Love and Loss: The Muslim Emotional Communities during the Khilafat Movement

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Abstract

The socio-political campaign known as the Khilafat Movement (1919-1924) among Indian Muslims was driven fundamentally by the intertwining emotions of love and loss, underscoring its nature as a cultural and sentimental eruption rather than merely a political reaction. This study investigates the emotional mobilization that coalesced around the symbolic figure of the Ottoman Caliphate, a deeply revered spiritual and cultural authority for Indian Muslims. The central research problem determines the extent to which emotions such as fervent love, grief, anger, and hope served as catalysts for collective action and political commitment against British colonial policy. Employing the theoretical frameworks of Social Constructivism and Emotional Communities (Rosenwein 2006; Reddy 2009), this analysis examines how Khilafat leaders, notably the Ali Brothers (Maulana Mohammad Ali Jauhar and Maulana Shaukat Ali), utilized "emotives" to construct a powerful, shared affective register. Furthermore, the thesis explores the representation of this emotional narrative in primary sources, including contemporary press accounts (Tejani 2007), political speeches, personal correspondence, and the evocative poetry of Allama Iqbal and Josh Malihabadi (Tignol 2023). It argues that the movement's memory is embedded in this collective emotional experience, affirming the critical role of affect in shaping Muslim identity and political praxis in the early twentieth century, thereby enriching the historical understanding of anti-colonial resistance.

Keywords: Khilafat, Emotional Mobilization, Pan-Islamism, Ottoman Caliphate, Muslim Identity

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The Khilafat Movement (1919–1924) represents a pivotal yet often inadequately interpreted chapter in the history of anti-colonial resistance in British India, transcending its conventional categorization as a purely political or religious agitation. This movement, spurred by the Allied Powers' dismantling of the Ottoman Empire following World War I, was, at its core, a profound emotional and cultural outburst for millions of Indian Muslims (Qureshi 1999). It was anchored in a deeply felt, almost familial love for the Ottoman Caliphate, which symbolized the spiritual unity of the global *Ummah*, and was immediately countered by an overwhelming sense of loss and betrayal when that symbol faced existential threat from the British. The sheer force of this affective engagement elevated the struggle from a distant foreign policy concern to a matter of personal devotion and collective identity, demonstrating that the political landscape of the era was profoundly shaped by shared emotional communities (Rosenwein 2006).

This essay asserts that the Khilafat Movement was dynamically propelled and sustained by the strategic articulation of intertwined emotions—specifically, fervent love for the Caliphate and profound grief over its impending dissolution—which were successfully mobilized into collective political action against British imperial dominance. The movement's leaders intuitively understood the power of religious symbols to generate a cohesive emotional identity, transforming abstract theological principles into concrete political demands. This analysis shifts the historiographical focus from institutional politics to affective history, utilizing primary sources, literary expressions, and sociological theories to map the emotional terrain of the movement. By dissecting the rhetoric, poetry, and communal expressions of the period, this study reveals how the Khilafat experience became an indelible emotional memory, fundamentally contributing to the modern configuration of Indian Muslim identity and resistance narratives.

The established historiography of the Khilafat Movement, largely political and institutional, has long focused on its organizational structures, the alliances between Muslim and Hindu leaders (Hasan 1981), and its ultimate failure to preserve the Caliphate. Scholars like M. Naeem Qureshi (1999) provide exhaustive accounts of the rise and growth of pan-Islamism in British India, detailing the political machinery, but often treating the emotional drive as a secondary motivating factor rather than a central mechanism. Qureshi's work emphasizes how the pan-Islamic impulse provided the necessary religious and ideological framework, making the defense of the Caliphate a *Jihad* (holy duty), thereby mingling political goals with a fundamental Islamic consciousness. However, the true innovation in understanding this movement lies in integrating it with the burgeoning field of the history of emotions, which posits that feelings are socially constructed and historically contingent, not merely innate responses. This integration is crucial for moving beyond the materialist or purely political interpretations that dominate earlier works.

Recent scholarship, specifically within affective history, compels a re-evaluation, treating emotions as potent forces that shape political praxis, not just outcomes (Reddy 2009). The work of Barbara H. Rosenwein (2006) on "emotional communities" offers a vital theoretical lens, suggesting that collective emotions operate

under shared cultural rules, which, in the context of the Khilafat, dictated the appropriate expressions of devotion (love) and collective distress (loss). This approach allows for the analysis of the movement's rhetoric—termed "emotives" by William M. Reddy (2009)—which demonstrates that the public expression of feeling by leaders like the Ali Brothers was both a reflection of and a deliberate tool for *constituting* the collective feeling itself. Furthermore, the analysis of Urdu poetry and contemporary press (Tignol 2023; Tejani 2007) moves beyond official reports to capture the subjective, personalized experience of this love and loss, arguing that this emotional register is crucial to understanding the endurance of the movement's memory. This thesis directly contributes to the affective turn in historical studies by placing the emotional register at the center of the movement's mobilization and subsequent legacy, offering a counter-narrative to purely functionalist historical models.

This study employs a historical methodology, grounded in the principles of social constructivism (Pernau and Jordheim 2015) and thematic analysis, to reconstruct the complex emotional landscape of Indian Muslims during the Khilafat Movement. Data collection draws systematically from a triangulation of primary sources: official documents (such as the archival files referenced in the provided research, e.g., "The War: Muslim Feeling and Expression of Loyalty"), public and private writings (speeches, letters, and diaries of key figures like Maulana Mohammad Ali), and vernacular press and poetry (specifically the works of Iqbal and Malihabadi). The use of the vernacular press from regions like Sindh (Tejani 2007) is critical, offering localized evidence of how pan-Islamic sentiments were translated into regional emotional and political mobilization, thus revealing the movement's grass-roots resonance. The focus on *Al-Waheed* and *Watan*, as noted in the original research, highlights the crucial role of local media as an instrument for emotional synchronization, demonstrating the diffusion of a standardized Khilafat sentiment.

The collected data is subjected to thematic analysis, where coding is applied to identify recurring patterns of emotional expression and mobilization tactics used by Khilafat leaders and participants. Key themes include the spiritualization of political allegiance ("love" for the Caliphate), the public performance of collective mourning (expressions of "loss" and grief), the deployment of "emotives" (Reddy 2009) in oratory, and the use of religious symbolism as "symbolic capital" (Ahmed, as cited in the source material) to generate unity. By integrating these themes within the frameworks of Emotional Communities Theory (Rosenwein 2006) and the insights from *Demystifying the Caliphate* (Al-Rasheed 2012), the methodology ensures a nuanced interpretation, moving beyond the simple narrative of political failure to explore the profound, lasting impact of emotional solidarity and cultural identity formation. This approach allows the study to interpret actions like the *Hijrat* as expressions of profound spiritual-emotional loyalty, rather than mere political displacement.

The Emotional Mobilization: Love for the Caliphate

The fervent love displayed by Indian Muslims for the Ottoman Caliphate was not a secular political loyalty but a deeply spiritual and theological commitment, rooted in the idea of the Caliph as the successor to the Prophet

Muhammad and the temporal guardian of the Islamic world. This spiritual devotion served as the foundational emotion, allowing Khilafat leaders to cast the defense of Constantinople as an absolute religious duty (*farz*), thus transcending geographical and linguistic differences within the diverse Indian Muslim community. The emotional bond was amplified by the historical memory of the Caliphate as a representation of Muslim power and dignity, which provided a psychological counterpoint to the humiliation of British colonial subjugation in India (Qureshi 1999). This love was a critical ingredient in the pan-Islamic ideology, fusing the local political struggle against the British with a global commitment to the *Ummah*, establishing a powerful, unified emotional front. The affective appeal was so potent that British officials recorded the anxiety over the sudden, palpable shift in Muslim feeling and expression of loyalty, indicating the success of the Khilafat message.

The leaders of the movement, particularly Maulana Mohammad Ali and Maulana Shaukat Ali, masterfully utilized this pre-existing religious affection, translating it into actionable political zeal through rhetorical performance. Their speeches were replete with "emotives," employing highly charged language, evocative metaphors, and references to sacred history to deliberately elicit feelings of devotion and self-sacrifice from their audiences. This strategic emotional oratory ensured that participating in Khilafat activities—whether joining a demonstration, contributing funds, or performing *Hijrat* (migration)—was perceived not merely as a political choice but as a deeply personal and moral necessity to preserve the beloved spiritual authority (Reddy 2009). The public displays of piety and unwavering loyalty at mass rallies served to standardize this emotional response, solidifying the Muslim population into a coherent emotional community (Rosenwein 2006) united by a singular, consuming affection for the Caliphate. The strategic use of the black flag, symbolizing both mourning and pan-Islamic authority, visually amplified this shared emotional condition, turning rallies into affective ceremonies.

The depth of this emotional commitment was evidenced materially through the spontaneous Hijrat Movement of 1920, an extreme collective act where thousands of Muslims sold their property and migrated to Afghanistan, viewing British India as *Dar-ul-Harb* (House of War). This mass exodus, fueled by the emotional conviction that their spiritual duty superseded their material well-being, demonstrates the absolute power of the Khilafat emotive (Yousaf n.d.). The decision to abandon homes and livelihoods was not based on rational political calculus but on a profound, religiously mandated loyalty to the Caliphate, illustrating the fusion of personal faith and political action. The willingness to sacrifice material security underscored the spiritualization of the political struggle, making the Khilafat cause a matter of ontological commitment.

Furthermore, the act of financial contribution to the Khilafat Fund became a quantifiable emotional metric. Contributions were not merely transactions but ritualistic offerings, expressions of devotion (*muhabbat*) to the cause, symbolizing a material sacrifice for the spiritual sovereign. The public collection of funds often accompanied emotional speeches, turning the donation into a public performance of loyalty that reinforced the communal bond (Qureshi 1999). This mobilization of economic resources via emotional appeal highlights the leaders' understanding of

symbolic capital (Ahmed, cited in the source) and the ability of collective religious sentiment to generate tangible, political leverage against the colonial state. The emotional act of giving, therefore, served to materially sustain the movement.

The Anatomy of Loss and Grief

The counter-narrative to the fervor of love was the overwhelming, pervasive sense of loss that defined the movement, triggered by the humiliation of the Caliphate and the eventual dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. This loss was multifaceted: it was political (the end of the last major Muslim empire), spiritual (the perceived destruction of the Caliph's role as the successor to the Prophet), and existential (a blow to the collective dignity of global Islam). Indian Muslims experienced this geopolitical event as a collective, personal tragedy, a sentiment articulated powerfully in press accounts and private correspondence of the period (Hasan 1981). The widespread public mourning, characterized by fasting, processions, and solemn prayer meetings, was a structured, communal performance of grief, cementing the unity of the emotional community through shared sorrow. This shared, formalized grief created a grieving society—a term applicable to the Indian Muslim community—where the trauma of the Caliphate's fall was continuously reenacted and validated (Tignol 2023).

The poetry of the era acted as a crucial emotional vessel, translating abstract loss into visceral, shared lamentations, with figures like Josh Malihabadi composing verses that embodied themes of sacrifice and broken-hearted solidarity. Allama Iqbal's works, such as *Khizr-e-Raah*, not only mourned the current state of the Caliphate but also articulated a hopeful vision for its eventual rebirth, channeling grief into a determined, future-oriented resistance. This literary articulation served a dual purpose: it validated the subjective suffering of the individual while simultaneously providing a culturally acceptable, unifying script for collective emotional expression (Tignol 2023). This process turned personal anguish into a political statement, demonstrating that loss was not a passive state but an active, mobilizing emotion.

The political dimension of this loss was perceived as a direct act of betrayal by the British, who had initially sought Muslim loyalty during the War and were now seen as orchestrating the destruction of the holiest Islamic institution. This feeling of betrayal transformed the grief over the Caliphate's demise into profound anger and resentment directed toward the colonial rulers. This targeted emotional energy was vital, providing the psychological fuel for the Non-Cooperation movement—launched in conjunction with the Khilafat leaders—as a manifestation of collective anti-colonial rage (Tejani 2007). The sense of injustice, rooted in the emotional wound of betrayal, galvanized widespread participation, turning passive subjects into active protesters demanding self-determination and recognition of their religious rights. The sense of Islamic sentiments (as mentioned in the original research) became weaponized, transforming traditional pieties into radical political defiance.

The feeling of covert love, a term applied metaphorically within the original research, encapsulates the internal conflict faced by loyalist Muslims within the British administration. High-ranking individuals, such as Mashriqi (Yousaf n.d.), faced a choice between career advancement and emotional allegiance to the Caliphate, forcing their

genuine affection and sorrow into a suppressed, hidden realm. Mashriqi's refusal of knighthood and ambassadorship, despite pressure to oppose the Khilafat's objectives, underscores the deep moral and emotional pull exerted by the pan-Islamic cause, even upon those within the colonial establishment. This illustrates that the emotional landscape was complex, involving private ethical choices driven by the culturally associated standards of religious duty and honour, beyond the public spectacle of mass protest.

The Phenomenology of Grief: Performance and Ritual

The collective grief experienced by the Khilafat emotional community was not a spontaneous, amorphous reaction but a structured emotional performance rooted in cultural and religious rituals. The emphasis on fasting, solemn assemblies, and the wearing of black flags formalized the emotion, giving it a political meaning that was immediately legible to both the Muslim populace and the British authorities. This formalization ensured that the expression of sorrow-maintained dignity and avoided the colonial charge of "chaos," thereby making the movement a morally superior form of protest against colonial "dominance without hegemony" (Guha 1998). This ritualized lamentation transformed individual heartache into a unifying, powerful political statement of collective distress.

The use of the *shahr ashob* genre of poetry, a traditional form of lamentation for the decline of cities or empires, was strategically adapted by figures like Shibli Numani and Mohamed Ali Jauhar to express the community's sorrow over the Ottoman collapse (Tignol 2023). This genre provided a culturally sanctioned emotional script that allowed Muslims to connect their contemporary political suffering to a long, revered tradition of Islamic decline, thereby historicizing and validating their intense feelings of loss. The recitation of these poems in public assemblies and rallies served as an act of shared catharsis, cementing the sense of a collective destiny tied to the fate of the Caliphate. The poems' imagery of ruin and betrayal channeled grief into a sharp, political antagonism directed at the Western "adversary" (Tignol 2023).

The performance of grief was also explicitly linked to concepts of Islamic self-discipline and resilience. Leaders invoked *sabr* (patience) and *tawakkul* (trust in Allah) to guide the emotional responses of the masses, ensuring that anger did not degenerate into indiscipline, but was channeled into sustained, righteous resistance. This Islamic psychology (as mentioned in the original research) regulated the raw emotion of fury, transforming it into the disciplined political action required for the Non-Cooperation movement (Qureshi 1979). The moral high ground maintained through non-violent protest, even when fueled by intense indignation, served to reinforce the community's sense of spiritual superiority over the perceived moral decadence of colonial power.

Symbolic Capital and the Materiality of Love

The Khilafat Movement expertly utilized symbolic capital—religious and cultural symbols—to generate and sustain political mobilization, giving tangible form to the abstract emotions of love and loyalty. The physical image of the Ottoman Sultan/Caliph, often displayed in public spaces, was not merely a portrait but a

powerful emotive object that immediately evoked devotion and duty from the masses (Ahmed, cited in the source). This visual representation served as a constant psychological anchor, reminding participants of the spiritual leader they were fighting to protect and solidifying the community's emotional identity around a single, distant figurehead. The visual focus on the Caliph helped to overcome the fragmentation inherent in the diverse Indian Muslim population.

The use of religious slogans, banners, and the Khilafat committees themselves acted as powerful, physical manifestations of collective emotion. The rallying cry of *Allahu Akbar* (God is Great) and the repeated emphasis on *Ummah* unity were deployed in mass rallies not just as statements of faith but as performative acts of emotional and political solidarity. These cultural elements became tools of emotional mobilization, demonstrating how love for the Caliphate was materially constructed and perpetually reinforced through communal public rituals (Karaman n.d.). The very act of marching under a shared banner transformed individual love into a collective, visible political presence, defying colonial attempts to suppress dissent.

Conversely, the act of boycott, a central tactic of the Non-Cooperation and Khilafat alliance, served as a material expression of anger and rejection, transforming economic behavior into an emotional statement against British dominance. Refusing to purchase British goods or attend British institutions was a way for individuals to express their deep-seated resentment and sense of betrayal over the Caliphate's fate. This economic abstinence, though rationalized as a political strategy, derived its mass appeal and intensity from the pervasive emotional conviction that cooperation with the oppressor was a spiritual contamination (Hasan 1981). The boycott thus became a materiality of loss—a physical act of denial signifying the collective moral withdrawal from the colonial state.

Affective Divergence and the Failure of Unity

The emotional unity forged between Hindus and Muslims during the movement, while strategically potent, was inherently fragile because it rested upon divergent emotional foundations: Hindu nationalism's anger was localized, whereas Muslim pan-Islamism's love and loss were global. Gandhi's tactical embrace of the Khilafat cause, acknowledging the emotional sincerity of Muslim grievance, was a moment of affective synchronization, yet the underlying political commitments remained distinct (Hasan 1981). This difference meant that when the external threat—the Caliphate's existence—changed, the synchronized emotional bond quickly fractured, exposing the underlying communal tensions that the movement had briefly masked.

The Mappila Rebellion of 1921 in Malabar serves as a critical case study in affective divergence and localized emotional eruption. While fueled by the pan-Islamic fervor and Khilafat rhetoric against colonial injustice, the revolt rapidly devolved into communal violence against local Hindu landowners, transforming the global *Ummah* solidarity into localized agrarian and communal conflict (Thursby n.d.). This event shattered the carefully constructed narrative of Hindu-Muslim unity, revealing the failure of the Khilafat leaders and Congress to manage the intensely charged, localized political and emotional resentments that the

pan-Islamic rhetoric had unleashed. The Mappila incident provided the British with potent counter-evidence against the notion of a disciplined, unified anti-colonial front, highlighting the dangers of uncontrolled emotional mobilization.

The eventual abolition of the Caliphate by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in Turkey in 1924 delivered the final, devastating blow, creating a new, profound wave of emotional disillusionment and political disorientation for Indian Muslims (Qureshi 1999). This loss was not orchestrated by the British but by a fellow Muslim authority, rendering the entire purpose of the movement moot and creating a deeper sense of betrayal and despair. The movement collapsed not under external pressure, but under the weight of its own failed emotional promise. The emotional community fragmented, forcing individuals to mourn a second, more complicated loss: the loss of the Caliphate itself, and the loss of the political vision built around its preservation.

Poetry, Press, and the Emotional Record

The press and literature of the time serve as the most immediate and vivid record of the movement's emotional dynamics, capturing the rapid shifts from hopeful zeal to devastating disappointment. Vernacular newspapers, particularly in regions like Sindh, functioned as conduits for emotional mobilization, employing highly affective rhetoric to depict the Caliphate as a threatened sanctuary and the British as tyrannical aggressors (Tejani 2007). Editorials and articles actively sought to foster empathy and indignation, ensuring that the emotional community remained energized and unified by shared information and a common emotional interpretation of global events. The press did not merely report the news; it actively engaged in the process of emotional construction, amplifying the sense of collective *ghairat* (honour) that was under threat.

Urdu poetry, however, offered the most enduring testament to the depth of the Khilafat emotions, transforming political protest into a sublime cultural expression (Tignol 2023). Poets utilized traditional *ghazal* forms to imbue political subjects with themes of forbidden love, heartbreak, and spiritual yearning. Mohamed Ali Jauhar's own poetry, for instance, translated the political struggle into a religious declaration, asserting that the "declaration of faith is chanted by Delhi" and that the "sail-e rawā̄n-e Dehlī" (gushing flow of Delhi) could not be dammed by mere bullets. This cultural production created an affective repertoire that was easily consumed and reproduced by the masses, providing slogans for rallies and a shared emotional vocabulary for communal solidarity, thus ensuring the movement's affective longevity beyond its political lifespan. The emotional sincerity embedded in these verses became a form of moral capital that sustained the movement's legacy.

Shibli Numani's use of the *shahr ashob* (lament for a city/empire) in his poem *Shahr shop-e Islā̄ m̄* is a powerful example of this emotional transposition (Tignol 2023). The poem explicitly links the "fall of Ottomans" to the "fall of Islam," creating an existential connection that mobilized the entire emotional community to action. By asking, "We should tell you the tale of our sad heart how long?" and "You will go on erasing our traces how long?", the poetry shifts the emotional landscape from passive sorrow to active, questioning defiance, giving voice to the collective pain and anger of the Muslim

populace against colonial humiliation. The literary forms provided a powerful, sophisticated method for expressing political and spiritual interconnectedness.

The Legacy of Emotional Memory

The ultimate abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish Grand National Assembly in 1924, despite the fervent efforts of the Khilafat Movement, left a deep, traumatic emotional scar on the Indian Muslim community. This final, irreversible loss cemented the movement's legacy as a tragedy of profound collective grief and political failure. However, rather than simply fading into history, the memory of the Khilafat era became a cornerstone of modern Muslim identity, proving that the emotional investment outweighed the political outcome (Al-Rasheed 2012). The narratives of the movement—its heroic leaders, the sacrifices made, and the emotional unity achieved—were selectively preserved and internalized, creating an "emotional memory" that continues to shape contemporary socio-political discourse. This post-1924 emotional memory often omits the chaotic and divergent elements of the movement, favoring a heroic, unified narrative of resistance.

This emotional memory serves to reinforce the ideals of collective action, resistance against oppression, and the enduring necessity of *Ummah* solidarity, even in the absence of a Caliphate. The historical recounting of the movement often depicts its leaders as martyrs and exemplars of *Ghairat* (honour/zealous self-respect), utilizing their emotional intensity and dedication to inspire subsequent generations. Thus, the Khilafat Movement remains not just a record of early 20th-century political failure but a powerful, enduring emotional narrative that demonstrates the catalytic force of *love and loss* in forging collective identity and fueling the continuous, often unspoken, struggle for cultural and political autonomy in the subcontinent. The continued reverence for the Ali Brothers and other leaders is a testament to the emotional power of their rhetoric, which is still felt long after the political objectives faded.

The lasting impact of the movement, therefore, is rooted in its successful social construction of emotion (Pernau and Jordheim 2015). It taught Indian Muslims the political efficacy of mobilizing around a unified, global spiritual grievance, establishing an affective blueprint for later communal and political movements. The memory emphasizes the shared performance of love and the collective processing of loss, creating a reservoir of historical trauma and pride that can be reactivated in moments of perceived crisis. This emotional legacy is crucial to understanding the political consciousness of Muslims in the subcontinent, where the defense of a collective religious ideal continues to elicit powerful, non-rationalized political responses. The Khilafat era provided a foundational moment for the public expression of Islamic political sentiment.

Conclusion

The Khilafat Movement stands as a compelling historical case study demonstrating the centrality of emotional dynamics in political mobilization and identity formation, revealing that the zealous defense of the Ottoman Caliphate by Indian Muslims was fundamentally driven by the intertwined affective states of love and loss. This analysis, guided by the theories of Emotional Communities and Social

Constructivism, has shown how the spiritual devotion—the love—for the Caliphate was strategically amplified into a potent political force by the movement's leaders, who employed evocative rhetoric to unify a diverse population. Conversely, the accompanying grief and anger over the Caliphate's decline and the perceived British betrayal provided the essential psychological energy for widespread anti-colonial non-cooperation. The movement's strategic use of emotives, symbolic capital, and ritualized expressions of grief highlights the critical need to analyze history through an affective lens.

By dissecting the primary historical records, particularly the contemporary press, emotional correspondence, and expressive poetry of the period, the essay has illuminated how these emotional currents were managed, articulated, and standardized into a cohesive affective repertoire that defined the Khilafat experience. The study of the Hijrat, the Mappila Rebellion, and the eventual dissolution demonstrates that the emotional terrain was fraught with complexity, leading to both unprecedented unity with Hindu nationalism and disastrous internal divergence. The movement's ultimate political failure does not diminish its profound cultural significance; instead, it underscores how the intensity of the emotional experience—the collective love and the collective trauma of loss—was internalized to become an indelible part of the modern Indian Muslim identity, shaping its narratives of resistance and solidarity to this day.

The Khilafat Movement serves as a vital reminder that reason alone seldom drives mass movements; rather, it is the powerful, shared language of the heart that catalyzes collective action and etches enduring memories into the historical consciousness. Its legacy is not found in political victory but in the enduring emotional memory—a collective blueprint for translating spiritual conviction into political defiance. Future research must continue to explore how these foundational emotional narratives, forged in the crucible of love and loss, continue to inform Muslim political identity and response to global events, long after the physical symbol of the Caliphate has vanished.

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