



RESEARCH PAPER

Colonial Abuse and Environmental Displacement in Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati*

¹Muhammad Akram, ²Aamer Shaheen and ³Sadia Qamar*

1. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** sadiaqamar@gcuf.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Humans, animals, plants and land are essential portion of environment. This paper presents colonial abuse upon different elements of colonized environment. Colonial abuse leads to environmental displacement in the form of escape, migration and elimination. Environmental displacement refers to the phenomenon where individuals or groups are compelled to migrate as their environmental conditions have become uninhabitable or unsustainable because of colonial violence. Employing a postcolonial eco-critical lens to analyze the environmental displacement and colonial abuse, the paper delves into the intricate interplay between human actions and ecological consequences in Mustansar Hussain Tarar's novel *Sorrows of Sarasvati: The Lost River* (2021). Postcolonial eco-criticism is a theoretical framework that examines the representation of nature, environment, and ecology in literature within the context of post-colonial literature. Tarar's novel depicts environmental challenges faced by the human and non-human entities, entangled with the legacy of colonialism. The paper specifically analyzes the contending environmental issues in postcolonial literature drawing from the theoretical underpinnings of Huggan and Tiffin's concept of 'Green Postcolonialism' (2007) and emphasizes the need to integrate environmental concerns into postcolonial studies. Tarar's novel generates eco-consciousness by taking the readers deep into the mystery of history of ancient civilization that resembles modern day Pakistan's environmental position in many ways. In the tapestry of history, colonial invasion has been the main reason of devastation of indigenous people, native land, and local flora and fauna.

Keywords: Colonial Abuse, Eco-criticism, Environmental Displacement, Green Postcolonialism, Mustansar Hussain Tarar, *Sorrows of Sarasvati: The Lost River*

Introduction

The interplay between human actions and their ecological consequences has been a subject of intense scrutiny in the realm of postcolonial literature. This paper generates eco consciousness and sheds light on the environmental displacement and colonial abuse that has resulted from colonial invasion. The paper contributes to the ongoing discourse on environmental exploitation and its implications for indigenous people, native land, and local flora and fauna. The relationship between colonialism and the environment has been a theme of scholarly interest for several decades. Colonial powers, in their quest for resources and dominance, have often exploited the environments of colonized regions, leading to significant ecological changes and displacement of both human and non-human entities. This environmental exploitation and displacement are not just a historical phenomenon but continues to have repercussions in the present day, particularly in post-colonial societies. Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati* (hitherto abbreviated as *SoS*) provides a narrative exploration of these issues. Tarar, a renowned Pakistani author, presents a vivid depiction of the

environmental challenges faced by an ancient civilization that resembles the environmental position of modern-day Pakistan. The novel serves as a critique of colonial abuse and its ecological consequences, making it a significant work for the study of postcolonial eco-criticism. Huggan and Tiffin, (2007) bring eco-criticism within the ambit of postcolonial studies as their observation: “green postcolonialism brings out a truism that clearly applies to, but is not always clearly stated in, the different strands of both postcolonialism and ecocriticism: no social justice without environmental justice; and without social justice - for all ecological beings - no justice at all,” (p.10) clearly focusing on the assurance of “justice” associated with “social” and “environmental” portions of each lifecycle.

Environmental displacement refers to the phenomenon where individuals or groups are compelled to migrate as their environmental conditions have become uninhabitable or unsustainable. This can occur due to a variety of factors, including natural disasters, irreversible degradation of environmental resources, and the slow-onset impacts of rising sea levels and desertification (Khan & Niar, 2023). People can experience environmental displacement in many ways. They may be forced to leave their homes and communities due to sudden-onset events such as tsunamis, landslides, and flood events, or slow-onset processes such as desertification and sea level rise (McMichael, 2023). Environmental displacement is a recurring theme in *SoS*, with characters being forced to migrate due to the ecological consequences of colonial abuse. Abuse is a central theme that manifests in various forms. The novel presents a vibrant delineation of the environmental, cultural, and human abuses perpetrated by colonial powers. Environmental abuse is apparent in the degradation of the natural landscape and the displacement of both human and non-human entities. The colonizers exploit the environment for their own gain, leading to significant ecological changes that render the land uninhabitable and force the indigenous population to migrate. Cultural abuse is portrayed through the erasure of indigenous traditions and the imposition of foreign customs and beliefs. The colonizers not only physically occupy the land but also attempt to dominate the cultural landscape, leading to a loss of cultural identity among the indigenous population. Human abuse is depicted through the physical and psychological violence inflicted on the indigenous population. The colonizers exert their power through acts of violence and intimidation, leading to a climate of fear and oppression. Through these depictions of abuse, Tarar, provides a critique of colonialism and its devastating impacts on the environment and indigenous populations. Tarar’s work aligns Huggan and Tiffin’s concept of ‘Green Postcolonialism’, which emphasizes the integration of environmental concerns into post-colonial studies. Through his depiction of environmental displacement and colonial abuse, Tarar accentuates the need for a critical reflection informed by both postcolonial and eco-critical theory. The novel serves as a call to action, urging readers to recognize and address these issues in the context of postcolonial societies. The paper examines these instances of abuse, shedding light on the intricate association between colonialism and its various forms of abuse.

Literature Review

Prior studies of *SoS*, carried through the perspective of postcolonial environmental criticism, highly relevant to contemporary times, show that the novel contains environmental issues. The concept of the environmental catastrophe encompasses the range of ecological challenges and concerns facing our planet. It refers to the adverse effects of colonial activities on the environment, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and deforestation, pollution, and resource depletion. This section of the literature review explores various dimensions of the environmental crisis, displacement and abuse. Appannagari (2017) stated that the environmental crisis is characterized by the degradation and depletion of natural resources, including air, water, soil, and ecosystems, as a result of human activities such as industrialization, deforestation, urbanization, and overconsumption. It is driven by unsustainable practices, including excessive resource extraction, pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, habitat destruction, and the loss of

biodiversity under colonization. The environmental dislocation is a global issue that transcends national boundaries and requires collective action and international cooperation to address its impacts effectively. In the context of this research, the definition and dimensions of the environmental displacement can be explored through the theoretical frameworks of eco-criticism. Buell's theory of eco-criticism offers valuable insights into the relationship between literature, culture, and the environment. He provides a comprehensive understanding of environmental literature and its role in shaping environmental consciousness. Buell's opinion: "Western metaphysics and ethics need revision before we can address today's environmental problems," (Buell, 1995, p. 2) seems worthy and relative to the debates around environmental issues such as displacement and abuse.

Ecological Marxism provides a critical perspective on the colonial abuse and displacement by scrutinizing the relationship between capitalism, economic systems, and ecological degradation. It explores how capitalist modes of production contribute to environmental exploitation and social inequalities, emphasizing the need for systemic change to achieve environmental sustainability. Medovoi (2013) stated that ecological Marxism combines Marxist analysis with ecological concerns. It seeks to understand the relationship between capitalism, economic systems, and ecological degradation. This approach views the environmental crisis as a consequence of the inherent contradictions and dynamics of capitalist modes of production and consumption. Ecological Marxists argue that the pursuit of profit, endless growth, and the commodification of nature within a capitalist system leads to the exploitation and degradation of natural resources, lives of native people, local biodiversity and ecosystems. Bate (2013) proposes alternative socio-ecological models and envisions a transition to a more sustainable and just society. These alternatives may include decentralized, participatory economies that prioritize nature stability, social well-being, and democratic control over resources. Ecological Marxism is applied in various fields, including environmental sociology, political ecology, and environmental studies. It provides a critical perspective on the displacement and exploitation, emphasizing the structural and systemic roots of ecological degradation within capitalist societies. By integrating Marxist analysis with ecological concerns, ecological Marxism aims to inform transformative action and social change for achieving ecological constancy and social justice.

Foster (2000) recognizes the agency and environmental struggles of marginalized communities, particularly in the Global South. He emphasizes the importance of the environmentalism of the poor, as these communities often bear the brunt of ecological injustices and play a crucial role in resistance and movements for ecological and social justice. Deep Ecology, developed by Arne Naess, emphasizes the intrinsic value of nature and promotes a holistic worldview that recognizes the interconnectedness of all living beings. It argues for a shift in human attitudes and values towards a more eco-centric perspective, advocating for the preservation of ecosystems and biodiversity (Naess, 1984). Deep ecology is an ecological and philosophical perspective that promotes a consistent worldview, emphasizing the intrinsic value and rights of all living beings and the need for fundamental changes in human attitudes and behaviors towards the environment. It challenges anthropocentric views that prioritize human interests over the well-being of the entire Earth community (Nuñez et al., 2021). Deep ecology asserts that humans are not separate from nature but are an integral part of the Earth's unified web of life. It recognizes the interrelated and interdependence of all living beings and ecosystems. Deep ecology holds that all forms of life have intrinsic value and deserve respect and protection, regardless of their instrumental value to humans. It advocates for the preservation of biodiversity and the recognition of the inherent worth of non-human beings. Deep ecology promotes the notion of bio-centric equality, which asserts that all living beings have an equal right to exist and flourish. It challenges the dominant anthropocentric worldview that prioritizes human interests and exploitation of nature.

Environmental justice is a social movement and a field of study that focuses on the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, addressing the disproportionate environmental impacts on marginalized communities. It seeks to challenge environmental inequality, racism, and injustice by advocating for equal access to a healthy environment, meaningful participation in decision-making processes, and the recognition of human rights in relation to the environment. It addresses the intersectionality of social inequalities, environmental degradation, and the need for equitable distribution of environmental resources and benefits (Banzhaf et al., 2019). Temper (2019) avers that all individuals have a right to live, work, and play in a clean and healthy environment, free from environmental hazards, oppression and pollution. It highlights the importance of protecting human health and well-being in environmental decision-making. Environmental justice exposes and challenges the systemic patterns of environmental racism, which refers to the disproportionate exposure of communities of color to environmental hazards and pollution. It addresses the historical and ongoing practices that perpetuate environmental injustices based on race and ethnicity. It advocates for transitioning away from environmentally harmful industries, such as fossil fuels, towards clean and renewable energy sources, while ensuring a fair and inclusive transition for workers and communities affected by these shifts.

In addition to these approaches, the focus on 'Green Postcolonialism' as broached by Huggan and Tiffin, delineated in the introduction section of the paper, provides a reference point in having a comprehensive understanding of Tarar's *SoS*. The broader understanding of debates related to eco-critical perspectives vis-à-vis environment studies, enumerated above, enable a nuanced examination of Tarar's novel's engagement with issues of capitalism, colonialism, ecological degradation, and the potential for alternative visions of sustainability and social transformation.

Material and Methods

The paper reads Tarar's *SoS* closely to study environmental displacement as to how environmental degradation affects the entire ecological setup because of colonial dominance. Drawing from Huggan and Tiffin's concept of 'Green Postcolonialism' which emphasizes the need to incorporate environmental concerns into postcolonial studies, the paper devises a theoretical framework around postcolonial eco-criticism in order to examine the representation of nature, environment, life and ecology within the context of postcolonial literature. It allows for an examination of the complex connection between human actions, particularly those of colonial powers, and their ecological consequences in the form of displacement.

Results and Discussion

The title of Tarar's *SoS* clearly suggests its purpose as a narrative that delves into the environmental crises of native trauma and foreign oppression and its impact on various aspects of life. The paper is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of instances in the novel engaged with environmental displacement and colonial abuse, both in the context of the narrative itself and in relation to larger ecological and postcolonial discourses. Exploring the cataclysmic impact of colonial abuse in the form of displacement, the paper draws parallels between historical and contemporary environmental challenges to Pakistan.

Human Displacement

Tarar (2021) takes colonial abuse as the main reason of dislocation of native population in novel: "We had our lives in our thatched huts, our homes, humble or grand, we had a peaceful existence in our homes. Then our ears were ringed with the clop of hooves of your horses that shook our land; and for years on end, it has been resounding across our

lands and shaking our soil. You have deprived us of our sleep and serenity” (p. 80). In the given passage, Virchan, a native, expresses the disruption and displacement caused by colonization. The peaceful existence in their homes, symbolized by the “thatched huts”, is shattered by the arrival of the colonizers, represented by the “clap of hooves of your horses”. This disruption is not just physical but also psychological, as the colonizers have “deprived [them] of [their] sleep and serenity”. This description relates with the concept of ‘Green Postcolonialism’. The environmental devastation caused by colonization is evident in the displacement of the natives from their homes and lands. Moreover, the psychological trauma experienced by the natives due to this displacement states the human dimension of environmental devastation. Huggan also critiques the tendencies of some Green movements towards Western liberal universalism and “white middle-class nature-protection elitism.” In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers’ ways on the natives, disrupting their harmonious relationship with the environment. The passage from *SoS* provides a poignant illustration of the environmental devastation and displacement caused by colonization, aligning with the principles of ‘Green Postcolonialism’. It fuels the need for a postcolonial approach to environmental studies that takes into account the historical and cultural contexts of environmental issues. Tarar also shows difference between living style of native and colonizers: “You know, only few of us live in your cities. We cannot. We find it difficult to breathe in these congested environs. We need an open air. I won’t live here for long; I’ll move to the fields of Hari Yupia for farming” (p. 89). Even the indigenous lay man is not willing to live in places established by capitalism. Tarar expresses the panic situation of indigenous people regarding their relation with settlement and watercourses which is under threat: “I was terrified of the possibility that the people who were usurping our land and our rivers here would reach my village” (p. 85). Here, Virchan expresses his fear of losing his village and home due to colonization. The people usurping their land and their rivers represent the colonizers who are not only taking over their lands but also their natural resources, disrupting the natives’ relationship with their environment.

This description supports ‘Green Postcolonialism’ and environmental disruption caused by colonization is evident in the fear and anxiety experienced by the natives. The loss of land and rivers symbolizes the loss of their natural habitat and livelihood. In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers’ ways on the natives, disrupting their harmonious affiliation with place. Virchan, a native, reveals the horrible face of colonialism hiding behind the claims of development in the novel: “They are stronger than us and agile. These are gradually encroaching upon our land, rivers, and fields and pushing us out” (p. 85). In the given passage, Tarar describes the colonizers as stronger and agile, steadily invading upon their land, rivers, and fields, pushing the natives out. This tormenting displacement as the natives are being forced out of their homes and their environment is disturbing. This narrative aligns with Huggan and Tiffin’s idea of ‘Green Postcolonialism’. Moreover, the psychological trauma experienced by the natives due to this displacement features the human dimension of environmental devastation. In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers’ ways on the natives, disrupting their harmonious relationship with the environment. Tarar describes massacre of natives, seizing their homes and abduction of women by invaders: “For long, they have been descending from the mountains and spreading across the plains of Sindhu. Some of them pierce your skulls with their dark metal, carry off your women with them, and sack your villages” (p. 86). The violent imagery of “piercing skulls” with dark metal, “carrying off women”, and “sacking villages” states the brutality of colonial power on indigenous marginalized people and place. ‘Green Postcolonialism’ stresses the amalgamation of postcolonial and environmental studies, arguing that it is impossible to analyze modern imperialism and colonialism without engaging with the massive scale of environmental devastation that they entail. The environmental devastation caused by colonization is evident in the forceful displacement of the natives from their lands. Moreover, the psychological trauma experienced by the natives due to this displacement

mentions the human dimension of environmental devastation. Huggan and Tiffin condemn the tendencies of some Green movements towards Western colonialism.

Wild Life Displacement

Tarar explains the colonial abuse not only upon native population but for animals too in *SoS*: "Elephants and rhinoceros used to roam the impenetrable jungle once. That is why the shapes of these wild animals had been appearing on their stamps for centuries. But Dorga had never seen them as they had gradually vanished from their world because of the shrinking woods" (p. 99). Dorga, a native, laments upon the loss of a dense forest full of biodiversity on the banks of the Indus River. The forest, once home to elephants and rhinoceros, has been shrinking due to deforestation, leading to the migration of these wild animals. Huggan and Tiffin (2007) describe the cataclysmic effects of colonialism upon all components of environment. They deliberate the disease caused by the colonialism that affects people, plants, and animals. The introduction of European crops and cattle, the careless or deliberate killing of native wildlife, and the clearing of forests were the main causes and ongoing effects of the environmental damage brought about by the Europeans. In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' ways on the native flora and fauna. Disturbing their symphonic relationship with the place and leading to the destruction of their habitats, it provides a distressing illustration of the environmental devastation and displacement of wildlife caused by colonization. It underscores the need for a postcolonial approach to environmental studies that takes into account the historical and cultural contexts of environmental issues.

Forests Degradation

Tarar narrates the deprivation of forests because of colonial capitalistic way to use natural resources as fuel for industrial benefits: "The trees from the banks of Sindhu were being used to fuel these kilns; their number was fast depleting" (p. 82). The decreasing number of trees along the banks of Sindhu, which are being used as fuel in brick kilns. The owners of these kilns are colonizers, indicating that the deforestation is a direct result of colonial practices. This narrative attests the concept of 'Green Postcolonialism.' The environmental devastation caused by colonization is evident in the rapid depletion of trees. Moreover, the use of these trees as fuel in brick kilns symbolizes the exploitation of natural resources for industrial purposes, a common feature of colonial economies. Contextually this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' industrial practices on the natives, leading to the destruction of their natural habitats and elimination of nature by colonization. Tarar further adds: "Dorga had heard that before kilns were built, the banks of Sindhu were surrounded by large patches of thickly dense jungle where light could not penetrate" (p. 99). In the given passage, Dorga, describes the natural condition of the environment before the colonial invasion. The banks of Sindhu were once surrounded by large patches of thickly dense jungle, a testament to the rich biodiversity that existed before the arrival of the colonizers. The construction of kilns, a symbol of industrialization brought about by colonization, led to the destruction of these jungles. The environmental devastation caused by colonization is evident in the transformation of the dense jungles into industrial sites. Moreover, the loss of these jungles symbolizes the loss of biodiversity, a key aspect of environmental displacement. In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' industrial practices on the native resources, leading to the destruction of their natural habitats.

Loss of Place

Tarar elaborates how colonial control terminates the magnificent traditional appearance of the native places: "Do you know what have you done with our Mohenjo? How it used to be and what has it become now?" (p. 80). Here is an expression of grief on transformation of ethnic place, Mohenjo, due to colonization. The question "Do you know,

what have you done with our Mohenjo?" reflects the natives' sense of loss of place. The colonizers have not only destroyed the natural environment but also diverged the native places like local villages and cities. The environmental devastation caused by colonization is evident in the transformation of native places. Moreover, the loss of these places symbolizes the loss of cultural heritage, a key aspect of environmental devastation. This critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' ways on the natives, leading to the destruction of their cultural heritage. It underscores the need for a postcolonial approach to environmental studies that takes into account the historical and cultural contexts of environmental issues. Tarar comments more on colonial obliteration upon native cities and settlements. Virchan says: "The Mohenjo that you see now is different from the one it was a thousand years ago; it is turning into dust now" (p. 80). Virchan, cries over the conversion of his place, Mohenjo, after the colonial overtake. The phrase "it is turning into dust now" reflects the native's sense of loss and displacement. The colonizers have not only disrupted their natural environment but also the native villages and cities. The environmental devastation caused by imperials is evidence of transformation of native places. Moreover, the loss of these places symbolizes the loss of cultural heritage, a key aspect of environmental devastation. In the context of the passage, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' ways on the natives, leading to the destruction of their cultural heritage.

Colonial Abuse

Tarar presents the very painful condition of native workers under colonial, capitalistic way of production: "When Dorga took his first breath in the mortal air, his mother wiped clean the greasy fluids from his body and dried his wet body by placing close to flames of the kiln where bricks were fired. The clay for those bricks was obtained from the marshland beside Sindhu. Dorga's parents and all his forefathers had been baking those bricks in the kiln" (p. 97). Tarar further adds: "Dorga and his ancestors, generations after generation, had prepared bricks" (p. 97). Native workers have been treated as slaves for generations. *SoS* depicts the worst picture of native labor: "In exchange, their whole families, right from children to the elderly, would toil from dawn to dusk" (p. 98). Tarar presents the brutal face of colonialism in his fiction: "When humans-old and young, male and female-endure oppression and agony for a thousand years, their faces become distinct from other humans [...] They become half animal, half human: they remain humans in their appearance, but they act like animals in their daily routines and behaviours" (p. 133). Colonial abuse produces displacement as well as deshapes the native people. In their appearance they look like animals under the burden of unbearable work and nastiest working conditions. Postcolonial eco-criticism reports the colonial abuses on native environment. In past, colonial encroachment into other parts of the world led to the devastating outcomes of genocide or the eviction and marginalization of indigenous peoples worldwide (Huggan & Tiffin, 2007). In another place Tarar gives more facts: "For countless years [...] ever since the city was founded, they have been forced to bend on the big millstones grinding grains in the dark houses. Many of them have been sitting cross-legged before the mills for so many years that their legs have become crooked, and they are unable to move" (p. 192). The improper working environment of helpless natives is result of colonial abuse. 'Green Postcolonialism' criticizes the unkind attitude of colonialism in the name of development and regardless of the degree of change, the impoverished often endured hunger and hardship, and the once-accommodating relationships between the environment, people, and animals were shattered, often irreparably. Tarar provides a detailed evidence of colonial ferocity especially for marginalized and slaves: "But these people with fair complexion and cold sharp noses like you have been swarming from those far off lands for years now. Their unending swarms have been trampling on our green fields and [...] even our women" (p. 80). Virchan, describes the colonial invasion on his native land and the abuse on people and environment. The colonizers, described as fair complexioned with cold sharp noses and trampling on their green fields and even their women. All these things show

the severe brutality of colonial powers and advocate Huggan and Tiffin's critique; this criticism can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' ways on the natives, leading to the destruction of their natural habitats and the abuse of their people. It shows the climax of emotional influence of environmental devastation on native people and women, adding another layer to the understanding of environmental issues in postcolonial contexts.

Air Pollution because of Colonialism

Tarar exposes the so-called colonial environmental awareness as colonialism has been always the main factor behind the contamination in colonized territories. He writes: "As the dusk settled over the plains, the smoke clouds rising from the brick kilns across the fields swirled in the dark sky like a horse moving in the jungle" (p. 82). This scene depicts the impact of colonial industrialization on the environment. The images like, "the smoke clouds" mounting from the brick kilns and "swirled in the dark sky," are symbol of industrialization brought about by colonization, pollute the clean air of indigenous places, including cities. This not only displays abuse on indigenous society but also environmental abuse upon native atmosphere. Tarar's *SoS* exhibits the crimes of colonialism for environmental devastation of colonized areas. Moreover, the pollution of the air symbolizes the loss of the natives' right to clean air, a key aspect of environmental justice. Huggan and Tiffin launch a critique upon the inclinations of environmental movements towards Western ecological imagination which is actually capitalistic oriented. In the context of the above textual lines, this critique can be seen in the imposition of the colonizers' industrial practices on the natives, leading to the pollution of their air.

Conclusion

The analysis of Mustansar Hussain Tarar's *Sorrows of Sarasvati* through the lens of Huggan and Tiffin's concept of 'Green Postcolonialism' reveals the profound environmental devastation and displacement caused by colonization. The narrative brings to light the disruption of the natives' relationship with their environment, the loss of biodiversity, violence upon native workers, converting people into animals, the pollution of air, and the transformation of native places. The novel underscores the need for a postcolonial approach to environmental studies that takes into account the historical and cultural contexts of environmental issues. It also highlights the psychological impact of environmental devastation on the natives, adding another layer to the understanding of environmental issues in postcolonial contexts. It emphasizes the intersection of postcolonial and environmental studies, arguing for the necessity of analyzing modern imperialism and colonialism in conjunction with the massive scale of environmental devastation that they entail. The novel is a significant contribution to the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, offering a unique perspective on the relationship between humans, animals, and the environment in postcolonial contexts. It is a call to action for sustainable practices and policies to mitigate the environmental devastation caused by colonization.

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