

Relevance of Traditional Self-Governance in Changing Tribal Communities: A Study of Pangwala Tribe of Himachal Pradesh

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DOI: 10.29327/216332.2.2-2

ABSTRACT

Tribal people have their own self-governing system. They control and regulate themselves through Traditional Self-Governing bodies. Before the inception of the formal Panchayati Raj system, the Traditional system of Self-Governance was popular among the tribes in India. Despite the implementation of the formal Panchayati Raj system and the era of globalisation the Traditional system of Self-Governance is still in existence in the Scheduled Areas in India. The present study was conducted with the purpose of investigating the structure, functions and institutional arrangement of the Traditional system of Self-Governing and its relevance in changing scenarios.

The results of the present study reveal that the Traditional system of Self-Governance is still in existence with the same institutional structure but the functions of this system have been reduced to a large extent. Even after the implementation of the formal system of Panchayati Raj (PESA Act) in Scheduled areas the Traditional system of Self-Governance is still very relevant in some cases.

Because of cultural and ethical diversity tribes have distinct positions in social strata. They have different patterns in social, political, economic, cultural, behavioural, ecological, customary, linguistic, geographical and developmental spheres. As a result, it is not easy to smoothly perform developmental activities in these areas at government level. For this local communities can contribute a lot. To cope up the problem Traditional Self-Governing institutions and formal Panchayati Raj Institutions can play vital role. Both the institutions include local representations.

Keywords: Traditional Self-Governance 1. Relevance 2. Formal Panchayati Raj System 3. Changing Tribal Communities 4. Scheduled Areas 5. Pangwala Tribe 6. Himachal Pradesh 7.

Recebido em: 12/10/2021 - Aprovado em: 06/12/2021 - Disponibilizado em: 24/01/2022

Introduction

Tribal development is mandatory for all governments as tribal communities are an integral part of our society. Only social and economic development is not required for tribes in India. The political development of tribal communities is also one of the most important aspects. In this regard, the Government of India took a landmark initiative and implemented the 73rd constitutional amendment act in the country. This has led to rural areas with respect to political decentralisation. In the next phase the government decided to implement PESA, Act-1996, in the Scheduled Areas of the country. This act included tribal communities in the political decentralisation system. Implementation of the PESA Act was a form of administrative reform, because the intervention of the government, government officials and political parties was banned in the Traditional system of Self-Governance. Tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh welcomed the new and formal Panchayati Raj system (PESA Act-1996) without any protest. The tribal communities respected the decision of the government. The PESA Act opened the new doors to tribal communities. It gave the opportunities to tribal communities to ensure their formal participation in the democracy. The PESA Act provided the opportunity to generate more financial resources and avail the benefits through different policies and programs implemented by the governments for the upliftment of communities. Traditional Self-Governing institutions do not receive financial aid from government or non-government agencies. Therefore it was important for the tribal people to welcome the implementation of the PESA Act with open arms, as it provides a huge amount of funds under different schemes.

Local Self-Government in any form (non- statutory or statutory) has been the prime institution of governance of village affairs in all communities of the world including tribal societies. The Pangi, Lahoul, Spiti, Bharmour and Kinnaur are five Integrated Tribal Development Projects in Himachal Pradesh are known for the predominance of tribal communities and their distinctness. This distinction can be observed in every walk of life such as the landscape, the array of communities and their socio-cultural practices, the prevalence of traditional institutions and ecological diversity. Within the communities distinctness is also observable. Understanding the distinctness of tribal communities and safeguarding their identities, the government has made efforts time to time. Tribal people developed their own self-governing systems. The system not only governs controls and regulates them but also protects the interests and identities of the tribal people. This traditional form of government has played a vital role among tribal communities during the period when the new form of Panchayati Raj was not in existence in the Scheduled Areas.

Tribes in Himachal Pradesh

The tribal population in Himachal Pradesh is spread in the Scheduled and non-Scheduled Areas. According to the census of 2011, the Chamba district has highest number of tribal

population with 135500 and Hamirpur district has less number of tribal populations with 3044 among all the districts of Himachal Pradesh. The district wise details of the tribal population are given in the table below:

Table 1 Tribal population in Himachal Pradesh

District	Area (Sq. Km.)	Total Population	Scheduled Tribes	Density per sq. km.	Sex Ratio	Literacy %age
Kinnaur	6401	84298	48746	13	818	80.00
L & S	13835	31528	25707	2	916	76.81
Chamba	6528	518844	135500	80	989	73.19
Kangra	5739	1507223	84564	263	1013	86.49
Kullu	5503	437474	16822	80	950	80.14
Mandi	3950	999518	12787	253	1012	82.81
Hamirpur	1118	454293	3044	407	1096	89.01
Una	1540	521057	8601	338	977	87.23
Bilaspur	1167	382056	10693	327	981	85.67
Solan	1936	576670	25645	300	884	85.02
Sirmour	2825	530164	11263	188	915	79.98
Shimla	5131	813384	8755	159	916	84.55
Himachal Pradesh	55673	6856509	392126	123	974	76.60

Source: Compiled from Directorate of Economics and Statistics and Department of Tribal Development Himachal Pradesh.

Scheduled Areas in Himachal Pradesh

The Kinnaur, Lahaul, Spiti, Pangi and Bharmour are five Integrated Tribal Development Projects (ITDPs) that constitute the Scheduled area in Himachal Pradesh, fulfilling the minimum criterion of the 50 percent Scheduled Tribe (ST) population in a Community Development Block.

Table 2 Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) wise Distribution of Tribes in Himachal Pradesh

ITDP	Area (Sq. Km)	Total Population	Scheduled Tribes	Density per Sq. Km.	Sex Ratio	Literacy %age
Kinnaur	6401	84121	48746	13	819	80.00
Lahaul	6250	19107	15163	3	931	74.97
Spiti	7591	12457	10544	2	862	79.76
Pangi	1595	18868	17016	12	970	71.02
Bharmour	1818	39108	32116	22	945	73.85
Total	23655	173661	123585	7	877	77.10

Source: Compiled from Directorate of Tribal Development Shimla-2

Kinnaur is the largest ITDP among the five ITDPs in the state. Spiti has smallest ITDP among all. The literacy rate of Kinnaur is quite high but the sex ratio (819) is low among all ITDPs. Pangi has a high sex ratio (970) not only among all ITDPs of the state but is quite high compared to the nation's sex ratio (940) but it is slightly lower than that of Himachal Pradesh (972).

Pangi and the Pangwala

The Pangi valley is the most backward tribal area of Himachal Pradesh and a sub-division of the Chamba district. This valley is mostly hilly and somewhat poorly developed remote areas surrounded by Peer Panjal and Zanskar Ranges. This is an off-beat challenging tourist destination for Himachal Pradesh. The Pangi valley is also known for its thrilling tracks such as Sach Pass, Hudan, Sural, Bhatories, Sechu Nala, Hilu-twan, etc. These trekking sites are open during summer. Government has done and is doing the development of all possible infrastructures of roads and other essentials for the people and tourist's projects to invite them to witness the majesty of nature and enjoy the trekking.

The Pangi covers 1,601 square kilometres area with a population of 18868 and is sandwiched between two sub-systems of the Himalayas. The river Chanderbhaga, flows from Lahaul and passes through the Pangi Valley. Pangi has 19 Panchayats. The Pangi valley is divided into the Saichu, Hudan Bhatore and Sural Bhatore valleys. These are inhabited at elevations of 7,000 feet (2,100 m) to 11,000 feet (3,400 m) above sea level. The Sach Pass at an altitude of 14,500 feet (4,400 m) is open for vehicular traffic officially between June to last 31st October, and remains closed with heavy snow in rest period of the year. With recent improvements to the roads, villagers have started to grow cash crops such as peas, apples and other fruits. The Pangi is mostly inhabited by the Pangwala and Buddhist people. The mountains are surrounded by a valley between 5,400 and 6,700 meters.

The people of Pangi are very simple and honest. Most people are engaged in agricultural and allied services. The people of Pangi Valley are fond of singing and dancing. Some of the highly economically empowered people have been migrated from Pangi to Kullu and Chamba. Most of the people shift from Pangi to other places of the Himachal Pradesh during winter. At present Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme is the main financial source of the people of Pangi Valley. Besides this some parts of the Pangi produce cash crops like pea, apple and potato to earn money. Pangwali is the mainly spoken dialect of Pangwala tribe. Most of the people are of Hindu religion and very few are from Buddhist religion. All the people of Pangi believe in worship of god. Every village has their own god. People from both the religions respect each other. There are no communal riots in Pangi Valley. The people of Pangi believe in brotherhood.

Praja System: A Traditional Form of Self-Governance of Pangwala Tribes

The Praja System is a nomenclature for traditional self-government of the Pangwala tribe. Praja is large gathering of people within a particular boundary decided by villagers with mutual consents. There is also the provision of a Self-Governing System within the Self-Governing System. Every small village constitutes its own small Praja System. The villagers of two, three or four even

five villages come together to form a large Praja System. The number of villages in a large Praja System depends on the size of the population of the villages and the controlling capacity of the villagers. The details or any document about Traditional Self-Governing System is not available with the administration or any other authority. Therefore it is not possible to mention here the total number of Traditional Self-Governing Institutions functional in the study other. One more reason is that the boundaries of the Traditional Self-Governing Institutions can change at any time. Villages can quit from the institution and can constitute new Praja System (new Traditional Self-Governing Institution).

Structure of Praja System

To form a proper structure to administer and govern the Praja System, people divide their whole population into wards (as in the formal Panchayati Raj System) with their mutual consent in a meeting without any external interference. After dividing the population in wards, the population nominate their ward members for their respective wards with their mutual consent. Here the very interesting point is that the people nominate these ward members not elect them. It means that the ward members are nominated and not elected. This also helps to maintain their brotherhood. These ward members conduct small meetings and make decisions. Their decisions are not final. They just take the decision and call a meeting of the Praja at large scale. In this meeting the members put their decision in front of the Praja and make a healthy discussion on that particular issue. Any member of the Praja can participate in this discussion and can suggest their better ideas in a democratic way. Praja has the right to accept or reject or accept with some necessary amendments.

Functions of Praja System

As for the functions of the Praja System are concern traditionally, the functional jurisdiction of the Praja System was wide. Take care of natural resources, distribution of resources among people, Land disputes, property disputes, resource disputes, theft, dispute between or among people, assaults, property damage, controlling stray cattles, impositions of fine for violations of rules and regulations, fine for illegal cattle grazing, etc. were common functions of the Praja System. They even settled rap cases, murder cases, divorce cases, etc. In addition, the Praja System also performs the local functions according to the events. The Praja System keeps all the rules regulations and decisions in written in a register. Even the Praja System keeps the amount of penalties and punishments in written. With the passage of time the functions of the Praja System have been reduced. People move to police stations or courts to settle disputes. One Praja System cannot interfere in the functioning of another Praja System. It is compulsory to participate one adult member of every household in the meetings called by the Praja System. To ensure 100 per cent

participation from every household, the provision of financial punishment is also available. Participatory democracy is the beauty of the Praja System. Generally females are not allowed in the meetings, but in some cases where male members are not available in the household male members are allowed in the meetings.

Tenure of the Members of Praja System

The tenure of the members is fixed for one year. Every year the Praja renew its members. The re-nomination of the members depends on the working and pleasure of the people of that particular ward. The ward member can be removed at any time before the completion of its tenure if necessary by the population of that particular ward. Any ward member can resign from its post if he feels so. There is no need for written resignation. He can publicly announce his resignation orally. After the consents of the people resignation can be accepted and at the same time people nominate their new member. The new member is nominated for the rest of the remaining tenure not for one year.

Financial Resources of the Praja System

The main financial source of the Praja system is the amounts of money collected from violators as financial punishment. In addition, people deposit small amounts of money from their own pockets. This amount is decided by the people collectively. Needy people take loans from Praja system at reasonable interest rate. The interest rate is also one of the sources of financial income of Praja system. Some other fines decided by the Praja System also act as financial resource.

PESA Act-1996, Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas)

PESA Act is the formal form of self-governing system in Scheduled Areas in India having constitutional affiliation. The act was introduced by Government of India in 24th December 1996 with the aim to extend the provisions of the part IX of 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 of Indian constitution to the Scheduled Area with some necessary modifications. The act was introduced in the ten states of India that were dominated by Scheduled population. This is an important legislation to empower the Indian tribal communities. The PESA Act-1996 is also known as "constitution within the constitution". The 73rd constitutional amendment act 1992 of Indian constitution related to the Panchayati Raj System in India was not implemented in Scheduled areas. PESA Act was perceived as a positive development for tribal communities in Scheduled Areas who had before experienced enormously commitment with current advancement processes and from the activity of both pioneer laws and resolutions made in independent India. The

deprivation of retrieve to forest, land and other local area assets had expanded their vulnerability. Displacement due to construction of different projects and uncontrolled land acquisition had prompted huge trouble in tribal communities in Scheduled Areas. PESA was viewed as a panacea for a considerable lot of these weaknesses and tried to present another worldview of advancement where the tribal communities in such Scheduled Areas were to choose without anyone else the speed and needs of their progress.

Identification of Research Gap

During this study literature review was conducted. From the literature of review it was concluded that there is research gap related to the present study. The main focus of the researchers was on PESA Act-1992 which is formal form of self-governance in tribal communities not traditional form. The focus of researchers on Traditional Self-Governance is negligible especially with respect to Himachal Pradesh. Even countrywide very few studies have been conducted on Traditional Self-Governance. This shows the inadequacy of research, knowledge, theory, evidences and desired information and data. In this research the researchers have made an attempt to contribute a concise literature in the field of Traditional Self-Governance System. The present study has been conducted at small scale that is why this is not enough. This attempt will definitely attract the researchers to contribute a lot in this field.

Problem Selection

The present study deals with the relevance of the traditional system of self-governance in changing tribal communities. This is clear from the title that the study is related to the Scheduled Areas. The development of Scheduled Areas is one of the focus points for centre and state governments in India. Tribal communities have their own culture and traditions. Therefore it is not easy for the government to interfere directly with their affairs. To safeguard their interests, traits, culture and traditions, tribal people have their own self-governing institutions. The Government of India have also introduced the PESA Act-1996 in the Scheduled Areas of India. To analyse the relevance of traditional self-governing institutions the researcher selected this particular research problem.

Importance of Present Study

The present study is highly important from the research point of view. It is evident that most of the policies and programmes are rural centric. The issue of rural development has become significant not only in India but also globally. For the purpose of implementing policies and programmes at ground level there is a provision of formal Panchayati Raj Institutions in India.

These institutions not only implement policies and programmes but also ensure people's participation in development and democracy. People in rural areas also have opportunities to elect and to be elected as people representatives through these formal institutions. To strengthen these formal Panchayati Raj Institutions the Government of India took a step to constitutionalize these institutions in 1992. This was a new landmark in the formal Local Self-Governing System in India. In the study area the tribal people have developed their own self-governing system with proper structure and well defined written functions. Without direct participation of the tribal people in the decision making it is not possible to develop Scheduled Areas. These areas have different issues compared to other parts of the country. Therefore we cannot deny the Traditional Self-Governing System. The study of this Traditional Self-Governing System is important in the era of globalisation.

Area of the Study

There are a total five Integrated Tribal Development Projects generally known as Scheduled Areas in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. Of these five, the Pangri Integrated Tribal Development Project was selected as study area for the purpose of this research. The area was selected because of three reasons. First, area wise Pangri is smallest among all. Second, the area has different functioning of Traditional Self-Government than other Scheduled Areas of the state. Third, Pangri is remotest Scheduled Area in Himachal Pradesh. It was not easy to conduct this small study in highly populous and widely spread areas. It was not easy for the researcher to cover a large sample size. In this study only social aspect has been taken in to consideration for the research. Constitutional and legal affiliation aspects of the Traditional Self-Governance have been excluded from the study.

Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the structure and functioning of Traditional Self-Governance Institutions in tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh.
2. To evaluate the role of the Traditional form of Self-Governance in safeguarding the interests of tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh.
3. To identify the problems and explore mechanism of coordination between Traditional Self-Governance and formal Panchayati Raj System in Himachal Pradesh.
4. To evaluate the impact of formal Panchayati Raj on Traditional Self-Governance in Scheduled Areas in Himachal Pradesh.
5. To evaluate the relevance of Traditional system of Self-Governance in changing tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh.
6. To suggest measures to strengthen the identity of the Traditional form of Self-Governance in the present scenario.

7. To suggest measures to ensure synthesis between Traditional Self-Governance and formal Panchayati Raj Institutions in Scheduled Areas in Himachal Pradesh.

Research Question

The study deals with the relevance of Traditional Self-Governance in changing tribal communities. After completion of this study following questions were answered:

1. Relevance of Traditional Self-Governance system in Scheduled Areas
2. Role of Traditional Self-Governance in Scheduled Areas
3. Intervention of formal Panchayati Raj Institutions in the working of Traditional Self-Governing Institutions.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

To select the samples, different sampling techniques like multistage sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling and random cum purposive sampling techniques were used. In the first stage of sample selection, study area was selected. There are total of five Integrated Tribal Development Projects in Himachal Pradesh namely Pangti and Bharmour areas of Chamba district, Lahoul, Spiti and Kinnaur. At this stage Pangti was selected as the study area. In the second stage the numbers of Gram Panchayats were selected and in the third and the final stage numbers of samples were selected for interviews to generate actual facts about the present research problem from the field.

Pangti is locally divided in to two parts i. e., the upper and lower parts and administratively divided in to 19 Gram Panchayats. The upper part consists of 10 Gram Panchayats and the lower part consists of 9 Gram Panchayats. Both parts have linguistic and cultural differences. Administratively it has nineteen Gram Panchayats. For the purpose of the present study total 10 Gram Panchayats were selected i.e., 5 Gram Panchayats from each part with the help of systematic sampling technique. Two lists of Gram Panchayats were prepared. One list consists of the names of Gram Panchayats of the upper part and the other consists of the names of Gram Panchayats of the lower part. A system was adopted to select the sample Gram Panchayats. Numbering was performed in front of Gram Panchayats. The Gram Panchayats with odd numbers starting from one were selected as the sample for this study. Same procedure was applied to select the sample Gram Panchayats from both the lists.

After the selection of the Gram Panchayats at the last stage of sampling, a number of samples were selected. A total of 76 samples were obtained from all ten sampled Gram Panchayats. During the sample selection the age of the samples was kept in mind. The samples were stratified in to three age groups i. e., above 60 years of age to determine the historical background of the traditional system of self-governance. The second age group was 45-59 years

to determine its relevance after establishment of formal Panchayati Raj System. Third age group was below 45 years of age to determine the relevance of traditional system of self-governance in changing scenario. Total 7 samples were selected from each Gram Panchayat, i. e., 2 from each age group and 1 elected representative (Pradhan) from each Gram Panchayat. 6 samples were also selected from office bearers of Praja System (Traditional Self-Governing Institutions). The samples were selected with the help of random cum purposive sampling techniques. Therefore 60 samples were among the general population, 10 samples were elected representatives of formal Panchayati Raj Institutions and 6 samples were the office bearers of Traditional Self-Governing Institutions.

Data Collection

This study was based on primary and secondary data. Primary data was compiled from the interviews and in depth discussion conducted with the sample respondents. Previous studies were consulted online mode. The offline mode of the secondary data collection was not accessible because of the corona pandemic.

Results and Discussion

The results from the discussion and interview conducted with the respondents who were above the 60 years of age revealed that Panchayati Raj Institutions were in existence long ago but their roles, functioning and tenure, etc. were not properly defined. Organisational structure of the Traditional Self-Governing System is same as it was earlier. People were not aware about these institutions and were also less interested in participating the activities conducted by Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Traditional form of Self-Governing system was more popular among the people and they were more interested in Traditional Self-Governing system. The jurisdiction area of the tradition system was large, which is getting reduced with the changing time. People still believe in Traditional Self-Governing system but with less enthusiasm. Now people are moving to police stations and courts to settle their disputes. During their young age there was a fear among the people about police and courts. They got hide when they see police personals at their village or anywhere else.

A question was asked from the respondents that how they compare Traditional form of Self-Governing system and formal Panchayati Raj System. It was revealed that the formal Panchayati Raj System is doing well for the welfare of people. Beneficiaries are getting benefitted through different policies and programmes. People are also getting financial assistance from the government through formal Panchayati Raj Institutions. As for as elections is concern, it was revealed that in the Traditional form of Self-Governing system people elect their representatives through mutual consents but in the formal Panchayati Raj System election process is tough. This

process is destroying the brotherhood among the people as everyone wants to contest the elections. Common man cannot contest the elections easily, because of illegal practices like distribution of money, alcohol, food items and other usable things during elections. But in the case of Traditional form of Self-Governing system these things are not in practice.

Brotherhood is the beauty among tribal communities. Tribal people still believe in mutual sharing of resources. Communal disputes are negligible among them. Therefore it is important to keep the brotherhood continue. The illegal use of alcohol, distribution of money and other usable things during are officially banned during election process of formal Panchayati Raj system. Even then some anti-social elements use these practices to win the elections. Only governments and election commissions cannot stop these illegal practices. These practices are not only being performed among tribal communities, but also among other communities. Local communities should come forward and work with the administration to stop these illegal practices. Traditional Self-Governing System can play a pivotal role in this regard. They can pass a strict resolution in their traditional manner to ban these practices. Definitely the people will follow the resolution.

As for as the opinion of the middle age group (45-59 years) respondents is concerned, it can be concludes that the jurisdiction area of the Traditional Self-Governing System was wide for about one decade even after inception of formal Panchayati Raj System. But slowly the jurisdiction area got reduced. Even after all these the relevance of Traditional Self-Governing System is not popular among the tribal communities but also functional in nature. The results from the opinion of elected representatives of formal Panchayati Raj Institutions and office bearers of the Traditional Self-Governing System, it is evident that they do not interfere in the day-to-day working of each other. Both the institutions do not call each other for meetings and any decisions. They never invite suggestions and creative ideas from each other. Functioning of both the institutions is completely different. To ensure synthesis between both the institutions, it is important for both the institutions to come on a common platform and to share their experiences, ideas and suggestions for the welfare of community. Even both the institutions can constitute an informal common platform. This platform will help them to keep all the records preserved so that the upcoming office bearers can take help from the previous record.

Traditional Self-Governing System in Pangi is still democratic in nature and people respect the decisions taken by the office bearers. Traditional Self-Governing System still defines their functions, jurisdiction powers and areas in written. Penalties and punishments are also defined in a democratic way. The Traditional Self-Governing System is playing pivotal role in maintaining social harmony, peace and integrity among the people, which is need of the hour. There is a compulsory provision to ensure participation of one adult male member from a household in meetings. It gives a chance of wider participate to the villagers and also strengthen the participatory democracy in decision making. Citizens can put their views and grievances without any hesitation.

The formal Panchayati Raj System is struggling for wider participation of the people in meetings, which causes underdevelopment among the communities. The Traditional Self-

Governing System is gender biased, because it is compulsory to participate an adult male member of the family in the meetings. Generally women are not allowed in the meetings, but in exceptional cases only where male members are not available in the family are allowed to attend the meetings. In terms of different welfare programmes and financial assistances, formal Panchayati Raj Institutions are more influential among the people. But above all this Traditional Self-Governing System is playing important role in safeguarding the interests of tribal communities and also preserving the traditional tribal culture. Traditional Self-Governing System is playing an important role in safeguarding the interests of tribal communities at local level. Traditional Self-Governing System should be sustained and strengthen as well. This will not only safeguard the interests of tribal communities but also can help the local administration during natural calamities or other emergencies. Local communities can identify the local problems easily and can help the administration in developmental activities.

Conclusion

No one can deny the tribal people. Tribal communities have rich cultural heritage. Because of cultural and ethical diversity they have distinct positions in social strata. They have different patterns in social, political, economic, cultural, behavioural, ecological, customary, linguistic, geographical and developmental spheres. As a result, it is not easy to smoothly perform developmental activities in these areas at government level. For this local communities can contributed a lot. To cope up this problem Traditional Self-Governing System and formal Panchayati Raj Institutions can play vital role. Both the institutions include local representations. They can identify the local problems easily and can also deal with them in better way. Therefore, it is important to strengthen both the institutions and ensure synthesis between the both. Implementation of PESA Act in Scheduled Areas with some major changes shows the high concern of the government towards the development of tribal communities.

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