

### Research Article

## An Analytical Study of the Problems Faced by Tribal Women in Achieving Empowerment in Palghar District

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**Abstract:** Tribal women have a great contribution in the social and economic development of tribal communities. But they face a lot of hurdles to achieve empowerment. This study concentrates on the major challenges faced by tribal women for empowerment in Palghar District of Maharashtra. The study mainly focuses on issues of poverty, poor education, poor health care, unemployment, lack of knowledge about government welfare schemes, social discrimination and poor infrastructure. The study uses both primary and secondary data. The primary data were collected from 50 tribal women by using a structured questionnaire with five-point Likert scale. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, government papers and published research publications. Descriptive and inferential statistics including mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data. The study results reveal that poverty, lack of employment opportunities and poor health care facilities are the major hindrance to the empowerment of indigenous women. The study found that the lack of awareness, limited educational opportunities and financial dependence affect the confidence and participation of indigenous women in decision making. The study reveals that for the empowerment and all round development of tribal women in Palghar district, enhancements in healthcare, education, employment opportunities, awareness campaigns and infrastructure development are essential.

**Keywords:** Tribal Women Empowerment, Socio-Economic Challenges.

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## INTRODUCTION

Tribal societies are considered to be among the oldest social groups in India. They have their own culture, traditions, customs, language and lifestyle. Most of the tribal populations reside in rural, forest and hilly areas with limited access to education, health care, transport and employment opportunities. Women in the tribe have a key role in the family, economy, agriculture, and the preservation of culture. Indigenous women are valuable members of community and family, yet they encounter many obstacles to attain social, economic, educational, and political empowerment. Tribal women are often neglected and are among the most disadvantaged sections of the society.

Women's empowerment is women's ability to make their own choices, and to participate fully in social, political and economic decision-making. Women empowerment improves their living standard and also their independence in social and economical life: Recently, the Government of India has undertaken many projects and policies towards the welfare and empowerment of women especially women from tribal communities. However, many indigenous women are unable to take full advantage of these programmes due to poverty, illiteracy, lack of awareness, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment, social discrimination and deep-rooted traditional customs. As a result, tribal women continue to face many hurdles in their journey of development.

Education is a great tool for empowerment. It empowers women by increasing their knowledge, confidence, skills and awareness of their rights. Many educational challenges faced by tribal women are lack of schools in remote areas, financial constraints, early marriage, family responsibilities and lack of parental support. This leads to many native girls dropping out

of school early. Their lack of education affects their chances of getting a job and becoming financially independent. Tribal women are dependent on others and without proper education and skill development, they are not able to uplift their social status.

Apart from educational problems, tribal women also face major economic and health related problems. A large number of indigenous women are engaged in agriculture, daily wage labour, forest-based occupations and in the unorganised sectors, which are marked by low earnings and poor working conditions. In many cases, women are not paid the same as men. Tribal women are deprived of adequate health care facilities, poor sanitation and limited medical services, which leads to starvation. Poor geographic location and poor transportation limit access to health care services. These conditions adversely affect the physical and emotional health of tribal women and limit their empowerment.

Social and cultural factors also work against the empowerment of tribal women. In many indigenous societies, women's role in important family and community decisions is restricted. Traditional mindsets, Gender Inequality, Domestic Violence, Alcoholics and Society's Restrictions reduce Women's Confidence and Independence. Many native women are unaware of their legal rights, government welfare programs, and financial support networks that may be available. The lack of information and social support often leaves tribal women out of the main stream of the development process.

The district of Palghar in Maharashtra is inhabited by a large tribal population including communities such as the Warli, Katkari, Malhar Koli and Thakar. Most tribal families in Palghar depend on agriculture, forest resources and daily wage labour for their survival. Despite the recent development in the district, indigenous women in many of the communities continue to face challenges in the areas of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, health, migration and lack of basic amenities. "It is important to understand the issues of tribal women in Palghar district to improve their living conditions and to enable inclusive development. The present study makes an attempt to identify the major problems faced by tribal women in achieving empowerment at the Palghar district. The present study makes an effort to understand the educational, economic, social, cultural and health related barriers faced by tribal women and to evaluate the impact of these barriers on their empowerment. The findings of the study may help the policy makers, researchers, social workers, and government officials to formulate better policies and welfare programs for the empowerment and development of indigenous women in the region.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Sharma (2016) studied the living conditions of tribal women in rural India. The study found that indigenous women suffer from many social and economic problems due to poverty and lack of resources. The researcher found that women in tribal areas are often engaged in heavy work in farms and household chores, but they earn little and get less recognition. The study further observed that the poor communication resources and lack of education are responsible for less knowledge about government welfare schemes among tribal women. The study suggested that literacy improvement and creation of work opportunities can facilitate empowerment of tribal women.

Bhan and Singh (2017) examined healthcare's impact on indigenous women's empowerment. The research found that many tribal women suffer from malnutrition, anaemia and lack of facilities for maternity healthcare. Researchers found that tribal areas, mostly remote, lack hospitals, skilled doctors and transport facilities. These problems cause health hazards for women during gestation and parturition. The study showed that poor health awareness has a negative impact on indigenous households' well-being. The researchers recommended the creation of regular health camps and awareness programs in tribal villages to improve the health status of women.

Verma (2018) has studied the economic status of the tribal women in India. The study found that most indigenous women were in low wage and informal employment sectors. The researcher noted that women involved in the forestry and agricultural work face erratic income and financial instability. The study pointed out that the tribal women lacked financial literacy, which in turn prevented them from accessing banking and credit services. The study establishes that economic independence is an antecedent to the improvement of women's confidence and decision-making abilities. The study recommended enhancing self-employment and small business opportunities for tribal women.

Kulkarni and More (2019) examined the education level of tribal girls in Maharashtra. Researchers found that indigenous students were leaving school at a high rate because of poverty, migration and a lack of nearby places to get an education. The survey revealed that many parents lack the financial ability to support higher education. The survey also revealed the common expectation for females to help with housework from a young age. Researchers have opined that education is playing a vital role in creating awareness and improving the confidence of tribal women. The report called for better facilities in dormitories and more scholarship support for students from tribes.

Rao (2020) studied on the status of tribal women in India society. The study revealed that women are still excluded from community activities due to traditional practices and gender bias. The researcher found that the participation of indigenous women in political leadership and local governance was limited. The research also found that families' domestic violence

and drunkenness cause women mental and emotional distress. Knowing one's legal rights and social equality is crucial to empowerment, the researcher says. The report suggested to promote women's participation in the bodies of local self-government and social organizations.

Jadhav (2021) studied tribal women of Maharashtra in respect of employment and migration. The research showed that seasonal labour mobility affects family stability and the education of children. The researcher explained that indigenous women often walk long distances to work in difficult conditions. Lack of stable economic opportunities in the countryside forces families to seek seasonal labor. The research found that migration worsens insecurity and health risks for women. The study recommended rural job schemes and vocational training to address the migration problem among tribal communities.

Pawar and Chavan (2022) studied the impact of self help groups on empowerment of tribal women. The researchers found that participation in self-help groups improved women's savings behavior, communication skills and self-confidence. The study showed that women joining group activities were able to gain a high level of awareness on financial management and government programs. Researchers also observed that self-help groups helped women to start small income generating enterprises in villages. Researchers say collective participation leads to social and economic growth of tribal women. The proposed research was to enhance self-help group initiatives in tribal areas for their sustained empowerment.

### Statement of the Problem

Tribal women are facing several social, economic, educational and health problems which are preventing their empowerment and holistic development. The present study is an attempt to explore the major issues faced by tribal women for their empowerment in Palghar district.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the major problems faced by tribal women in achieving empowerment.
2. To understand the review of literature in the related areas.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study deals with the major challenges faced by the tribal women for their empowerment in the Palghar district of Maharashtra. The research uses both primary and secondary data.

### Sample Size and Sampling Method

The study selected 50 tribal women (respondents) from specified places of Palghar district by using convenience sampling method.

### Tools for Data Collection and Analysis

Information is collected using a standardized questionnaire on the educational, social, economic and health challenges faced by indigenous women. Frequency and descriptive statistics are used to analyze the collected data.

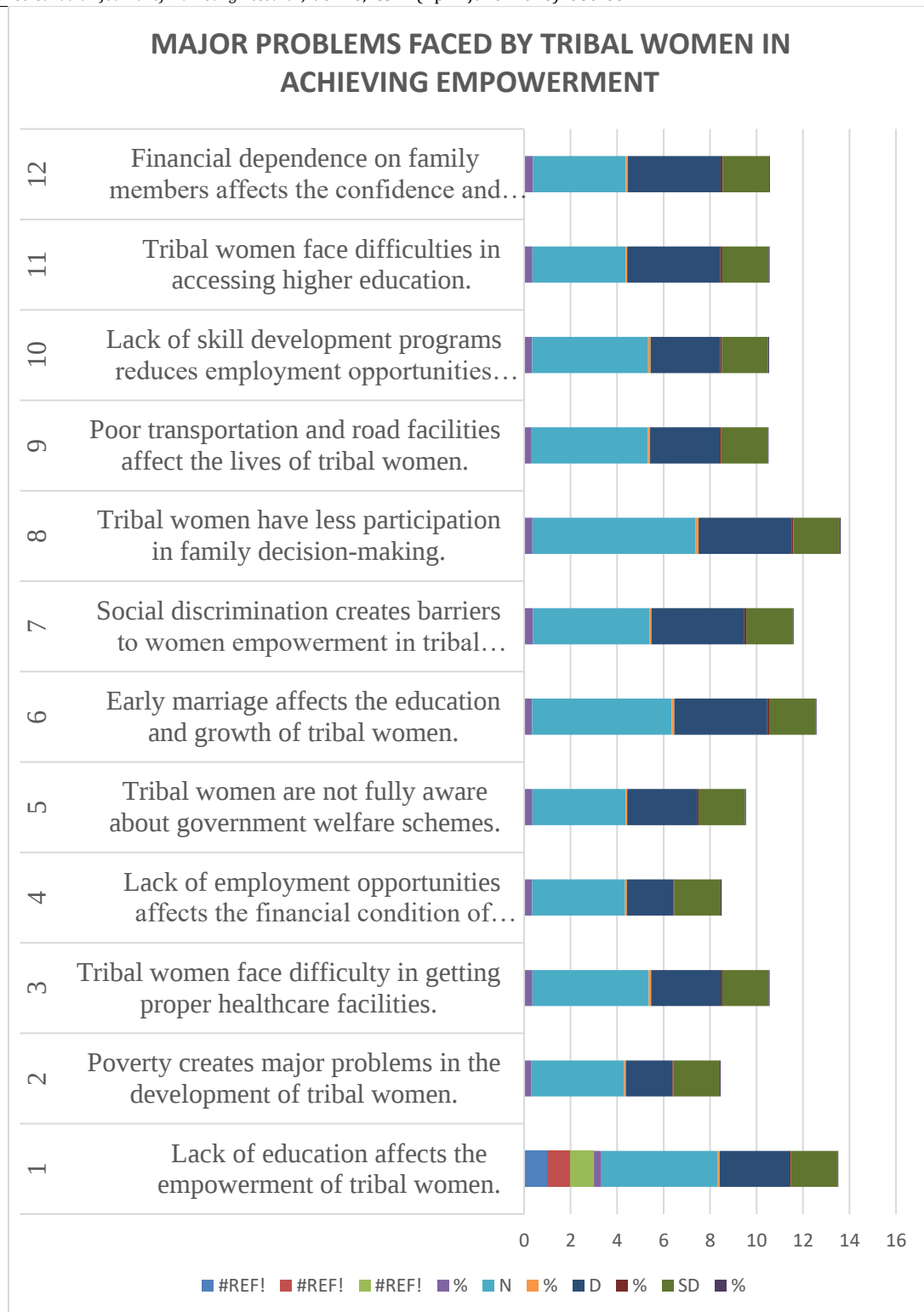
## FINDINGS OF FREQUENCY ANALYSIS

Table No. 1

| EXAMINE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY TRIBAL WOMEN IN ACHIEVING EMPOWERMENT |                                                                       |    |     |    |     |   |     |   |    |    |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|---|-----|---|----|----|----|
| Sr. No.                                                                   | Questions                                                             | SA | %   | A  | %   | N | %   | D | %  | SD | %  |
| 1                                                                         | Lack of education affects the empowerment of tribal women.            | 24 | 48% | 16 | 32% | 5 | 10% | 3 | 6% | 2  | 4% |
| 2                                                                         | Poverty creates major problems in the development of tribal women.    | 27 | 54% | 15 | 30% | 4 | 8%  | 2 | 4% | 2  | 4% |
| 3                                                                         | Tribal women face difficulty in getting proper healthcare facilities. | 22 | 44% | 18 | 36% | 5 | 10% | 3 | 6% | 2  | 4% |

|    |                                                                                                |    |     |    |     |   |     |   |    |   |    |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----|----|-----|---|-----|---|----|---|----|
| 4  | Lack of employment opportunities affects the financial condition of tribal women.              | 25 | 50% | 17 | 34% | 4 | 8%  | 2 | 4% | 2 | 4% |
| 5  | Tribal women are not fully aware about government welfare schemes.                             | 23 | 46% | 18 | 36% | 4 | 8%  | 3 | 6% | 2 | 4% |
| 6  | Early marriage affects the education and growth of tribal women.                               | 21 | 42% | 17 | 34% | 6 | 12% | 4 | 8% | 2 | 4% |
| 7  | Social discrimination creates barriers to women empowerment in tribal communities.             | 20 | 40% | 19 | 38% | 5 | 10% | 4 | 8% | 2 | 4% |
| 8  | Tribal women have less participation in family decision-making.                                | 19 | 38% | 18 | 36% | 7 | 14% | 4 | 8% | 2 | 4% |
| 9  | Poor transportation and road facilities affect the lives of tribal women.                      | 24 | 48% | 16 | 32% | 5 | 10% | 3 | 6% | 2 | 4% |
| 10 | Lack of skill development programs reduces employment opportunities for tribal women.          | 23 | 46% | 17 | 34% | 5 | 10% | 3 | 6% | 2 | 4% |
| 11 | Tribal women face difficulties in accessing higher education.                                  | 22 | 44% | 18 | 36% | 4 | 8%  | 4 | 8% | 2 | 4% |
| 12 | Financial dependence on family members affects the confidence and empowerment of tribal women. | 21 | 42% | 19 | 38% | 4 | 8%  | 4 | 8% | 2 | 4% |

Source: Researcher Compilation



**Diagram No. 1**

Source: Researcher Compilation

### Analysis and Interpretation:

The results of the study show that lack of education and poverty are major obstacles for the empowerment of indigenous women. The statement that lack of education affects the empowerment of tribal women, about 48% of the respondents strongly agreed and 32% of the respondents agreed. Similarly 54% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that poverty creates a lot of problems for the progress of tribal women. The results show that the social and economic development of tribal women still suffers due to the dearth of educational opportunities and poor economic conditions.

Study reveals major health and occupational challenges faced by tribal women. Nearly 44 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that tribal women faced problems in receiving adequate health care services and 36 per cent agreed. Similarly, 50% strongly agreed and 34% agreed that the lack of opportunities for employment has an effect on the economic status of indigenous women. This implies that poor health services and fewer career opportunities affect the quality of life and economic independence of tribal women.

The study highlighted the lack of information on government support schemes and early marriage as key concerns. Approximately 46% of the respondents strongly agreed that tribal women do not have full awareness with respect to government support services and 36% agreed. Likewise, 42% strongly agreed and 34% agreed that early marriage impacts the education and development of indigenous women. The results suggest that social factors and lack of awareness remain barriers to empowerment.

The findings of the study reveal that social discrimination and lack of participation in family decision making process inhibit the empowerment process of indigenous women. About 40% of the respondents strongly agreed and 38% agreed that inequality in society acts as a barrier for the empowerment of women in tribal communities. Similarly, 38% and 36% of the respondents respectively strongly agreed and agreed that indigenous women show lesser participation in family decision making. The findings reveal that social inequality and non-participation in big decisions make the confidence and independence of tribal women feeble.

The respondents also expressed concerns regarding infrastructure and skill development. Almost 48 per cent strongly agreed and 32 per cent agreed that the lives of tribal women are affected due to poor transportation and road infrastructure. Similarly, 46 per cent strongly agreed and 34 per cent agreed that the lack of skill development programmes reduces the career prospects of tribal women. The study results show that the employment and development opportunities of tribal women are limited due to poor infrastructure and lack of vocational training.

The results revealed that indigenous women face challenges in achieving higher education and financial independence. Around 44% of the respondents strongly agreed and 36% agreed that problems are faced by tribal women to get higher education. Moreover, 42% strongly agreed and 38% agreed that dependence on family members financially affects the confidence and empowerment of tribal women. The results indicate that higher education and economic independence are important for the empowerment and development of indigenous women.

## FINDINGS OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

**Table No. 2**

| <b>EXAMINE THE MAJOR PROBLEMS FACED BY TRIBAL WOMEN IN ACHIEVING EMPOWERMENT</b> |                                                                                   |    |         |         |      |      |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------|---------|------|------|
| Sr. No.                                                                          | Questions                                                                         | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | SD   |
| 1                                                                                | Lack of education affects the empowerment of tribal women.                        | 50 | 1       | 5       | 4.14 | 1.08 |
| 2                                                                                | Poverty creates major problems in the development of tribal women.                | 50 | 1       | 5       | 4.26 | 1.04 |
| 3                                                                                | Tribal women face difficulty in getting proper healthcare facilities.             | 50 | 1       | 5       | 4.10 | 1.06 |
| 4                                                                                | Lack of employment opportunities affects the financial condition of tribal women. | 50 | 1       | 5       | 4.22 | 1.03 |
| 5                                                                                | Tribal women are not fully aware about government welfare schemes.                | 50 | 1       | 5       | 4.14 | 1.06 |

|    |                                                                                                |    |   |   |      |      |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---|---|------|------|
| 6  | Early marriage affects the education and growth of tribal women.                               | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.02 | 1.10 |
| 7  | Social discrimination creates barriers to women empowerment in tribal communities.             | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.02 | 1.09 |
| 8  | Tribal women have less participation in family decision-making.                                | 50 | 1 | 5 | 3.96 | 1.09 |
| 9  | Poor transportation and road facilities affect the lives of tribal women.                      | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.14 | 1.08 |
| 10 | Lack of skill development programs reduces employment opportunities for tribal women.          | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.12 | 1.07 |
| 11 | Tribal women face difficulties in accessing higher education.                                  | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.08 | 1.09 |
| 12 | Financial dependence on family members affects the confidence and empowerment of tribal women. | 50 | 1 | 5 | 4.06 | 1.08 |

Source: Researcher Compilation

### Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis shows that poverty is the major hindrance to the empowerment of tribal women with the highest mean score (mean = 4.26, SD = 1.04). This suggests that the majority of respondents strongly agree that negative economic conditions have a direct impact on the development and living conditions of indigenous women. Lack of availability of employment opportunities is considered as a major concern (mean = 4.22, SD = 1.03). It suggests that unemployment and irregular income lead to lower financial independence among tribal women. The low values of the standard deviation mean that the respondents have similar opinions on these economic issues.

The major barriers to empowerment are lack of education (mean = 4.14, SD = 1.08) and lack of knowledge of government welfare schemes (mean = 4.14, SD = 1.06). The findings reveal that tribal women cannot enhance their socioeconomic status due to lack of awareness and limited educational facilities. Poor transportation and road infrastructure (mean = 4.14, SD = 1.08) was also recognized as a significant obstacle to accessing education, healthcare, and job opportunities in tribal areas.

Health and employment issues were highlighted by the responders. The challenge of access to adequate healthcare facilities was rated with a significant mean score (mean=4.10, SD=1.06) indicating that the healthcare services in the tribal areas are still inadequate. There was a large consensus on the absence of skill development programs (mean = 4.12, SD = 1.07) which reveal that inadequate training opportunities reduce the chances of tribal women getting a job. The small standard deviations indicate that respondents are largely in agreement with each other on these topics.

Research shows problems of tribal women to get higher education (mean = 4.08, SD = 1.09) and financial dependence on family members (mean = 4.06, SD = 1.08). The results indicate that the confidence and decision making ability of tribal women is very low because they lack higher education and economic dependency. Early marriage (mean = 4.02, SD = 1.10) and societal prejudice (mean = 4.02, SD = 1.09) were perceived as hindrances to the development and empowerment of indigenous women.

The lowest mean score ( $M = 3.96$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) of all the claims is given to reduced participation in family decision-making, which still indicates a consensus among respondents. This suggests that although indigenous women have low participation in household decisions, respondents attach greater importance to economic, educational and health concerns. The study clearly shows that tribal women face many socio-economic, educational, infrastructural and health problems which directly affect their empowerment and development in Palghar district.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was carried out to find out the major problems faced by the indigenous women in achieving empowerment in Palghar district. The findings of the descriptive analysis indicate that tribal women face several social, economic, educational, health and infrastructural challenges on a regular basis. The major obstacles in the empowerment of tribal women were lack of employment opportunities and poverty. The study revealed that poor education, poor health services, poor knowledge of government welfare schemes and lack of transportation adversely affect the overall development of tribal women.

The inferential analysis also shows a complex relationship between these problems and the empowerment process of indigenous women. Research has found that economic dependence, scarcity of higher education opportunities, absence of skill development schemes and social discrimination all have negative impacts on the confidence and participation of tribal women in decision making of family and society. Tribal cultures still face barriers to empowerment, and early marriage and poor awareness are two of them.

The study revealed that the empowerment of indigenous women depends on the improvement of healthcare facilities, employment opportunities, educational facilities, awareness programs and infrastructure in tribal areas. In conclusion, the government involvement and community participation are necessary to uplift the living standards and empower the indigenous women of Palghar district.

It recommends the government and local bodies to improve the healthcare facilities, transport and education infrastructure in tribal areas of the Palghar district. Regular organization of skill development and vocational training programs is required to improve work prospects and financial independence of the tribal women. Awareness campaigns on government welfare schemes, legal entitlements, health and education should be run by the native communities. We need to focus on delaying marriage, improving higher education and increasing the participation of tribal women in family and community decision making. Support to self-help organizations and micro income-generating activities is critical for the empowerment and development of indigenous women.

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