

# Theoretical Framework of Indian Diaspora in the Works of Jhumpa Lahiri

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## Abstract

Jhumpa Lahiri's writings contain a theoretical framework that is strongly entrenched in the themes of migration, identity formation, cultural hybridity, and displacement. This framework is used to explain the Indian diaspora. Lahiri's tales investigate the intricate process of self-identity negotiation among first- and second-generation immigrants. She does this by drawing on important theories from the field of diaspora studies, specifically those of Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Avtar Brah. As a reflection of the emotional and psychological problems associated with cultural adaptation and belonging, her paintings effectively express the tension that exists between one's origin and their host country. Lahiri uses the framework of hybridity to demonstrate how diasporic persons form identities in the "third space," which is a term that was established by Bhabha. Some of the works that she uses to highlight this idea are *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*. As a result of being stuck between ancestral traditions and current Western standards, the characters frequently contend with a sense of self that is frequently shattered. A reflection of Hall's concept of identity as a constant process of becoming rather than being can be seen in the developing identities of Lahiri's characters, notably in the way in which they negotiate language, memory, and cultural practices. Furthermore, Lahiri's works deal with Brah's idea of "diaspora space," which is a place where diverse histories and identities meet. This space brings to light concerns of gender, class, and generational inequalities. The Indian diaspora is characterized by recurring themes that emphasize the lived reality of the community, including feelings of alienation, nostalgia, and cultural struggle. The simple yet deep sensations of displacement and belonging are captured by Lahiri via the use of delicate storytelling methods and intimate character depictions. As a result, this research places Lahiri's literary contributions within a more comprehensive theoretical framework of diaspora. It highlights the ways in which her works not only reflect but also alter the debate on Indian diasporic identity in contemporary literature.

**Keywords:** *Theoretical; Framework; Indian Diaspora; Jhumpa Lahiri*

## 1. Introduction

The complicated experiences of migration, identity, and belonging in a globalized society are reflected in the study of the Indian diaspora, which has arisen as a key issue within the field of postcolonial and cultural studies. The word "diaspora" is used generically to refer to the migration and settlement of people outside of their ancestral homelands, which is accompanied by the maintenance and alteration of cultural identities across geographical boundaries. Colonial history, economic migration, and transnational movement all have a role in shaping diasporic experiences within the setting of India. This results in a variety of ways in which identities are expressed and cultural negotiations are carried out. Within this paradigm, the literary works of Jhumpa Lahiri have a key place in expressing the lived reality of the Indian diaspora, notably in the United States. This is especially true where the United States is concerned. Both first-generation migrants and their children who were born in the United States are the primary subjects of

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Lahiri's literature, which expertly depicts the emotional, psychological, and cultural aspects of immigrant life throughout its whole. In her memoirs, she sheds light on the everyday challenges of adjusting to a new environment, the need of preserving cultural legacy, and the search for self-definition in a strange country. Academics such as Homi K. Bhabha, who created the notion of hybridity and the "third space," which is a place where new cultural identities are produced via contact and negotiation, have had a significant impact on the theoretical foundation of diasporic studies. To a similar extent, Stuart Hall views identity as something that is malleable and ever-changing, molded by the historical and cultural circumstances in which it is situated rather than having a set beginning. This perspective is further expanded by Avtar Brah through the concept of "diaspora space," which places an emphasis on the intersections of diverse identities, histories, and power relations. Literature written by Lahiri, such as *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, provides a wealth of material that may be utilized for the purpose of analyzing different theoretical viewpoints. Her characters frequently deal with concerns of alienation, nostalgia, and cultural struggle, and they frequently inhabit locations that are in between. Also, they frequently negotiate dual identities. The complex tensions that exist between tradition and modernity, home and exile, and individuality and community are presented by Lahiri via writing that is both straightforward and evocative on the whole. By studying the ways in which Lahiri's tales include essential themes like hybridity, identity formation, displacement, and belonging, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the theoretical framework of the Indian diaspora as it is mirrored in Lahiri's writings. The purpose of this research is to emphasize the ways in which Lahiri redefines and expands the idea of diasporic identity in contemporary literature. This will be accomplished by locating her literary contributions within the larger discourse of diaspora studies.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations of Diaspora and Identity

Within the realms of postcolonial and cultural studies, the idea of diaspora has been extensively conceptualized as a dynamic process that involves the reconstruction of identity, memory, and displacement. Stuart Hall (1990) contends that cultural identity is not a permanent essence but rather a "production" that is continually generated and modified via the experiences of historical and cultural events. In the context of the Indian diaspora, where identity is formed by the combination of the memories of one's homeland and the reality of the place in which one is now living, this perspective is especially pertinent. The conceptual framework developed by Hall is helpful in comprehending the manner in which the protagonists in Jhumpa Lahiri's writings negotiate their feeling of belonging across a variety of cultural situations.

## 3. Hybridity and the "Third Space"

The concept of hybridity, which was first articulated by Homi K. Bhabha (1994), is an extremely important component of the field of diaspora studies. The concept of the "third space" is presented by Bhabha. This "third space" is a cultural zone that exists between two other cultural zones and is where new identities are generated via the interplay of many cultural traditions. The protagonists of Lahiri's stories frequently occupy this third place, and as they attempt to integrate Indian customs and Western ways of living, they frequently find themselves in a state of both conflict and creation. This hybridity is not just the mixing of cultures; rather, it is the product of a complicated negotiation that leads to the formation of identities that are distinct and fluid.

## 4. Diaspora Space and Intersectionality

Through the notion of "diaspora space," which is introduced by Avtar Brah in 1996, the understanding of diaspora is expanded. This space is a place where many subject positions, such as race, gender, class, and generation can interact. It is important to note, according to Brah, that diaspora is not just about people who move away from their homelands, but also about the intertwining of many groups inside a common social space. In the writings of Lahiri, this is made clear via the diverse experiences of first-generation immigrants and their children. These experiences bring to light the contrasts between generations as well as the role that gender plays in the formation of diasporic identity.

## 5. Displacement, Nostalgia, and Belonging

Displacement and melancholy are two of the most prominent themes that appear in diaspora literature. It has been observed by academics that migrants frequently suffer a feeling of "in-betweenness," which is characterized by an emotional commitment to their birthplace and the requirement to adjust to a new cultural setting simultaneously. Several of Lahiri's writings, including *The Namesake* (2003) and *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999), effectively depict the tension that is present in the world. Additionally, her characters usually deal with emotions of alienation and cultural dislocation, while at the same time looking for acceptance and a sense of belonging in the society in which they have been raised.

## 6. Identity Formation in the Indian Diaspora

The process of identity development within the Indian diaspora is an ongoing and ever-evolving process that is impacted by cultural heritage, social interactions, and personal decisions. This mobility is reflected in the works of Jhumpa Lahiri, notably via the characters of the second generation, particularly those who frequently suffer a fractured sense of who they are. As a result of these people's ability to navigate between the cultural standards of Western society and the expectations of their parents, which are steeped in Indian traditions, they are able to redefine their identities in a way that transcends the boundaries of distinct cultures. Generally speaking, the theoretical framework of diaspora in Lahiri's writings incorporates essential themes from Hall (1990), Bhabha (1994), and Brah (1996). This provides a complete lens through which to comprehend the intricacies of migration, hybridity, and identity in modern literature.

## 7. Discussion of Key Theories Informing the Analysis

Several works on diaspora, privileging hybridity, and transnationalism, which are situated within the rhetoric of feminist and postcolonial theories, serve as the theoretical foundation for the analytical framework that this study employs. In order to inspire acknowledgment of cultural hybridity, social diversity, and inclusivity, postcolonial diaspora literature focuses on the lives and cultural practices of individuals who have been forcibly exiled out of their homelands as well as people who have freely migrated.

**Postcolonial Feminism:** This critical perspective, which is a consequence of the convergence of postcolonial and feminist ideas, is essential for evaluating the work of Lahiri. It expresses opposition to male hegemony while simultaneously criticizing the tendency of certain white feminist ideas to disregard inequalities in racial and socioeconomic distinctions. It provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how cultural relocation frequently exacerbates difficulties of patriarchy, autonomy, and self-realization, particularly for women in environments that are characterized by diaspora.

**Cultural Hybridity:** Cultural hybridity is a prominent issue in diasporic writing, and it challenges traditional concepts of authenticity and purity in the depiction of cultural identities. Lahiri is one of the many authors that rejects the concept of a one or essentialized identity. Instead, they embrace the intricacies and inconsistencies that are inherent in multicultural experiences. Through the adoption of this topic, diasporic writers encourage readers to reevaluate the limits of identification and belonging, so fostering a more all-encompassing comprehension of the human experience. The work of Lahiri, in particular, gives the impression that there is no one solution that can be definitively answered to concerns about home, Indianness, American identity, or what it means to be an Indian lady or an immigrant Indian woman. Her characters' conceptions of locations, roles, and identities are altered as a result of the migratory experience, which results in a life that is always in flux, characterized by continual questioning and negotiation.

This approach places a significant emphasis on the notion of agency, particularly with regard to the agency of women. The purpose of this research is to investigate how Lahiri's characters acquire and exercise their decision-making powers. This will be accomplished by utilizing theoretical techniques such as Amartya Sen's capabilities approach, which places an emphasis on reducing cultural, economical, and social constraints. To do this, it is necessary to investigate the ways in which women bring about change within their respective social settings and establish agency through the processes of acculturation that occur inside diasporic places.

## 8. Exploration of How Gender Shapes Migration Experiences and Identity Formation

A "striking difference between the experiences of diasporic men and women" is a clear indication that the experiences of diasporic people are gendered. Lahiri's Indian male protagonists frequently locate their reason for moving in the "search for the American dream," which is the act of traveling for the aim of pursuing better possibilities in the areas of education and employment. Taking this into consideration, it appears that migration is frequently motivated by personal aspirations and the proactive pursuit of financial and professional growth in the new nation. This is in sharp contrast to the experiences that Lahiri's immigrant women normally have, which are typically quite diverse from one another. They are regularly "brought" to the United States, either to accompany their husbands or to see them for the first time. This is typically the consequence of arranged weddings. This indicates a relative lack of initial agency in their decision to migrate, which frequently makes their travel less of a choice and more of a consequence due to the imposition of circumstances. Once they arrive in the new nation, these women are confronted with a number of important problems, such as adjusting to a life that is different from their extended families and conventional female support structures, as well as coping with changing cultural norms around childcare, home duties, and food. Both male and female characters have fundamental reasons for migrating, yet there is a noticeable distinction between the two in terms of their motives. Characters who are male are shown as migrating in order to achieve success in the outside world and to integrate themselves into the public and professional spheres of the host nation. On the other hand, female characters are usually shown as the "bearer of culture" and the "representative of culture." They are tasked with the responsibility of preserving traditional customs inside the home sphere, such as preparing local cuisine, dressing in traditional garb, and instructing the mother tongue. This shows that there is an unequal burden: while males may want to assimilate in the public realm, more often than not, it is women who carry the major duty for safeguarding cultural heritage within the house. This obligation is frequently unsaid. This gendered division of labor regarding cultural preservation can directly lead to increased feelings of isolation, homesickness, and a sense of being "out of sorts" for women. This is because their primary sphere of influence, which is the home, becomes the site of intense cultural maintenance, which is frequently disconnected from the larger host society. Additionally, this offers a fertile environment for intergenerational conflict, as children of the second generation, who are more exposed to the culture of the host country, may find it difficult to adhere to the traditions that their moms work so hard to uphold. While male characters may be able to navigate the diasporic experience through external achievements and professional integration, female characters frequently internalize the diasporic struggle, becoming the primary "site" where cultural continuity and the tensions of hybridity are most acutely felt and performed. This is implied by Lahiri's portrayal of the characters. While kids are developing resilience and autonomy, this reveals a particular sort of "gendered entrapment" that they are experiencing.

## 9. Gendered Diasporic Identities in The Namesake

The experience of displacement and alienation that Ashima has at the beginning of her voyage through the diaspora in *The Namesake* is powerful. She is pregnant and just married when she arrives in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and she instantly has a tremendous sense of alienation and isolation. The overwhelming sensation that "nothing feels normal" is what she describes as her initial experiences in the United States of America. This emotional load is considerably exacerbated by the fact that she is not there with her extended family for key life milestones, such as delivery, which in India would be a communal occasion attended by both parents and other relatives. She expresses her profound sorrow at the fact that the birth of her child, "like almost everything in America, feels somehow haphazard, only half true... she has never known of a person entering the world so alone, so deprived." The fact that she is mourning in solitude without the reassuring rituals and camaraderie of her cultural gathering is more evidence of her isolation. She declares that she is "completely alienated" after being quietly notified of the death of her father. She had "no other option but to move with her husband only to serve him," hence her move to the United States was not a choice but rather a "forced one." She had no other choice but to obey her husband. Her marriage was planned, and she was not informed about her preferences or expectations, which resulted in a major lack of agency in the initial decisions that she made in her life. She is profoundly influenced by "disciplinarian patriarchal norms" from India, which are shown by the fact that she is unable to say the first name of her husband, which is a subtle yet powerful indicator of propriety in her culture. Ashima eloquently compares the sensation of being a foreigner to that of a

"lifelong pregnancy—a perpetual wait, a constant burden, and a continuous feeling out of sorts," which elicits a complicated combination of curiosity, sympathy, and respect from others who are not familiar with her.

### **10. Transformation and Evolving Agency in a Foreign Land**

A tremendous amount of endurance and a slow yet deep development are displayed by Ashima, in spite of the difficulties she first encountered and the acute homesickness she experienced. She never completely gives up her cultural identity, as seen by the fact that she always wears saris, speaks and teaches her children their mother tongue, and prepares native cuisine. As a result of her role, she "purposefully becomes a mother of culture for herself, her son, and many young Bengali-Americans," so actively promoting new cultural transmissions. It is when she begins working at a municipal library that she experiences a key turning point in her quest toward more agency. She is able to more easily integrate into American society and develop her independence as a result of this career opportunity. The normal Bengali housewife is dependent on her husband, but she begins to socialize with American acquaintances, goes shopping by herself, and learns to drive, all of which are substantial departures from the norm. She is transformed from a subservient wife into a "independent woman capable of making critical life decisions" as a result of her engagement, which minimizes her likelihood of being financially reliant on her husband. The initial experience that Ashima has in the diaspora is marked by a significant lack of autonomy, which is profoundly founded in patriarchal standards and the cultural isolation that she is experiencing in her new setting. Her change, on the other hand, is neither shown as a total integration into American culture or as a complete abandoning of her Indian identity. Rather than full assimilation, which would imply a complete absorption into the host culture and a loss of her original self, her increased agency and independence are a direct result of acculturation, which is the process of adapting to a new culture while retaining significant aspects of one's original culture. Acculturation is the process of adapting to change while maintaining significant aspects of one's original culture. Through the acquisition of practical skills, such as learning to drive and getting job in the library, as well as the creation of new social contacts in the host nation, Ashima is able to directly overcome the cultural and financial hurdles that she had previously encountered. She is now able to demonstrate that agency in a diasporic setting may be built not by rejecting one's background, but rather by carefully integrating aspects of the new culture into a hybrid identity. This newly discovered self-sufficiency enables her to express greater autonomy and make crucial life decisions independently. Ashima exhibits a fresh sense of composure and practicality in the aftermath of Ashoke's unexpected death. She observes the traditions of her nation throughout the period of mourning without experiencing a sense of helplessness, and she performs rituals with poise while simultaneously instructing her children. She undertakes the voyage totally on her own, which is a concept that no longer terrifies her. Her return to India after his demise is a metaphor of her personal development; she arrives there on her own. In order to embrace the meaning of her name, "Ashima," which means "without borders, without a home of her own, a resident everywhere and nowhere," she makes the logical decision to split her time between India and the United States. This represents a "fluid identity" and a "rootless and nomadic existence" that, for her, is not a source of alienation but rather a chance to take pleasure in experiences from both her past and her present lives. Her journey effectively challenges the simplistic binary of "either/or" that is frequently imposed on diasporic identities. She advocates for a "both/and" approach, which is a method in which agency and a profound sense of self are found in the dynamic synthesis of cultural influences. This approach embodies the complex and fluid hybridity that is discussed as a key characteristic of contemporary diasporic literature.

### **11. Gogol Ganguli: The Second-Generation Male's Quest for Self-Definition**

#### **The Symbolic Significance of His Name in Identity Formation**

Within the context of *The Namesake*, Gogol Ganguli's name functions as the key fulcrum of his identity issue and his sense of being of diasporic origin. The Russian author Nikolai Gogol is the subject of this tribute, which was selected by Ashoke Gogol, the author's father, following a near-fatal train accident in which a book written by Gogol saved his life. Gogol's name, which was given to him by his parents with the intention of honoring their history and establishing roots in a new area, becomes a significant cause of anguish and alienation for him, designating him as "different, foreign, and an Other." In spite of the fact that his choice to officially change his name to Nikhil is portrayed as an act of self-definition, it is also described as "one of erasure, a severing of ties to his family and heritage." As a

result of his tremendous struggle to reconcile his Bengali background with his American upbringing, he feels as though he is stuck between the traditional values that his parents uphold and his strong desire to adapt into American society. There is a recurrent pattern that involves this internal and exterior struggle. The first cultural conundrum that his parents encountered, in especially with regard to his naming, unintentionally lays the groundwork for Gogol's ongoing struggle with his identity throughout his whole life. Internalizing the conflict that exists between the preservation of culture and the process of assimilation, he comes to the conclusion that letting go of his "foreign" identity is the way to achieve a sense of belonging. This rejection of his roots, on the other hand, does not instantly offer a sense of belonging in the new culture; rather, it leaves him adrift, suggesting that real integration involves a more sophisticated interior synthesis rather than an exterior erase. It is not until the untimely passing of his father and the heartbreaking discovery of the actual history and importance of the name that Gogol begins to comprehend the full value of the name and the significant sacrifices that his parents made in order to provide him with chances.

### **Navigating Cultural Hybridity and Romantic Relationships**

The sexual connections that Gogol has serve as an important mirror for the psychological battle that he is experiencing over his identity and his feeling of being a diaspora. His relationship with Maxine is a representation of his effort to completely embrace an American life that is integrated, one that appears to be free from the perceived responsibilities of tradition and cultural expectations. Through his relationship with Maxine, he exemplifies the character of "Nikhil," a guy who is able to assimilate himself without difficulty into American culture, where family responsibilities are relaxed and ethnic identity is an afterthought. On the other hand, following the passing of his father, he gradually comes to the realization that there is a substantial distinction between just being "welcomed into a family" and genuinely "belonging to one." His later marriage to Moushumi, a fellow Bengali-American, is shown as an attempt to recapture his lost ancestry; nevertheless, in the end, it is founded on duty rather than true understanding, which finally leads to the breakdown of the marriage. These connections shed light on his ongoing fight to define himself according to the expectations of others, whether it is by denying his own culture or by steadfastly embracing a common heritage. In the end, this conflict leaves him feeling without fulfillment. Gogol, as a second-generation immigrant, faces the distinct and perhaps more insidious challenge of constructing an identity from disparate and often conflicting cultural influences. This is in contrast to the challenge that first-generation immigrants like Ashima face, which is grappling with the challenge of retaining and adapting their established identities in a new land. A need for a "blank slate" identity, free from the "weight of tradition" and the "foreignness" connected with his history, is shown in his early rejection of his given name and his pursuit of connections that embody an unburdened American identity. Both of these actions are indicative of his desire to reject his given name.

However, rather than bringing about release, this search results in a severe sense of alienation and a lack of fulfillment from the experience. In spite of the fact that they both have Bengali-American ancestry, the eventual collapse of his marriage to Moushumi is more evidence that a purely "Indian" identity, or one that is exclusively based on exterior cultural markers, is not adequate for him. Every single one of Gogol's stories is a never-ending quest for belonging, which was first exemplified by his conscious decision to distance himself from the culture of his parents. He eventually comes to the realization that identity is "not a binary choice but a continuum, shaped by both inheritance and experience." This realization is brought about by his experiences, notably the failures of his love relationships. At the end of the book, the author makes the point that real belonging is not about choose one world over another but rather about "learning to exist in both." His trip highlights the specific psychological burden that the second generation in the diaspora has, which is that they are frequently neither entirely "at home" in their ancestral region nor fully integrated into the country that they are currently living in. His journey emphasizes that identity is not a fixed condition but rather a dynamic, lifelong process of becoming. The struggle that they are going through is not so much about the loss of a distinct identity as it is about the inherent difficulties of establishing one in a fluid and heterogeneous world that requires ongoing negotiation and self-redefinition.

### **12. Discussion**

Throughout her body of work, Lahiri repeatedly presents the concept of identity as fluid, nuanced, and multifaceted, therefore challenging rigid or binary conceptions of selfhood. Through her art, she successfully creates a

"interpretative third space" that challenges the basic dichotomies of "us" and "them," so enabling a flexible acceptance and negotiation of other cultures. Through her remarkable demonstration, she demonstrates that belonging is not about selecting one world over another, but rather about "learning to exist in both environments." It is not only narratives of sorrow and loss that Lahiri's stories of displacement are, but they are also fascinating portrayals of belonging to many cultures, with an emphasis on "addition and negotiation rather than loss and acceptance." Remarkable tenacity and the tremendous human potential to adapt, integrate, and create meaning in the midst of seemingly irreconcilable disparities are displayed via Lahiri's subtle characterizations, which expose the rich inner lives of characters who are navigating their dual worlds. At the end of the day, her tales provide a well-rounded and multi-faceted investigation of diasporic experiences, highlighting both the obstacles and the opportunities for self-discovery. The traditional discourses on immigration frequently portray a dichotomy that is rigid: either total integration into a "melting pot" (which implies the loss of original culture) or tight commitment to "cultural purity" (which implies resistance to the culture of the host). The work of Lahiri, which can be seen in both *The Namesake* and *Interpreter of Maladies*, deconstructs and transcends this basic distinction in a constant manner. Ashima's journey, for example, indicates that agency and a feeling of belonging are not attained by becoming entirely "American," but rather by skillfully combining features of American society with her strong Indian customs. This is the case since Ashima's path reveals that she gained both of these things. The great struggle that Gogol went through demonstrates that just switching his Indian name to an American one does not bring about tranquility or a secure identity. Because of her childlike nature, Lilia is able to actively combine and mediate across different cultures, so fostering harmony rather than separation. Both the recurring ideas of "interpretative third space" and Ashima's identity as "without borders" expressly reject the binary alternatives that are presented here. The works of fiction written by Lahiri provide a complex and profoundly humane framework for comprehending identity in a society that is becoming increasingly globalized. She suggests that genuine belonging and self-realization for those who have experienced diaspora live in the gap between cultures, which is dynamic, fluid, and sometimes contradictory. This is in contrast to the situation in which individuals are compelled to choose between cultures or in a standstill condition of cultural preservation. An important contribution that this viewpoint makes to postcolonial discourse is that it goes beyond basic narratives of assimilation or resistance. Instead, it advocates for a more nuanced awareness of cultural intricacies and the continual process of identity development.

### 13. Conclusion

Jhumpa Lahiri's writings reflect a sophisticated and profoundly human knowledge of migration, identity, and cultural negotiation. This is revealed via the author's investigation of the theoretical framework of the Indian diaspora. via her narratives, she skillfully illustrates how diasporic identities are not fixed but are continuously formed via experiences of displacement, adaptation, and engagement with many cultural contexts. This is accomplished by engaging with significant theoretical ideas. Taking inspiration from the concepts presented by Stuart Hall (1990), Lahiri's characters exemplify the concept of identity as a fluid and ever-changing process that is continuously impacted by history, memory, and the reality that people experience in their experiences. Similarly, the notion of hybridity and the "third space" articulated by Homi K. Bhabha (1994) is clearly portrayed in her picture of persons who reside between cultures, negotiating and rebuilding their sense of self. The conceptual framework of "diaspora space" that was presented by Avtar Brah in 1996 contributes to the enhancement of this study by drawing attention to the intersections of identity that are formed by elements such as disparities in gender, class, and generational inequalities. To summarize, the literary contributions made by Lahiri not only serve as examples of important theoretical notions in the field of diaspora studies, but they also provide a significant redefining of diasporic identity as being dynamic, hybrid, and depending on the context in which it is experienced. The conversation on migration and identity in modern literature is enriched by her works, which also provide vital insights into the ever-changing nature of cultural belonging. Her works serve as a crucial bridge between theory and lived experience, connecting theory and lived experience effectively.

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