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Historical Development of Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), Batu Gajah in the State of Perak, Malaysia, 1907 – 1957

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to study the History of Sultan Yussuf School in Batu Gajah, Perak, and it's the development from 1907 to 1957. Sultan Yussuf School was founded in 1907 by an Indian immigrant named K.Malaiperumal Pillai. Sultan Yussuf School was known as the Government English School, and it was the first English school founded in Batu Gajah, Perak. Sultan Yussuf School or better known as SYS, was attended by students from various races, particularly Malays, Chinese, and Indians. In 1956, Sultan Yussuf School was divided into two, that is for primary and secondary. Since it was the establishment in 1907, Sultan Yussuf School had progressed rapidly and achieved a lot of success in academic and also co-curricular activities. Besides that, Sultan Yussuf School also produced many leaders in the country. One of the former students of Sultan Yussuf School was His Majesty, Sultan Azlan Muhibbuddin Shah, the 34th Sultan of Perak, and was the 9th Yang Di Pertuan Agong (King) of Malaysia.

Keywords: History, Development, Education, English and School

Introduction

Education system already exists in Malaya before the arrival of the colonial powers, but it is different to what was introduced by the British colonialist. The educational system that existed during the British reign were four school system, namely the Malay Vernacular School, Chinese Vernacular School, Tamil Vernacular School and English School. During the British rule, English Schools can be divided into three categories, namely Free School, Grant In Aid English School and private English schools founded by individuals. Independent schools are founded by the initiative of certain individuals in order to provide English education to children from underprivileged families.¹

One of the English School founded by an individual is Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), Batu Gajah, in the state of Perak. This school was founded in 1907 and known as the Government English School, was the first English school in Batu Gajah, Perak. It was founded by an individual named K.Malaiperumal Pillai, an Indian immigrant from India. This school's history can be divided into three phase. The first phase started from 1907 to 1910 as a small private school. The second phase is from 1911 to 1942 and the third phase is from 1942 to 1957. Initially, Sultan Yussuf school was also known as the Government English School, Batu Gajah.

¹ Frederick Mason, *The schools of Malaya*, Eastern University Press, 1959.

Background of K.Malaiperumal Pillay: Founder of Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), Batu Gajah

The school's founder, K.Malaiperumal Pillay, is an Indian immigrant from Karikal, India. He was born in 1870 and raised in a low-income family.² He came to Malaya in 1889 at the age of 19 to make a living and to change his life. K.Malaiperumal Pillay himself has no higher education. He only received primary education in a Tamil School in India, where he also studied French.³

When he arrived with some of his friends in Batu Gajah, Perak, K.Malaiperumal Pillay did some temporary work. With a low educational background, he could only get a job as a laborer. For more than three years, he worked hard as a laborer. When life in Batu Gajah is already quite secure, K.Malaiperumal Pillay has returned to Karikal, India to bring his wife to Malaya in 1892. Since then, a new life began for K.Malaiperumal Pillay and his family.

Given that he now has to bear his family, K.Malaiperumal Pillay has left his job as a laborer. He then moved on to work in the housing construction. He feels that the housing construction sector has a bright future. Thus, he had the determination to become a successful contractor in the future. By accumulating some capital, he began to involve himself as a small-scale housing contractor. As a result of his persistence, K.Malaiperumal Pillay has established himself as one of the successful housing contractors in Batu Gajah. Besides being a housing contractor, he was also involved in building roads around Batu Gajah.⁴

Although he was a rich man, he was not arrogant. K.Malaiperumal Pillay has one of the most admirable traits of generosity. Therefore, it is not surprising that he was also known as a philanthropist by the people in Batu Gajah. He was also responsible for the construction of the Sri Subramaniam temple in Batu Gajah. The site for the construction of the temple was donated by

K.Malaiperumal Pillay. He also donated a piece of land belonging to him for the construction of the Sri Subramaniam temple hall. He also handed over a shop-house owned by him to the temple to make it a financial resource for the temple.⁵

Although K.Malaiperumal Pillay only received his education at a Tamil School in India, he has been a successful construction contractor in Batu Gajah. He always felt that education is important to the community. Accordingly, he founded the English School, Batu Gajah, in 1907, regardless of money and time to complete the school.⁶

Initially, classes were held in his own house, and only 30 students were interested in studying, although education is given for free. It is understood that the founder of this school, K.Malaiperumal Pillay, has gone from house to house to persuade parents to send their children to this school. For two years, the tuition fees and teacher's pay have been borne by him. He looks after the school affairs until the government took over the school in 1910 and renamed it the Government English School.⁷

K. Malaiperumal Pillay died on 19th January 1935 at the age of 65. He left behind a great history to the people of Batu Gajah at that time. His contributions are remembered to this day, and the school he founded despite changing the name several times remains a pride of locals until today.

Development of Sultan Yussuf School, 1907-1910

Sultan Yussuf School in Batu Gajah in the state of Perak was founded in 1907 by K.Malaiperumal Pillay as English School, Batu Gajah. For a start, K.Malaiperumal Pillay decided to start the first class of English School, Batu Gajah, in his own house.⁸ Initially, K.Malaiperumal Pillay had a hard time getting students to enter the school. This is due to the attitude of parents who are not yet aware of the importance of English education.

2 Sri Gajah, *Majalah Tahunan Sekolah Menengah Sultan Yussuf, Batu Gajah, Perak, Keluaran Khas, 1981-1983*, p.55

3 The Yussufian, *Sambutan Seabad SYS, 1907 – 2007*, p. 57

4 K.L.O. 702 / 07, 25 March 1907

5 The Yussufian, *op.cit.* p. 57

6 Ibid

7 Ibid

8 Sri Gajah, 1981 – 1983, *op.cit.* p.92

For Malay parents, they are more likely to send their children to Malay schools.⁹ Also, it becomes a common practice for the Malays to have an attitude of suspicion towards the English School.

Due to the difficulty of getting students to come to school voluntarily, K.Malaiperumal Pillay had to take his initiative. He had to go from house to house, persuading parents to send their children to this school. As a result, he managed to get about 30 students to start the first class of English School, Batu Gajah. All school expenses are fully borne by K. Malaiperumal Pillay.¹⁰ In other words, the English School, Batu Gajah, offers free lessons to its students.

Having succeeded in getting students to study at the English School, Batu Gajah, K.Malaiperumal Pillay has sought to find suitable teachers for the task of teaching and managing the school. To begin with, he enlisted the services of three teachers from Taiping. They were Mr.K.Mudaliar, Mr.S.Rajaratnam, and Mr.Krishnan Iyer. Mr. K.Mudaliar was honored to be the first Headmaster of the English School, Batu Gajah.¹¹ The salaries of the three teachers were funded by K.Malaiperumal Pillay. At the beginning of the establishment of the English Schools, Batu Gajah, the class was only up to Standard 3. Students are taught the basic subject of writing, reading, and arithmetics.¹²

After a year, the English School, Batu Gajah was in operation; it was found that the classroom was not suitable for learning as the students were housed in small classrooms. Therefore. K.Malaiperumal Pillay decided to relocate the school to a new site so that students could learn comfortably.¹³ The new site of the English School, Batu Gajah, is about 300 meters from the house of K.Malaiperumal Pillay, and the land belongs to him. The construction of the school was done with the help and cooperation of the locals. The Batu Gajah Prison authorities have also generously donated boards and woods

from the old prison building. The construction work was completed in 1908, and in the same year, the students were transferred to the new building.¹⁴

In 1908, Mr. M.C.Champion was appointed as Headmaster of English School, Batu Gajah, in place of Mr. K. Mudaliar.¹⁵ Since moving to the new building, the number of students enrolled in the English School, Batu Gajah has increased. In 1908, it was estimated that there were 40 students. In line with the increase of students, the existing classes were expanded. English School, Batu Gajah, now has classes up to Standard 4. By 1910, the number of students continued to increase to 80.¹⁶ However, in terms of curriculum, education is limited to the basic English subject of writing, reading, and arithmetics.

Until 1910, the administration of the English School, Batu Gajah, was managed by K.Malaiperumal Pillay.¹⁷ He was assisted by a Headmaster and three teachers. For three years, all school expenses and teacher salaries were funded by K.Malaiperumal Pillay. With the increase in the number of students at the English School, Batu Gajah, in 1910, caused K.Malaiperumal Pillay to face difficulty in continuing to finance the cost of this school. In this regard, he decided to hand over the administration of English School, Batu Gajah, to the British government. Therefore, the school administration was officially handed over to the government on 4th August 1910. At the same time, the name of the school was changed to Government English School (GES), Batu Gajah.¹⁸

Development of Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), 1911-1942

After the government took over the English School, Batu Gajah, several changes were made to the school administration. Mr.J.R.D Oliveiro of Anderson School, Ipoh, has been appointed as the headmaster to replace Mr.M.C.Champion. He

9 Awang Had Salleh, Malay Secular Education and Teacher Training in British Malaya, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1979

10 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.51

11 Sri Gajah, 1981 – 1983, op.cit. p.42

12 Ibid

13 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.51

14 Ibid

15 Buku Cenderamata Sempena Menyambut Perayaan Jubilee Intan SYS, Batu Gajah, 1981, p.8

16 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.53

17 The Gajah, Magazine of the Government English School, Batu Gajah, Perak, 1957, p.7

18 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.52

is assisted by Gopal Singh of Anderson School, Ipoh.¹⁹ Government English School (GES), Batu Gajah is no longer offering free lessons to its students. They are required to pay a school fee of \$ 1.00 a month. However, for the less fortunate students, the government allows them to study for free.

Since the government took over the administration of the English School, Batu Gajah, until Mr. J.R.D Oliveiro was relocated to Ipoh in 1913, the GES Batu Gajah has been offering lessons only up to Standard 4.²⁰ The post of Headmaster was held by Mr. Gopal Singh. He held this position until 1914. The post of headmaster was then held by Mr. W.D.A Rabel for 13 years until his retirement in 1926.²¹

In 1927, Tuan Syed Shaidali took over as headmaster after the retirement of Mr.W.D.A Rabel. He is a Captain in the Volunteer Force. During his tenure as headmaster, the number of students at GES Batu Gajah was 200, and the teaching staff was 7.²²

After Tuan Syed Shaidali became the headmaster, he worked hard to raise the quality and standard of GES Batu Gajah. He has received the cooperation of the School Board. In 1927, the GES Batu Gajah was upgraded to Standard 7.²³ The following year, the school was upgraded to Standard 8, or known as Junior Cambridge. This means that the GES Batu Gajah is now a secondary school.²⁴ In line with GES Batu Gajah's position as a secondary school, changes have been made to the curriculum as well as co-curricular activities. It also aims to streamline the school's syllabus in alignment with other English Schools.

The syllabus for each class has been restructured. The syllabus compiled shows English features. The Islamic subject is not included in the syllabus. Muslim students attend the Islamic lessons taught by private teachers at the village in the evening. Overall, students are educated and prepared for

the Junior Cambridge and Senior Cambridge exams. For example, for Standard 1 and Standard 2 history subjects, students are required to study 20 biographies or important events in English History from the time of the Roman invasion to the reign of Henry VII. It covers the History of the British Empire from 1492 to 1784.²⁵

In 1929, the Special Malay Class was introduced.²⁶ It provided an opportunity for children from the Malay School in Batu Gajah to enter GES. Selection is made through examination after four years; students attended primary education at Malay School. Intensive English Training is given for two years for students attending the Special Malay Class. They will then be admitted to Standard 4 or Standard 5.²⁷

Also, co-curriculum activities in this school have changed. The Geography, Debates, and Music Association were established at GES Batu Gajah. The school band was also formed in 1931.²⁸ It is the result of the hard work of Mr.R.Myram, Manager of the Robinson Piano Company in Ipoh.²⁹ It was the first school band to be established in the state of Perak. In the meantime, the school magazine "The Gajah" (Elephant) was published in 1931.³⁰ Simultaneously, the "Much in Little" School Motto was introduced. This motto means, "although this school is small and lacking in facilities, its quality of education remains high".³¹

Student's involvement in the uniformed unit was also a priority in this school. Accordingly, the School Scout Team was founded under Mr.Mongal Singh and Mr.Navaratnam. The First Troop, Batu Gajah, was founded on 13th January 1925, while the Second Troop, Batu Gajah, was founded on 1st March, 1929.³²

25 Paul Chang Ming Phang, Educational Development in a Plural Society, A Malayan Study Case, Academia Publication, Singapore, 1973, p. 12

26 Annual Report, Perak Education Department, 1929.

27 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.53

28 Buku Cenderamata Jubilee Intan, 1981, op.cit. p.7

29 Ibid

30 Ibid

31 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

32 The Gajah, Magazine of the Government English School, Batu Gajah, Perak, 1947, p. 3

19 The Gajah, 1957, op.cit. p.7

20 Sri Gajah, 1981-1983, op.cit. p.55

21 Ibid

22 Perak Annual Report, 1927, p.11

23 Sri Gajah, 1981 – 1983, op.cit. p. 46

24 The Yussufian, op.cit. p.53

The scout team in the 1930s is considered the best scout team ever formed by the GES Batu Gajah. Under the guidance of Mr. Mongal Singh, Mr. Navaratnam, Mr. H.R. Herslet, and Mr. John L. Woods, the school's scouts team has won several state championships in Perak. The First Troop Team, Batu Gajah, won the Latham Cup. The Second Troop, Batu Gajah, won the "Sultan Shield" trophy three times in 1931, 1937, and 1939.³³ The success of these two scouting teams was a proud moment for GES Batu Gajah.

In the meantime, sports activities in this school have also grown rapidly under the guidance of the headmaster, Tuan Syed Shaidali. His involvement in sports such as hockey, football, and polo has motivated him to improve the sports activities in this school. Tuan Syed Shaidali is responsible for introducing the "House" system. Four sports houses were introduced, namely Shaidali House (Green), Keir House (Red), Head House (Blue), and Sultan's House (Yellow).³⁴ Since the house system has been implemented, the GES Batu Gajah Annual Sports has become more vibrant and has received the attention of the local community.

In addition to the co-curriculum, the academic achievement of this school is also growing and can be proud of. In 1929, for the first time, GES Batu Gajah students sat for the Junior Cambridge examination. Out of the 11 students who took the exam, only three students passed.³⁵ However, in 1931, 16 students sat for the Junior Cambridge Examination, and out of this, 12 students passed the examination.³⁶ This is a success for GES Batu Gajah. For the first time in the history of GES Batu Gajah, its students sat for the Senior Cambridge Examination in 1932. In preparation for the exam, a class was prepared under the guidance of Mr. G. S. Mathews. He teaches English as well as English Literature. History subject was taught by Mr. En. A. K. Sabapathy, Science by Mr. Thong Tet Hin and Mathematics by Mr. S. Sabaratnam. History was created when 9 of the 12 students who sat for the Senior Cambridge Examination passed the

exam.³⁷ Until the outbreak of World War II, many of these students were able to further their studies at Raffles College and the College of Medicine in Singapore.³⁸

Development of Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), 1942-1957

Japanese military administration in Malaya began after the British surrender to the Japanese on 15th February 1942. Thus, it began a new era for the people of Malaya. Changes also occurred in the education system in Malaya. The Japanese military administration has a policy of banning English lessons in schools.³⁹ However, Malay and Tamil schools were allowed to teach subjects in their native language. To replace the English lessons, the Japanese introduced Japanese lessons. In line with Japanese education policy, GES Batu Gajah became a Japanese school or Nippon-go school.⁴⁰

In terms of curriculum, it includes teaching Japanese, singing patriotic songs of Japan and physical training or Taiso, and gardening.⁴¹ The Japanese occupation has also resulted in many GES Batu Gajah equipment being destroyed. The theft also took place, and the Japanese army seized valuable items and even burned important school files. The Japanese army also stole a Bronze Sign bearing the name of K. Malaiperumal Pillay as the founder of the school.⁴²

After the Second World War, efforts were underway to restore the education system in Malaya. The GES Batu Gajah was officially reopened on 1st October 1945. Since the reopening of the GES Batu Gajah, several problems have been faced by the school. The main problem is the redesign of school equipment such as chairs, desks, blackboards, paper, chalk, and other equipment. A shortage of textbooks is another problem that is compounded. The shortage of transportation was also faced by many students and teachers. The British Military

37 Sri Gajah, 1981 – 1983, op.cit. p. 55

38 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

39 Malayan Union, Annual Report on the Malayan Union For 1946, The Government Press, p. 49

40 Sri Gajah, 1981 – 1983, op.cit. p. 44

41 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

42 Hicks, E.C., History of English Schools in Perak, The Perak Library, 1958, p. 44

33 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

34 Ibid

35 Annual Report, Perak Education Department, 1929

36 Annual Report, Perak Education Department, 1931

Administration (BMA) has provided trucks and lorries to carry students living in the towns of Siputeh, Papan, Tanjung Tualang and Lahat.⁴³

As a result of the war, many students postponed their schooling. As a result, when the school reopened in 1945, most of the students enrolled were above the age limit. For example, many students in Standard 1 are between eight and nine years old.⁴⁴ Although the school faces various problems resulting from the war, the teachers still work hard to provide the students with knowledge. As a result of the efforts by the school teachers, many students passed the School Certificate examination in 1946. As a result, in 1947, three GES Batu Gajah students were awarded scholarships offered by the College of Medicine, Singapore and one student was awarded a scholarship from Technical College, Kuala Lumpur.⁴⁵

In January 1947, Mr. V.Arumukham was appointed as Headmaster of GES Batu Gajah, replacing Tuan Syed Shaidali. He has taken steps to improve the facilities at this school. In the same year, the government agreed to establish a library at GES Batu Gajah. At first, 300 books were brought from England and were donated to the school library. Also, a teachers' room and two reading rooms are provided. A bookstore was also opened with the initiative of Mr.Harnam Singh, a teacher at this school.⁴⁶

To improve school facilities, the School Board has applied to the government to build a school canteen. The application was approved in 1947, and a canteen was built with the help of the Public Works Department. The Food Control Department has been responsible for ensuring reasonable food prices in the school canteen.⁴⁷ The Academic is constantly changing at this school. Science subjects were introduced to this school in 1947. Tamil and Chinese lessons were also introduced at the request of parents of Indian and Chinese descent. Both subjects are conducted in the evening.⁴⁸

43 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

44 Ibid

45 The Gajah, 1947, op.cit. p. 5

46 Ibid

47 Ibid

48 Ibid

In another development, the headmaster of the school formed the GES Old Pupils Association on 8th November 8, 1947⁴⁹. The association was founded to establish relationships between former students and the school. The association also organizes several sports events between former students and the present students at the school. In 1950, Mr. Victor Dury was appointed as the headmaster of GES Batu Gajah after the retirement of Mr.V. Arumukham.⁵⁰

The number of pupils at GES Batu Gajah is increasing rapidly. It is also related to the ability of GES Batu Gajah to produce excellent examination results. In 1946 the number of pupils was 526, and it increased to 838 in 1950.⁵¹

One of the students who studied at this school was His Majesty, Sultan Azlan Muhibuddin Shah ibni Sultan Yussuf Izzuddin Shah. He began his secondary education at the Government English School from 1937 to 1948. In 1947 he took the School Certificate Examination.

Later in 1948, he was appointed as the Head Prefect of the GES Batu Gajah for his excellence in academics and sports. While studying at this school, he was very active in sports and athletics. He was involved in football, cricket, and hockey. He has represented the Perak Malay Hockey Team and the Perak Hockey Team as well. He became the 34th Sultan of Perak in 1984 and subsequently became the 9th Yang Di Pertuan Agong (King) of Malaysia in 1989.⁵²

The rapid growth of students made it impossible for existing buildings to accommodate a large number of students. Thus, the government built a new building on a three-acre site donated by the K. Malaiperumal Pillay family. The new school building was completed in 1951.⁵³ The new school building was officially opened by the Sultan of Perak, His Majesty Sultan Yussuf Izzudin Shah ibni Sultan Abdul Jalil on 1st October 1951. School headmaster, Mr. Victor Dury, has proposed that GES Batu Gajah be renamed as Sultan Yussuf School

49 Ibid

50 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 54

51 Federation of Malaya Annual Report, 1947 – 1957

52 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 59

53 Ibid, p. 54

to commemorate the historical event of the inauguration of the new building by the Sultan of Perak.⁵⁴ At the same time, the students were transferred to the new building on 1st October, 1951.⁵⁵

As the school progresses, the number of teachers serving in this school continues to increase. In 1947, there were 24 teachers at the Sultan Yussuf School.⁵⁶ By 1953, this number had increased to 35 teachers.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, in 1957, the number of teachers serving at Sultan Yussuf School was 41.⁵⁸ Initially, most teachers at Sultan Yussuf School received Normal Class training. The first graduate teacher to serve at Sultan Yussuf School was Mr. William Jesudason and Mr. Yeong Hong. Both are graduates of Raffles College, Singapore.⁵⁹

The administration of Sultan Yussuf School also took steps to encourage more Malay students to receive education in English. Accordingly, in 1953, a hostel was built to accommodate the Malay students who live far from the school. Accommodation at the hostel is provided free of charge.⁶⁰ Although Sultan Yussuf School has a new building; the problem of congestion continues to be faced by the school.

The situation caused the school to rent a building owned by To' Amar Sulaiman at Jalan Kelab, Batu Gajah. It is used to accommodate the primary school students.⁶¹ Mr. Victor Dury retired in 1954. He was succeeded by Mr. Brian Smith, who began serving as the new headmaster in 1955. The new office and library block was built in 1955, and the Sultan Yussuf School also celebrated the 'Golden Jubilee' in the same year.⁶²

Sultan Yussuf School also progresses well in sports. This schools' excellence in sports was

54 Ibid

55 The Gajah, Magazine of the Government English School, Batu Gajah, Perak, 1951, p. 4

56 The Gajah, 1947, op.cit. p. 12

57 The Gajah, Magazine of the Government English School, Batu Gajah, Perak, 1953, p. 7

58 The Gajah, Magazine of the Government English School, Batu Gajah, Perak, 1957, p. 7

59 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 53

60 Ibid, p. 54

61 Ibid

62 Ibid, p. 54

evident when some athletes of this school have represented the state and the Federation of Malaya in some sporting events. Among them is Abdul Wahab Said, who was selected to represent the Perak hockey team in 1953. Also, S. Shanmuganathan was chosen to represent the Federation of Malaya hockey team in the Asian Games in Tokyo. In 1957, three Sultan Yussuf School athletes were selected to represent the state of Perak in the Merdeka Games Championship in Kuala Lumpur. They are Premjeit Singh for javelin, Marina Smith in the discus and Leela Nair in the 4 X 100 relay team.⁶³

When the Alliance Party lead the government after winning the election in 1955, the education system in Malaya began to change. A committee was formed to study the education system in Malaya. The Education Committee made several proposals in 1956. Accordingly, the Sultan Yussuf School was divided into two levels, namely Primary and Secondary. The Primary School was known as Standard Type Primary School, Batu Gajah. The first headmaster was Mr. Chin Chee Cheong. Meanwhile, the Headmaster of Sultan Yussuf Secondary School was Mr. Yoong Khee Hong.⁶⁴

Conclusion

It can be seen that the Sultan Yussuf School (SYS), Batu Gajah, has grown rapidly since it was established in 1907. The efforts of K. Malaiperumal Pillay to establish the English School, now known as the Sultan Yussuf School is a positive and wise step. He has been instrumental in the development of this school from the beginning. Also, the commitment shown by the administration as well as the school teachers has enabled Sultan Yussuf School to experience many changes, especially in the development of school infrastructure as well as in the academic and co-curricular activities. The support of the local people also enables the number of students in this school to increase every year.

Sultan Yussuf School has achieved a lot of success both academically and in co-curricular activities. This can be seen in the examination results as well as the involvement of students in the uniformed and sports teams. The school

63 The Gajah, 1957, op.cit. p. 9

64 The Yussufian, op.cit. p. 54

continues to grow, and many former students hold high positions in the private and government sectors. Sultan Yussuf School celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2007 and continues to stand proudly until today.

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