

Arthśastra: A Replica Of Social Dynamism In Ancient India

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Abstract: Kautilya, Viśnugupta or Ānakya was a man behind the final overthrow of once a mighty empire in the last half of the first millennium BCE and helped one Āndragupta (Sandrocotus) established a strong, unified and centralised empire in India. His treatise Arthśastra dealt with the minute details of socio-economic and political life in ancient India in the Mauryan Period. The Arthśastra comprises ancient Indian social thought and theories of social values and importance of a class society. Arthśastra is one of the important sources on ancient Indian social thought besides generally resorting to the earlier social codes and practices and provides important material to understand the social changes that took place in later times. The Kautilyan society seems to be vertically divided society based on the four traditional Varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vashiyas and Śudras. Further the life of individual was horizontally divided into four Ashrams, such as Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprashtha and Sanyasa. Brahmacharya was the school days under the guidance of a tutor, in the Grihastha, it was under head of a household, in the Vanaprashtha it was an outdoor retirement, and in the Sanyasashrama, it was a complete introverted living. Thus a person had to start after observing certain duties assigned to him. The Arthśastra refers the four Varnas' duties and Ashrams and their determined observance "leads to heaven and endless bliss. In case of transgression people would be exterminated through mixture of duties and Varnas. In the theory of Kautilya, the state was required to safeguard that social order which was based on Varna and Ashram system. Brahmins undertook a bigger role and were astrologers, spiritualists and experts in clandestine practices. To protect their interest and to have better bargaining position and the priest could form unborn. Such are the basic tenets of daily life discussed in the present article.

Keywords: Śudras, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaiśya, Varna, Vedas, Smṛti, Dharma, Artha, Anuloma, Pratiloma, Stridhana etc.

'In the happiness of his subjects lies the king's happiness.'

Kautilya's *Arthśastra*, (1.19.34)

The formation of the first unified state in the South Asia which made a viable impact on the movements of peoples is the significance of the Mauryan period, and ideas are well recognized by students of the history and civilization of India. We may be well aware of the dearth of comprehensive studies on the subject. The present study of social dynamism deals with the Mauryan period in a broader context of time and space and above all provides some novel perspectives. It provides significant information about not only the mobility of the Indians in the Achaemenid Empire but also the impact of Persia on the north western parts of the Mauryan Empire. On

the issue of land ownership in Mauryan India there was a multiple pattern which included state, private and communal tenure. On the other hand, after having examined the features of slavery in ancient India which gave Megasthenes grounds to assert that "all the Indians are free, and not one of them is a slave" we are tempted to think that "Megasthenes meant that there were only limitations to reducing free men to life-long slavery". He also states that "in fact hired labourers often constituted a social group half-way between the freemen and slaves". He remarks that "in the more developed regions-Magadha and the neighbouring areas-slavery was widespread, whereas in some of the more outlying regions the tribal system still prevailed". The pre-Alexandrian Greek settlements in Afghanistan (The Indo-Greeks) Bongard-Levin adds that the

Greek version of the Aśokan bilingual record shows survival of living colloquial language, suggesting a long tradition of usage in and around Kandahar. We have not, unlike many others, drawn heavily on only Kautilya and Megasthenes for his treatment of the social hierarchy of the Mauryas but also used some Buddhist and Jain textual material. We may assume that the Mauryas did not pursue a policy of destabilization of the local institutions, but tried to adapt them to the new conditions".

It finds expression through some of the world's best minds. Social thought usually finds its initial expression during social crises. We find a longer and higher development of social thought in India than in Egypt and Babylonia. India right from the earliest time till present day filled with rich literary and cultural traditions. However, Indian thought has been built largely on the theory of the negation of the world and life, yet it has definite and real social implications. There is a unique sweep to India thoughts, for it takes in the relation of man not to other human beings but to whole life. However, India is composed of people of various races and origin. Among the early Vedic believers, sacrifice acquired a positive social function as far as relationship of the individual and his deity was concerned. Sacrifice was a social act in which the worshiper and his deity took part. The food strengthened the deity and the spiritual contact strengthened the worshiper and lifted him out of this life of trouble while still living in it. Thus, life must have seemed unduly harsh to the early Vedic people. They sought release from it through the system of religious thoughts and action, but it was a system of life negation." The climatic and geographical conditions of a humid, semi-tropical nature possible played a role in developing a theory of negation.

With the settlement of the Aryan folk in the Ganges plains, they had developed a strong class of human being called Brahmins, whose thought had developed over many phases. Their ceremonies and Vedic rituals gave a definite form to the *Brahminical* teachings. The Vedic doctrine of becoming one with the super-worldly forces has been expressed in considerable detail. Social responsibility had always been a slow process in developing a man's life. All thought on human being and society has a continuing relevance. Indian thought on these matters is embodied in a satiric form, that is, a self-consciously organized body a knowledge which makes it doubly relevant. Daya Krishna rightly puts it, 'a Satiric form, honour, one to think of the cognitive enterprise of civilizations, particularly those belong to a distant past, as essentially static and final. In other words, the very form in which knowledge is available to us creates the impression that there is no room for it to be critically evaluated in terms of incompleteness or inadequacy.'" The intellectual format in the Indian tradition also encourages these attitudes as it takes the form of writing commentaries and sub-commentaries on the original text.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL SOCIAL COGNITION:
Kautilya's *Arthśāstra* deals with ancient Indian social thought and theories of social values and importance of a class society. *Arthśāstra* is one of the important sources on ancient Indian social thought besides generally resorting the earlier social codes and practices and provides important material to understand the social changes that took place in later times.

The Kautilyan society seems to be vertically divided society based on the four traditional *Varnas* of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vashiyas* and *Śudras*. Further the life of individual was horizontally divided into four *Ashrams*, such as *Brahmacharya*, *Grihastha*, *Vanaprashtha* and *Sanyasa*. *Brahmacharya* was the school days under the guidance of a tutor, in the *Garhasthya*, it was under head of a household, in the *Vanaprashtha* it was an outdoor retirement, and in the *Sanyasashrama*, it was a complete introverted living. Thus a person had to start after observing certain duties assigned to him. The *Arthśāstra* refers the four *Varnas*' duties and *Ashrams* and their determined observance "leads to heaven and endless bliss. In case of transgression people would be exterminated through mixture of duties and *Varnas*. In the theory of Kautilya, the state was required to safeguard that social order which was based on *Varna* and *Ashram* system. Brahmins undertook a bigger idle role and were astrologers, spiritualists and experts in clandestine practices. To protect their interest and to have better bargaining position and the priest could form unborn. Kautilya suggests that the *Brahmins* should not be taxed and they enjoyed numerous judicial privileges, employed respects, privileges and gifts, movable and immovable articles. They could exercise a considerable influence on the state administration. Kautilya observes that a *Kshatriya* flourish on account of the support and guidance of a *Brahmin* as his *purohita*. The *purohita* of a king had a complete hold over the state matters. The king or state had to follow the *Purohita* as a son follows his father or a disciple follows his teacher or a servant follows his master. Similarly a *Kshatriya* also had to learn the Vedic rituals and a little knowledge but the primary concern was to protect the *praja* (populace) and sacrifice his life for the sake of his state and wearing arms. Thus, they constituted the army and the executive authority – the ruling class in action, they wielded the real power and were second to the *Brahmins* in social grade. The *Vaishya* was also asked to study the Vedas but also to promote agriculture, cattle breeding and trade. They were most populous class and by far the majority of them were the cultivators. He argues that the *Vaishyas* should devote their full time in producing wealth, particularly food grains whole heartedly. *Vaishyas* should be given favours for being a producing class and be given concessions on certain occasions being the maximum tax payers in the Mauryan times. *Arthśāstra* advocates that *Śudras* should perform additional duties alongwith serving the *dvija*, the twice-born. They assisted *Vaishyas* in agricultural operations, herdsmen or traders as servants. Art and crafts practicing and manufacturing was exclusive for them. The *Śudras*, the lowest in the social hierarchy, were given a place in the Aryan fold as servants and were not the untouchables and Kautilya prohibits the sale of a minor *Śudra* into slavery because he considers them also to be the Aryans. Kautilya was the first in the *Brahmin Varna* to prescribe the *Śudras* to be a part of the Aryan army. He did not attest the earlier view that *Brahmana-kshatriya* army was the best, if large forces were required, recruitment from *Śudra Varna* was prescribed. Kautilya considers *Śudras* as hard working and obedient and he prefers *Śudra* as the cultivators in the newly settled villages in the state. With the placing of the *Śudras* among the Aryans, it was the first radical effort of Kautilya to incorporate the masses in

the *Aryana* crease. Kautilya's attempt to negate and question the Vedic norms and their supremacy and the notion of 'Super human being' called Brahmin seems a strange statement.

In the *Arthśāstra*, Kautilya lays emphasis on the moral and spiritual advancement of the people. He emphasized the importance of *Trivarga-dharma, artha, and kama*, with *moksha* which implied not only performing the religious and moral duties but righteous, humble, kind, sympathetic conduct, accommodating and obliging others. Acquisition of material goods, wealth, property and power and working trends promotion of trade come under the purview of the *Artha*. *Kama* stands for him as the gratification of desire, pleasure, and enjoyment of the senses. *Trivarga* contained *dharma, artha and kama* and *moksha* was the fixed as the highest aim of life i.e., attaining the eternal truth. Thus, *Arthśāstra* tells us that by the preservation of social order of *purushartha*, psycho-moral bases of the *Asrama* theory by an individual he or she could be realized in their best welfare.

Kautilya treated *Śūdras* as an integral part of the Aryan community. He differentiated them from the *Mlecchas* or non Aryan. *Arthśāstra* forbids the sale or pledging or pledge their children. "For one selling or keeping as a pledge a minor Aryan individual except a slave for livelihood, the fine is twelve *panas* for a kinsman in the case of a *Śūdra*, double that in the case of a *Vaiśhya*, three times in the case of a *Kshatriya*, four times in the case of a Brahmin." It was an utter offence to sell of an offspring or keep it as an item of pledge, and Kautilya advocates the death punishment for the purchaser in these cases. However, actors and artisans were mostly *Śūdras*, they worked as laborers' or hired workers under private masters or under the state in many capacities.

THE VARNA THEORY, A DEBATE: The theory of the four Varna, though broadly true of ancient Indian society, has had to take into account paradigms of social organization which had little relation to that system. However, there were large numbers of communities in ancient Indian society whose place in the scheme of four Varna could not be easily determined. Kautilya made an attempt to bring them into the Aryan fourfold system. This was done through the theory of a mixed Varna system. The *Arthśāstra* refers that the son of a Brahmin from *Kshatriya* woman and that of a *Kshatriya* from a *Vaiśhya* woman belong to their father Varna. But *Vaiśhya* son from a *Śūdra* woman was, however, remained a *Śūdra*. As a consequence of these mixings of Varna, brought new communities into being in ancient Indian society. *Arthśāstra* states that a *Śūdra* begets an *Ayogava* or a *Vaiśhya* woman, a *bksatta* or a *Kshatriya* woman and a *Āndala* or a Brahmin woman. Kangle reserves some of the rights of such women under some doubts. This seems that some of these communities, such as, the *Niśada* and *Āndalas* were original communities, but *Ugna* and *Ksatta* seem to have been warrior clans. Whereas the communities like *Vaina*, *Kusilana* and *Suta* were profession based communities. It is therefore hardly possible to believe that any of these communities really came into being as a result of mixed marriage among the four Varna, neither these communities were the result of *pratiloma* unions. The marriage between the Brahmin girl and a *Śūdra* boy on large scale might increase the number of *Āndala* community in different statistics, are quite inconceivable, this reflect sexual union instead of marriage between Brahman boy

and *Śūdra* girl. Therefore, the theory of the origin of the communities seems to be merely a myth.

Kautilya suggests that the *Āndalas* should observe the same dharma as the *Śūdra*, although Kautilya state that the well of *Āndalas* can be used only by the *Āndalas* and not by other. This clearly shows that they were outcastes and probably untouchables. *Arthśāstra* prescribed a heavy fine for a *Āndala* touching an Aryan woman. The touching of Aryan woman meant having sex with Aryan woman rather than untouchability. In connection with adultery and other sex offences, the *Śvapaka* born of these abductions was considered an outcaste community, thus the menace which developed in Mauryan society, was the concept of untouchability.

CUSTOMS: *Arthśāstra* acquaints us that endogamous community should follow its own traditional professions and immemorial customs, Kautilya further prescribed that the dharma, that is, the law of inheritance, which may be peculiar to any region or community or *Samgha* or village should be recognized and honestly upheld. The term community is used as *Jāti*, which obviously implies membership by birth, and which clearly corresponds to what is known as caste. The endogamy and *Samaya*, i.e., custom referred in *Arthśāstra* are the characteristics of caste. It is very clear from certain guidelines that the caste was definitely known in Kautilya's times. *Arthśāstra* referred a number of specialized communities who were expert in their professions and services. Kautilya referred the term *tajjata*, one born to that (kind of work). This expression clearly indicates the existence of different professional caste, such as *Tantuvayas* (weaver); *Rajaka* (Washerman) *Tunnanya* (tailor); *Suvarnakar* (goldsmith) *Ārmakara* (leather-worker); *Karmara* (smith); *Kuttaka* (carpenter) and others name of castes which had their origin in the different professional groups.

Thus the social conditions as reflected in the Kautilya's *Arthśāstra* did not materially differ much from the social conditions of today. There are the same fourfold Varna theory, with a large number of castes of different origin in actual practice, there are untouchables which have become menace in our present day society. The pattern of social grouping that has endured through the centuries was more or less fixed in the days which *Arthśāstra* was finally compiled. What happened thereafter was only a proliferation of castes and sub-castes, the transformation of some of the old communities and the appearance of altogether new groups as a result of certain internal and external stresses.

EDUCATION: The *Arthśāstra* attached great importance to education and made it obligatory for the three upper *Varnas* to acquire knowledge by studying *Vedas*. Kautilya states that every male child belonging to the *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya* and *Vaiśhya* in the Aryan home should start his educational career with observation of certain rituals and customs grouped under the name of the *Upanayan Saṃskaras*. Kautilya states that the main aim of education is the control of the sensual organs: "Those students of the *Veda* are; studying the *Veda*, tending the (sacred) fire and ceremonial bathing, keeping the vow of living on alms only, residing till the end of his life with the preceptor or, in his absence, with the preceptor is son or with a fellow-student." It is clear that girls and *Śūdras* had reserved rights to education during the Mauryan times.

Arthśāstra further refers that, whosoever of reverse character, whosoever has not his sensual organs under control, will soon perish, though he possess the whole earth bound by the four ends of the world”, the young students therefore, enjoined to “abandon lust, (*kama*), anger (*krodha*), greed (*lobha*), vanity (*mana*), conceit (*mada*), and over joy (*harsha*). Kautilya speaks about the duty of a student that he should observe celibacy, sleep on bare ground, wearing matted locks and antelope-skin, worship of the (sacred) fire, worshipping the deity, manes and quests and living on the forest produce”. Kautilya states that the pre-requisites of getting education were discipline, desire for learning, cultivation of truth learnt, grasping what is learnt, retaining what is grasped, knowledge of wages and means of achieving the truth learnt, inference and deliberation. Thus, it can be deduced that Kautilya wanted the people of the state to be well-educated so that they were able to lead the society towards the path of progress. Since, the individual is an integral part of the society and it is through the individual the social goal can be achieved and enhance the qualities of an individual in development of society as a whole.

Kautilya does not appreciate the untimely desertion of the household for the life of a monk or nun, he considered it as anti-social. According to him the act of desertion of the household duties is economically injurious to the society and reminds social and family duties of an individual. Kautilya states that no one should take to monastic order or become ascetic without providing for his dependents like minor sons, unmarried daughters or widows in the family. Inducing a woman having child bearing capacity into nun hood was punished.

MARRIAGE, A SACROSANCT CORD: Kautilya believes that institution of marriage was one of the most significant institution. The orthodox doctrine of marriage inside the caste and outside the *gotras* was observed. He recognized the traditional mixed castes marriages and number of mixed castes born out of marriage between numbers of different castes; of course such persons were placed low in social gradation. To avoid unhappy and unfruitful marriages the father of the newly married girl was fined 96 *Panas*, return of dowry and woman's property (*Stridhana*) to the bridegroom's father if the girl's sexual defects were not disclosed beforehand. Even bridegroom's defects did not go unnoticed, and any middleman, who arranged the marriage without disclosing the defects of the bridegroom was punished with double the fine i.e. 192 *panas* and the dowry and *Stridhana* were forfeited. Kautilya state that marriage could be revoked till the time of *panigrahan* if either of the party intended to do so, but no marriage could be revoked after the birth of a child. Kautilya was aware of the biological needs of young wives. He states that if the husband was away for more than stipulated number of years and had left no child or provision for maintenance, the wife was allowed to remarry. Even having sexual relation with another man and getting child from him in long absence of her husband was granted. Kautilya emphasized that the relation between a man and a woman should be of a reciprocal nature. He forbids the practice of cruelty towards each other. He permits re-marriage of women under certain circumstances; woman not provided for by dowry had the right of remarriage with the permission of kinsmen. Those

whose husbands were abroad for a longtime, or who suffered from terminable diseases or were sterile, could remarry if they desired. *Arthśāstra* depicted that if husband and wife both feeling sick of their unhappy marriages. If the wife seeks divorce against the will of her husband, she had to forego whatever she might have received from her husband whom she was divorcing now. If the husband was for divorce against the wishes of his wife, he had to return whatever he might have drawn from his wife wealth. If no mutual agreement was possible, then either party could end the unhappy marriage with some economic loss.

It is remarkable to note that the *Arthasāstra* deals with question of widow's remarriage; they were allowed to remarry with or without the consent of their in laws under certain condition, the choice of remarriage or of leading a pious life was the woman's own. The surety was tolerant towards the choices they made to lead the rest of their lives after widowhood. “If she is desirous of a second marriage, she shall be given on the occasion of her re-marriage whatever either her father-in law or her husband or both had given to her.” Kautilya states that if widow had no issue and did not marry, she retained all her property till the end of her life. In case widow decided to lead a pious life, she could retain all the property given to her by her late husband. Thus, it indicates that the welfare of widows was one of the important and aims of Kautilya. Kautilya in his *Arthśāstra* states that a *Brahmin*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* and a *Śudra* could have many wives, even of different *Varnas*. This indicates that the polygamy had become a fashion among Aryans. Kautilya mentions that a husband could marry as many wives as he could support them economically. A husband could marry another woman if his wife does not give birth to a son or produce only girl child even some time husband remarried without and justification. Thus, women with child-bearing capacity had any one justification that was to produce children, particularly sons, and this also strengthens the impression that the wife's only utility was begetting children, particularly sons.

WOMEN RIGHTS: *Arthśāstra* tells us that the women from upper the *Varnas* had least freedom of movement. Only in case of ill-treatment and insult meted out to her, she could go to a neighbours' house or of kinsmen and to a village headman, trustee or guardian. On certain occasion such as death, illness, calamity or childbirth she had the right to visit her kinsmen. Otherwise, she was not allowed to visit the somewhere else without the prior permission of her husband. These prohibitive measures were motivated by the society is anxiety to assure the complete fidelity of the wife to her husband, she was completely to the husband and his house and put under the bondage of her husband, they were kept in seclusion. Even Aśoka refers to separate apartments for women. However, scholars, historians and sociologists are of the opinion that the Mauryan period was not edifying women. But references regarding the making of laws on marriage, divorce, inheritance, cruelty towards women, molestation, rape or any other etc. are found. Kautilya was not only a statesmen but he had also some humane facets. He can be considered a liberal thinker who allowed widow re-marriage. Thus, he dealt with the social issues in details, keep household vis-à-vis the society in perfect harmony. Kautilya, was the first thinker who prescribed to legalised and regulated prostitution

from them state earned substantial share of money. Fee of prostitutes was fixed and even women of higher family maintained brothels under the knowledge of the government and had to pay taxes for this. This generated extra revenue for the state. These *ganikas* (prostitutes) were well trained in fine arts and in the art of conversation and spying. *Arthśāstra* depicted that the king used to keep courtesans as his personal companies on a salary of a thousand *panas*. Besides the *ganikas*, there were young and beautiful girls, live by selling their youth and beauty. There beautiful, *rupajivikas* were licensed, medically examined and treated, and charged to pay double the normal fee as tax every month charged by them for a day.

SLAVERY: The above study of the *Arthśāstra* of Kautilya he realized the value of slave labour, which was certainly cheaper than wage earning or hired labourers. Slaves were used in cultivating the state lands, working in state mines and factories. Kautilya prescribed certain kinds of ways open to the slaves to regain liberty and put certain restrictions on the masters right over slaves and pledges. During the period of bondage their social conditions were made as humane and honourable as possible. Thus, the *Śudras* were considered as a component to the Aryan stock. It was first revolutionary step of Kautilya to get them recognition Aryans and negated the prevalent intolerable norms of the *Brahmnical* traditions. *Arthśāstra* emphasized the moral and spiritual growth of the people by explaining the importance of *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*. His attitude towards relationship between the husband and wife was of a reciprocal nature. He forbids the practice of cruelty towards each other, sanctified marriages of higher caste with lower caste; encouraged monogamy in society. He was a liberal social thinker who showed greater compassion towards widows. Kautilya was not the buyer of the theory of the withdrawal from the worldly life. He made certain laws for the welfare of the society; put ban on the sale and purchase of minor as slaves, the law was made to safeguard the honour and right of the female slaves; granted civil rights to *Śudras* which had not been contemplated earlier. He emphasized on joint family system as he felt that it was the best way of providing social security to the aged, children and disabled persons of the family which is missing at present.

Scholars opine that 'the conditions of the slaves came to be so much ameliorated near about 320 BCE that foreign visitors to India could not even visualize the existence of slavery in India. Moreover, the Greek writers seem to be misguided by the treatment given to slaves by their masters. Although, slaves were regarded as *Śudras*, still a *Brahmin* employing twice-born as slaves against their will were subject to punishment. Manu defines in the clearest terms the social status of slaves by laying down that 'a slave is the shadow of his master'. The fact that there existed a high degree of difference between the Aryan and *Mlechchha* slaves, is referred by the Kautilya. According to him, it was no crime for *Mlechchhas* to sell or mortgage the life of their own offspring, but an Arya was never subjected to slavery. However, Kautilya lays down circumstances under which an Arya had to adopt slavery, though exchangeable.

In the *Arthśāstra*, we see that the sale or mortgage by kinsmen of an Aryan *Śudra*, who had not attained the majority, was a punishable act. Similar punishments were laid

down for the purchasers and abettors. Slaves, contrary to *Smṛti* injunctions, were allowed to possess property and accumulate wealth. After his death his property passed into the hands of his kinsmen, and in their absence, to his master. Unlike *Nārada Smṛti* laying down the rules of performing impure works by slaves, Kautilya states that employing a slave to carry the dead or to sweep ordure, urine or the leavings of food or a female slave to attend on her master while he is bathing naked or hurting or abusing him or her, or violating (the chastity of) a female slave shall cause the forfeiture of the value paid by him. The Mauryan monarchs Bindusara and Aśoka also tried to maintain these improved conditions of slaves as is evident from the Ninth Rock Edict of Aśoka, in which it is stated that the *Law of Piety* consists of, among other things, the improvement in the conditions of slaves and a guaranteed of kind and human treatment to slaves and hired servants. It helps us to conclude that though the Mauryan king recognized the institution of slavery, he was in favour of the radical social and economic uplift of the slaves.

In his IXth Rock Edict, Aśoka enumerates the *dharma man gala*, i.e. four main duties of a noble householder. According to him "Dāsabhatakasī Samyapatipati" means that "appropriate behaviour to slaves and servants" is the first and the foremost of the four duties which comprise *dharma-mangala*. Aśoka thus does not preach against slavery, he only advocates humane treatment to slaves. In the *Mahabharata*, we find mention of the gift of *dāsas* and *dāsīs* at many places.

In the sum up, we can surmise that Kautilya's *Arthśāstra* is an amazing and detailed handbook on the statecraft and the art of living by ancient India's best intellectuals. Also known as Chanakya and Vishnugupta, Kautilya wrote the *Arthśāstra* not later than 150 CE. In this treatise his brilliance is reflected, which is the most comprehensive treatise of statecraft of classical time. Written mainly in prose, it includes 380 *shlokas* of exceptional interest and value which is believed to have been written by Chanakya under the pseudonym 'Kautilya'. In the treatise we can easily make an effort to choose particular passages which having their relevance to the modern times.

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