign land.

Objectives: The research's objectives are listed below.

- i) To comprehend what postcolonial literature means.
- ii) To understand prominent critics' concept of postcolonial literature;

- iii) To figure out the themes of postcolonial literature;
- iv) To grasp that diaspora authors deal with postcolonial themes;
- v) To realize that the novel *Jasmine* contains postcolonial literature themes.
- vi) To emphasize the quest for identity as major postcolonial literary themes in *Jasmine*.

Discussion: One of the most well-known novelists from the Indian diaspora, Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian-born American novelist and short story writer who was born on July 27, 1940, in Calcutta, India. She passed away on January 28, 2017, in New York, New York, United States. Mukherjee came from a wealthy family. She attended an Anglicized Bengali school. The family relocated for three years before returning to India. Mukherjee earned her B.A. from the University of Calcutta and an M.A. from the University of Baroda. After that, she applied to the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she graduated with an M.F.A. and with a Ph.D. She moved to Canada. Then, she moved to the United States in 1980 and started teaching at the university level. In 1989, she became a citizen of the United States and accepted a teaching position at the University of California at Berkeley in the areas of postcolonial and world literature.

By contributing to Indian English writing, she has earned a place in the international literary community. In her writing, she outlined the cultural shifts and alienation that are part of the immigrant experience. Bharati Mukherjee explores postcolonial themes such as expatriation, immigration, and transformation in her novels. Six novels, including *The Tiger's Daughter*, *Wife*, *Jasmine*, *The Holder of the World*, *Leave It to Me*, *Desirable Daughters*, and *The Tree Bride*, are among her works of creative writing. Bharati Mukherjee writes in a unique and imaginative way. In her symbolism and metaphorical art, she uses great technique. Everything Mukherjee writes about is based on her personal experience and intimate knowledge of India's culture and tradition. Though it is difficult to classify her fiction, the majority of it deals with identity, multiculturalism, globalization after colonialism. The theme of identity is explored in this paper.

Bharati Mukherjee is an accomplished writer whose imaginative sensibility creates characters who struggle with transformation and assimilation issues and are driven to move. She describes her own works as "stories of discarded languages and broken identities." with characters that have the desire to join a new community" In her writings, she gives an estimate of the identity shift she went through for herself.

Personal identity:

Postcolonial theorists and critics have consistently regarded the issue of identity as a central topic of discussion. As Sheoran aptly points out,

"The major themes in works written during the postcolonial era have often revolved around the fragmentation and identity crisis experienced by formerly colonized peoples, as well as the profound impacts of colonialism on indigenous cultures" (Sheoran 1). Consequently, novelists have not shied away from addressing the issues of diaspora, exile, and matters closely linked to identity in their works.

In the realm of postcolonial literature, there has been a deliberate effort to deconstruct the power of signs and challenge the notion of a fixed truth, as MacCarthy notes,

"One of the primary concerns of these writers, both in their fiction and non-fiction, is the theme of hybridity and ambivalence towards received traditions, values, and identity" Renowned authors like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie, Sam Selvon, and others have skillfully depicted the struggles of immigrants in their quest to establish and resist threats to their identities. Works such as V.S. Naipaul's "The Mimic Men" and Sam Selvon's "The Lonely Londoners" vividly illustrate the challenges faced by immigrants as they navigate the intricate terrain of identity in a foreign land.

In a broader perspective, particularly concerning British imperial power, many postcolonial novels have used London as a significant setting. This city symbolizes imperial authority, expectations, fears, and the multicultural image of the new world, as highlighted in Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" and other similar novels (Halloran 121). Rebbica Dyer argues that Sam Selvon, in "The Lonely

Londoners," uses actual London locations to assert the claims of colonial migrants to a geographical location profoundly associated with British imperialism and culture. Selvon's novel powerfully captures the experiences of Trinidadian migrants in London and their feelings of displacement and loss of identity, a theme that resonates with Graham Macphee's assertion that postcolonial literature requires sensitivity to the submerged ways in which individuals conceive both individual and collective identities.

In Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North," the crises of identity are intricately linked to the legacy of imperial power, unraveling the concept of "otherness." As Hughes suggests, the characters in the novel exemplify how colonialism dismantled and transformed modes of identification, resulting in deeper chasms in individuals' experiences of life and community. The selected postcolonial novels in this dissertation delve into the dilemma of constructing a unique identity that differentiates colonized people from what the colonial system imposed upon them. Additionally, these novels explore the immigrants' search for identity while grappling with feelings of displacement, the recognition dilemma, and the struggle to affirm their identity through behavior and tradition.

Many literary critics view "The Lonely Londoners" as a text dedicated to portraying the specific experiences of marginalized and diasporic individuals in their encounters with the colonial center of London. As Andrew Teverson argues, European-derived traditions coexist with other traditions, expressing either Caribbean identity within the West Indies or Caribbean identity within European diasporas. Mark Looker, in "Atlantic Passages," suggests that Sam Selvon was a pioneer in constructing a representation of the lives of black immigrants in 1950s London, involving a degree of experimental inventiveness in forming a subcultural identity. Tayeb Salih's "Season of Migration to the North" addresses the confrontation between East and West through its main protagonist, Mustafa Saeed, offering a unique perspective on colonialism and its impact on individuals. The novel has been hailed for its contribution to literature and its exploration of themes such as self-identity, cultural duality, and the clash between East and West.

In the novel, Mustafa Saeed's sense of place and belonging is profoundly lacking, characterized by his inability to find a true sense of home or belonging to a group. His English identity creates further distortions in his relationship with place, as Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" underscores the difficulty of accommodating those who do not fit neatly into existing social and cultural divisions. The imperial gaze of his colleagues further confounds his self-identity, while his attempts to resist imperialism through philandering only cloud his vision of London as a potential home, exacerbating his sense of placelessness and place-relations. According to Mike Velez, England provides no refuge for individuals like Saeed, who cannot easily fit into established social and cultural divisions. The parodic settings in Salih's work highlight the ironies inherent in colonial mimicry.

Identity and its complexities serve as the central theme depicted and explored by novelists of the postcolonial era. It is impossible to ignore this theme, as it has become a defining feature of postcolonial literature. The novels delve into the manifestations of colonial policies and their embodiment by individuals educated within Western systems of education, resulting in a specific type of power and knowledge.

The crisis of identity is a prominent theme in V.S. Naipaul's "The Mimic Men." The protagonist, a survivor of the colonial era, grapples with the challenge of creating an original identity. Caught between imitation of the colonizers in a futile attempt at uniqueness and a return to the roles imposed by colonization, the notion of mimicry takes center stage, reflecting the ambivalence of colonial discourse. As Reeta Harode suggests, the novel's title symbolizes the condition of colonized individuals who imitate and emulate the lifestyle and perspectives of their colonizers.

Etymologically, the term "identity" originates in the Latin word "Idem," signifying sameness or continuity. This concept encompasses various facets, including one's social role, personal traits, and conscious self-images, representing the authentic essence of one. It manifests prominently throughout diasporic literature. Diasporic literature delves into the multifaceted identities forged across different locations, languages, religions, and cultures

in both the "homeland" and the "host land." Indian diasporic literature has transformed, acquiring a new identity through a reciprocal process of self-fashioning and growing acceptance within the adopted country. The Diaspora experience generates encounters between languages, cultures, and thoughts, resulting in what Homi Bhabha referred to as a "hybridist" identity. Renowned Diasporic authors such as Jhumpa Lahiri, V.S. Naipaul, Bharti Mukherjee, Rohinton Mistry, and Kiran Desai, among others, have artfully captured this complex narrative.

Initially, individuals within the Diaspora endeavor to maintain their distinct identity within their own community. However, upon venturing outside their community, their social identity undergoes transformation due to their migration from their homeland to their adopted country. This transformation raises questions about both social and personal identities. It necessitates the creation of a new identity, forged through intellectual, physical, and political abilities. This newly formed identity is often labeled as expatriate, immigrant, or transnational, although distinctions exist between these terms at an individual level. In contemporary discourse, these terms are often used interchangeably to describe individuals residing in a country other than their place of origin.

Diasporic fiction captures the dual experiences of the expatriate and their ties to their motherland. Ultimately, diasporic fiction serves as a bridge connecting these two opposing worlds. Writers in exile or immigrants navigate both temporal and spatial dimensions in their narratives, seeking to find a sense of belonging and connection. As Meena Alexander eloquently phrases it, they engage in "writing in search of a homeland."

A person's identity is intricately molded by their perception of the world that surrounds them. This identity draws from various sources, including religion, race, class, the family's economic and social status, as well as the cultural and religious beliefs shared by the society in which the individual resides. When an individual migrates from their place of birth and upbringing, many of these beliefs and values accompany them to their destination, a phenomenon sociologist N. Jeyaram aptly termed "the socio-cultural baggage carried by the migrant."

In the first generation of immigrants, the act of migration often gives rise to feelings of alienation, nostalgia for the past, and a sense of rootlessness. This is because they tend to hold onto the cultural beliefs, practices, and norms of their homeland, resisting the transition to their new surroundings. The first-generation Diaspora often clings to familiar aspects such as food, clothing, and language as evident markers of their original culture, setting them apart and emphasizing their distinctiveness. This displacement or dislocation places them in a liminal position, living in between two worlds or on the borderlands. This displacement gives rise to the concept of "double consciousness" and "unhomeliness," as noted by scholar Lois Tyson, who identifies these as key features of postcolonial diaspora. "Double consciousness" is characterized by an unstable sense of self resulting from forced migration. In the diaspora, the sensation of being caught between two cultures yet belonging to neither stems from the cultural displacement in which one resides, a condition referred to by scholars like Homi Bhabha as "unhomeliness." To be "unhomed" is to feel out of place, even in one's own home and even within oneself, ultimately transforming one's cultural identity into a form of psychological exile.

In the second generation, the children born to immigrants find themselves straddling two distinct cultures and societies: the host culture of their birthplace and their ancestral home culture. This often leads to a sense of "in-betweenness" that can result in either a loss of identity and alienation or the development of a hybrid identity. This creates tensions between the desire for affiliation with the host culture and the need to maintain their ethnic identity among the younger generations. Consequently, conflicts may arise between parents who uphold their cultural heritage and children who aspire to assimilate into the culture of the host country. In the postcolonial concept of Diaspora, the negotiation of hybridity is seen as a natural phenomenon, encapsulated in the slogan "think globally and live locally."

Personal identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that is shaped by a variety of factors, including our culture, upbringing, experiences, and relationships. In Bharati Mukherjee's novel *Jasmine*, the protagonist, Jasmine, undergoes a significant journey of self-discovery

and identity formation as she navigates the challenges of immigration, cultural assimilation, and personal trauma

Jasmine's quest for self-identity begins in her native India, where she is constrained by the patriarchal norms and traditions of her village. As a young woman, she is expected to marry and surrender to her husband and family. However, Jasmine rebels against these expectations and refuses to be defined by her traditional role. She escapes from her oppressive marriage and embarks on a journey to America, where she hopes to create a new life for herself.

In America, Jasmine faces a new set of challenges. She is an immigrant in a foreign land, struggling to adapt to a new culture and language. She also has to come to terms with the trauma of her past, including the death of her husband and her own near-fatal suicide attempt.

As Jasmine navigates these challenges, she begins to experiment with different identities and personas. She changes her name from Jyoti to Jasmine to Jane, and she adopts different fashion styles and mannerisms. She also enters into various relationships, which help her to explore different aspects of herself.

Through her experiences, Jasmine comes to realize that her identity is not fixed or static. It is fluid and dynamic, shaped by her ever-changing circumstances and relationships. She also learns that she can embrace multiple identities simultaneously. She is both Indian and American, both traditional and modern, both strong and vulnerable.

Here are some specific examples from the novel that illustrate Jasmine's journey of self-discovery and identity formation: When Jasmine first arrives in America, she is determined to leave her past behind and start fresh. She changes her name to Jasmine and adopts a new, more modern identity. She also tries to suppress her Indian heritage and blend in with American society. However, Jasmine soon realizes that she cannot completely erase her past. Her Indian heritage is a part of who she is, and it has shaped her experiences in both India and America. She begins to embrace her Indian identity, while also incorporating aspects of American culture into her life. Jasmine also experiments with different relationships in America. She has a brief affair with a married man, and she

later marries a white American man named Buddy. These relationships help her to explore different aspects of herself and to learn more about what she wants in a partner. Throughout her journey; Jasmine faces many challenges and setbacks. However, she always manages to bounce back. She is a strong and resilient

Bharati Mukherjee explores identity formation in her novel *Jasmine*. She describes how Jasmine, the protagonist, leaves her country to fulfill her wishes and tries to deal with the issue of cultural loss and assume a new identity in the United States. Jasmine, the title character and narrator of the novel was born in the Indian village of Hasnpur. She tells her story as a twenty-four-year-old pregnant widow who lives in Iowa with Bud Ripplemeyer, her crippled lover. In Iowa, it takes two months to recount the most recent developments. But during that time, Jasmine also talks about events in her life that happened between when she was born in Punjab and when she was an adult in the United States. The action in Iowa is informed by these historical biographical occurrences. Her odyssey involves three love affairs, two murders, at least one rape, a suicide, and five distinct locations. The title character's identity as well as her name change repeatedly throughout the book: Jyoti to Jasmine, Jazzy to Jassy, Jase to Jane, and finally Jane. Jasmine travels from Hasnpur, Punjab, through Fowlers Key, Florida, New York, Manhattan, Baden, Iowa, and finally California at the end.

Jasmine is primarily concerned with issues of personal identity. She says,

"I have had a husband for each of the women I have been. Prakash for Jasmine, Taylor for Jase, Bud for Jane. Half-Face for Kali"

Despite the fact that each of these men represents a distinct chapter in Jasmine's life and influences her transformation in some way, in each of these relationships, Mukherjee carefully portrays Jasmine's action. When Jasmine thinks back to the first time Prakash gave her the name Jasmine, she specifically focuses on the moment as a change in identity. To break off the past, she says,

"He gave me a new name: Jasmine. He said, 'you are small and sweet and heady, my Jasmine. You'll quicken the whole world with your perfume.' / Jyoti, Jasmine: I shuttled

between identities” Mukherjee also looks into the idea of reincarnation as a way for Jasmine to talk about how she changed her identity. "

At last Jasmine's life is her decision to return to Taylor. She doesn't have a future, but she has endless possibilities.

Shobha Shinde points out:

Jyoti, Jane, Jasmine's life journey took her through many transformations. Through, vast geographical locales such as Punjabi. Florida, New York, Iowa, and finally California. Jasmine rebelled against her fate and the path set out for her at every stage of her life.

In the end, Jasmine comes to realize that her identity is not defined by any one thing. She is a complex and multifaceted individual who embraces multiple identities simultaneously. She is both Indian and American, both traditional and modern, both strong and vulnerable. Jasmine's story is a powerful reminder that our identities are fluid and dynamic. They are shaped by our experiences, relationships, and the ever-changing world around us. We are all free to create and reinvent ourselves, as we journey through life.

National identity: At its core, 'Jasmine' grapples with the central theme of identity, closely intertwined with the pursuit of nationhood. Jasmine's dynamic identity, characterized by name changes and personal growth, mirrors the broader immigrant experience. Her story challenges conventional notions of what it means to belong to a nation and prompts contemplation on the fluidity of identity in an increasingly globalized world. Jasmine exemplifies the diverse and shifting facets of Indian national identity at the time. Jasmine recalls,

"When I was a child, born in a mud hut without water or electricity, the Green Revolution had just struck Punjab. Bicycles were giving way to scooters and to cars, radios to television. I was the last to be born to that kind of submission, that expectation of ignorance"

Prakash, Jasmine's first husband, frequently makes fun of the "feudal" conservative customs of Hasnapur and India as a whole. Prakash's interest in and proficiency with electronics make him a memorable character. Mukherjee

believes that this new wave of digital and electronic technology that is sweeping through India will put an end to submission and ignorance; As a result, Prakash's progressive politics and connections to technology are a microcosm of the larger promise of progress in India. Jasmine recalls the poverty that she experienced as a child in Hasnapur

"I thought we could trade some world-class poverty stories, but mine make her uncomfortable. Not that she's hostile. It's like looking at the name in my passport and seeing "Jyo—" at the beginning and deciding that her mouth was not destined to make those sounds. She can't begin to picture a village in Punjab. She doesn't mind my stories about New York and Florida because she's been to Florida many times and seen enough pictures of New York".

Mukherjee demonstrates in this manner that even suffering is linked to national identity. Force of capitalism is seen when jasmine says

"A sanctuary transformed into a hotel," Jasmine says. "Hell turned into paradise—to me this seems very American" (138). She continues, "It is by now only a passing wave of nausea, this response to the speed of transformation, the fluidity of American character and the American landscape. I feel at times like a stone hurtling through diaphanous mist, unable to grab hold, unable to slow myself, yet unwilling to abandon the ride I'm on. Down and down I go, where I'll stop, God only knows"

Further the concept of national identities through Du's immigrant journey to the United States from a refugee camp. She recalls:

"This country has so many ways of humiliating, of disappointing. How dare you? What must he have thought? His history teacher in Baden, Iowa, just happens to know a little street Vietnamese? Now where would he have picked it up? There are no harmless, compassionate ways to remake one. We murder who we were so we can rebirth ourselves in the images of dreams"

Conclusion: In 'Jasmine' by Bharati Mukherjee, the quest for nationhood is artfully woven into the tapestry of the immigrant experience. Through the character of Jasmine, Mukherjee invites readers to explore the intricate and

evolving nature of identity and belonging in a world shaped by migration, globalization, and the universal desire for a better life. Ultimately, 'Jasmine' offers a profound and nuanced portrayal of the immigrant's journey—a journey that transcends geographical boundaries and underscores the resilience of the human spirit in the face of change. Mukherjee's masterpiece encourages us to reflect on the complex interplay between personal identity and the quest for nationhood in our contemporary world.

Jasmine immigrates to the United States, acquires survival skills, transforms her identity, creates a place for her in American society, and achieves success as a result. She oscillates between the old and new worlds; the old she once belonged to and the new she longs to be a part of. She takes on multiple identities as she moves from one to the other. That is to say, in order for her to adjust to the host nation, she changes, as her name and identity change. She overcomes identity shifts and removes obstacles in order to survive. That is, she stands in the third space and transforms into a hybrid after going through dislocation and in-between's. In addition, the author, Mukherjee, makes reference to her own liberating transformation as an immigrant while depicting Jasmine's transformation. As a result, Bharati Mukherjee's Jasmine is Jasmine's journey toward real identity. Her journey to America is a process of finding her true identity. Even when the protagonist has the worst life experience, she overcomes the challenges, develops self-awareness, acquires a new identity, and overthrows her previous life.

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