

STATUE OF UNITY

... An inspiring landmark
of the Iron Man of India

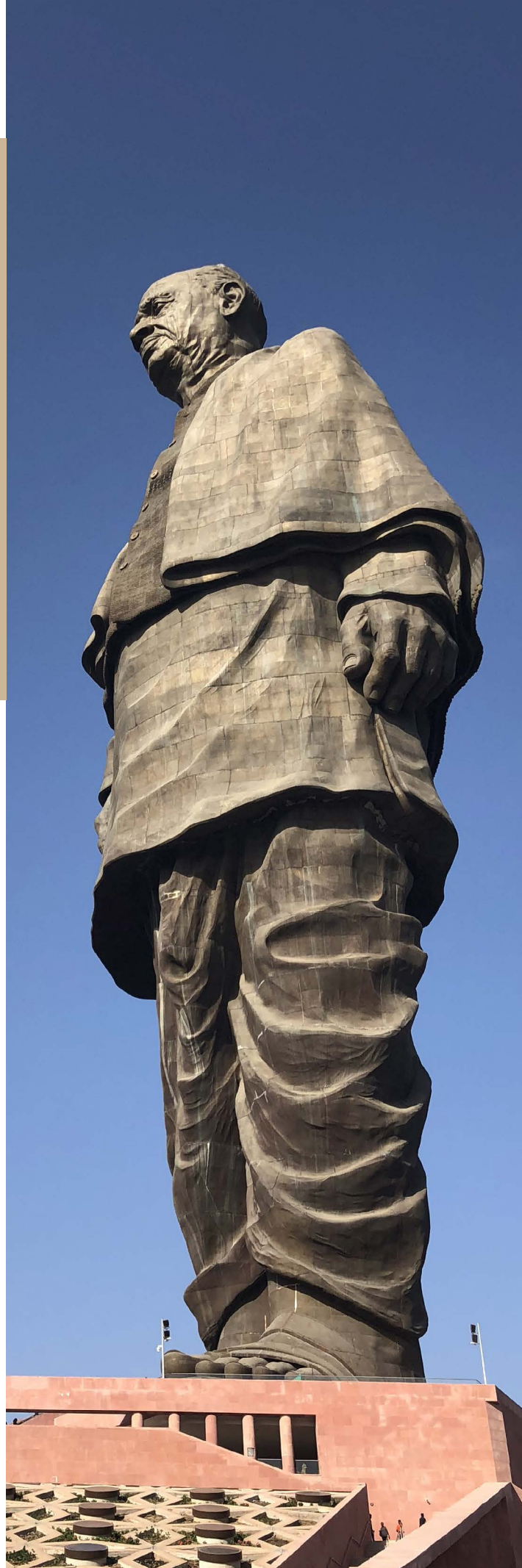
- *Dr. V Shankar*
25.02.2019

“The Statue will stand high, not just in meters and feet but much more in terms of academic, historical, national and spiritual values. My vision is to develop the place as a source of inspiration for ages to come.

– Shri. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

We visited the Statue of Unity on the river island facing the Sardar Sarovar Dam on river Narmada in Kevadiya Colony, 100 kms south east of the city of Vadodara between 23rd and 24th February 2019.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was born in Nadiad on 31st October 1875. He died at the age of 75 on 15th December 1950. He is widely acclaimed as the Architect of modern India. He was the Deputy Prime Minister and the First Home Minister of Free India. He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Armed Forces between 15.8.1947 and 15.12.1950,

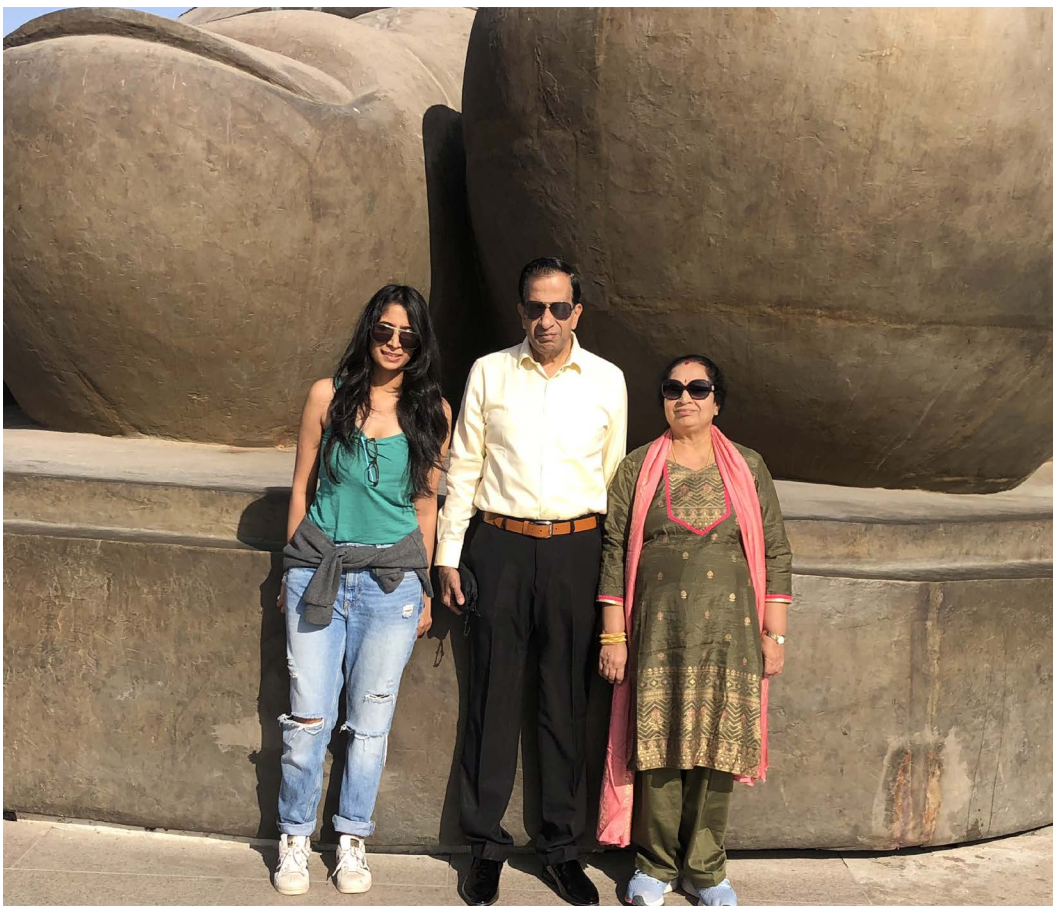




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a position now held by the President of the Republic. Singularly, he is the only Indian not having occupied the highest office of the Republic, was the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.

At the age of 36, Patel travelled to England and enrolled in their Middle Temple Inn, a School for Barristers. He finished the 36 months course in 30 months and topped the final examination despite having no previous college experience. Patel joined Gandhiji's non co-operation movement and travelled around India to recruit 3,00,000 volunteer members. He worked extensively against alcohol consumption, untouchability, caste discrimination and for women emancipation.



Sardar Patel handled effectively the integration of 562 independent states into the Union of India with his diplomatic skills and foresightedness. He pursued an Iron handed policy refusing to recognise the right of any state to remain independent and in isolation, within India. By 15th August 1947, all except Hyderabad, Junagarh and Kashmir acceded to India. When the Nawab of Junagarh wanted to accede to Pakistan against people's wishes, Patel intervened, took over the administration and held a plebiscite and merged it into India. With a iron fisted hand, he subdued the Nizam with police action and made him surrender. In Kashmir, Lord Mountbatten played a major role alongwith Pandit Nehru. Mountbatten even supervised Indian military operations against intruders from Pakistan. The Hindu King of Jammu and Kashmir Hari Singh, father of Dr. Karan Singh begged for mercy of India when Pakistani insurgents attacked Jammu and Kashmir and occupied some parts! Sardar Patel got the King to accede to India and quelled the insurgency with the force of the army. Small wonder he is remembered as the Iron Man of India.

Despite his sterling contribution to the unification of India, successive Congress governments failed to recognise his greatness and kept him away from Bharat Ratna award. It was Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, of the non-Nehru family who conferred Bharat Ratna posthumously on Sardar

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Vallabh Bhai Patel in 1991, 41 years after his death. Jawaharlal Nehru was given Bharat Ratna in July 1955 when he was serving as the Prime Minister. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar died on 6th December 1956. It took 36 years to give the country's highest civilian award to him, albeit a few years earlier than Sardar Patel. Govind Ballabh Pant was the 4th Home Minister of India holding that position between 1955 and 1961. He was decorated with Bharat Ratna in the year 1957 while being in the office. Pant was credited with the re-organisation of the states along linguistic lines. Patel unified the country and as Rajendra Prasad once said "India is what it is because of Patel". Yet there was a conscious policy not to project him as the 'Real Hero' of Independent India.

In trying to correct the distortion in History and a conscious attempt to suppress Sardar Patel's contribution to India, the Government of Gujarat

started the work on the Statue of Unity in 2013 under Shri. Narendra Modi, the then Chief Minister. The Statue of Unity is a colossal statue of the Iron Man of India. At 182 metres, it is the tallest statue in the world. It was dedicated to the nation on 31st October 2018 by Shri. Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India. The Statue of Unity is a reminder to generations of Indians of the monumental contribution of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and is a symbol of national harmony and integrity.

The statue is a paragon of artistic expression and engineering excellence. The Statue rises out of a star shaped geometric base that covers the entire Sadhu Hill. It was constructed at a cost of Rs. 2989 crores. The two vertical cones support the steel frames to which about 6500 bronze panels are clad. A viewing gallery at 153 metre level, at the chest of the statue, affords a breathtaking view of the Sardar Sarovar Dam and its environs. An exhibition centre at its base showcases the life and achievements of Sardar Patel.



Some hard facts on the construction of this engineering marvel.

210000 cu.m of cement concrete

18500 tonnes of reinforced steel

6500 tonnes of structural steel

1700 tonnes of bronze

1850 tonnes of bronze cladding made up of macro and micro panels

The statue can withstand wind speeds of **50m per sec** (about 180 k/m per hour)

It can survive earthquakes measuring upto **6.5 on richter scale**, at a depth of 10 kms within a radius of 12 kms of the statue.

The statue is divided into five zones.

Zone 1 - Upto the shin, comprising three levels (memorial garden and a large museum)

Zone 2 – Extend upto the statue’s thighs at 149 metres

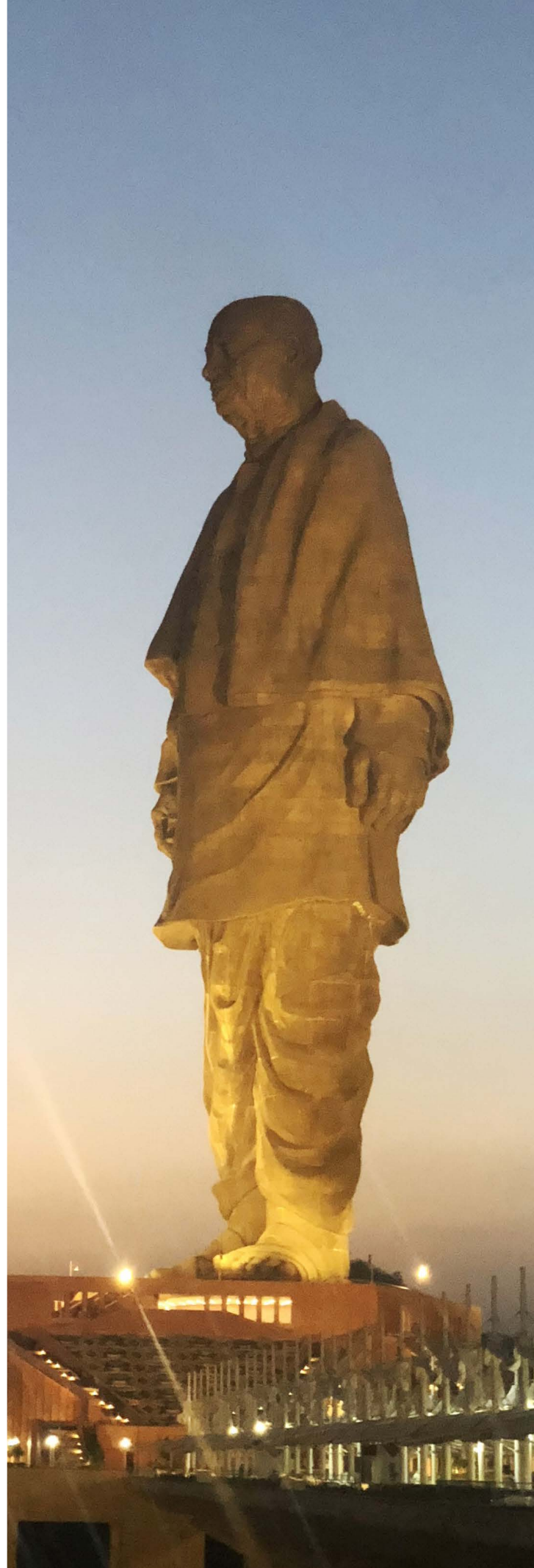
Zone 3 – Viewing gallery at 153 metres

Zone 4 – Maintenance area

Zone 5 – The head and the shoulders of the statue

Zone 4 and 5 are out of bounds of the public. In the lobby area, at the entrance of the statue, a museum and audio visual gallery feature a 15 minutes presentation on Sardar Patel and the tribal culture of Gujarat. Earth from all parts of the country were used in the making of the symbolic unity wall. When Iron was collected as part of the Loha campaign from farmers across India, soil was also collected from 1,69,078 villages. This soil was used to build the special 350 ft x 40 ft ‘Wall of Unity’. The statue of unity imprinted on the wall is visible all over.

The Museum on Sardar Patel captures his life and times and his contribution to the nation. The



photos could have been improved for better registration. The dome shaped hall that houses the Museum has large enough space for an orderly flow of the visitors. The pledge that the visitor can take on the computer that relays it on the screen is a thoughtful addition. The Sardar's statue and the huge face sculpture of Vallabhai Patel adds to the show. The Audio visual on Sardar Patel is a useful chronicle of his life.

As shadows lengthen at the end of the day and darkness envelopes the entire environment, the statue of Sardar Patel glitters and glows as the laser show begins. This is a never to be missed activity and is the best part of the visit. The laser show is tastefully done with brilliant colour combinations and of course a narrative that brings home the greatness of Sardar. The high point is the national anthem at the end that evokes a sense of pride and patriotism.



Certainly the memorial achieves one thing, that Sardar Patel's contribution to freedom movement and unification of India has been suppressed by the powers that guided the nation for too long. This memorial is a fitting tribute to his legacy, though belated. It is a symbol of Sardar's ideologies of unity, patriotism, inclusive growth and good governance.

Throughout history, statues have been associated with cult images in many religious traditions from ancient Egypt, India, Greece and Rome to the present. When we think of statues, our minds travels to the Statue of Liberty. The copper statue of Liberty is a gift from the people of France to people of USA, designed by French sculptor Frédéric Auguste Bartholdi and built by Gustave Eiffel. The statue was dedicated on October 28, 1886. The Lowenmensch figurine from the Swabian Alps in Germany is the oldest known statue in the world and dates to 30,000 – 40,000 years ago. The venus of Hohle Fels, from the same area is somewhat later.

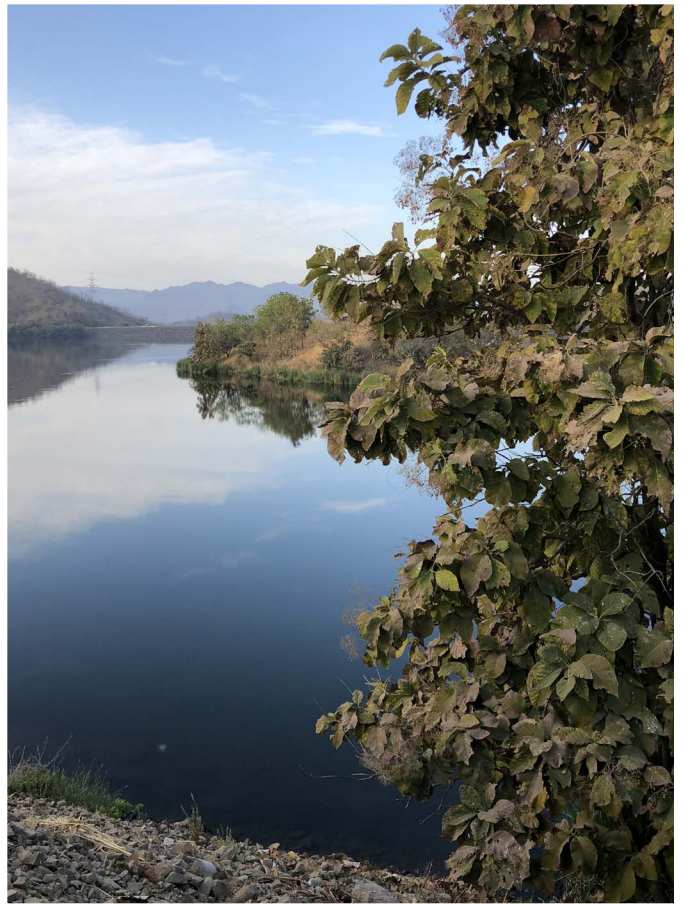
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For thousands of years sculpture has filled many roles in human life. The earliest sculpture was probably made to supply magical help to hunters. After the dawn of civilisation, statues were used to represent Gods. Ancient kings, possibly in the hope of making themselves immortal gave birth to portrait sculpture. Sculpture is the oldest of the art. People carved before they painted or designed dwellings.

New York's Statue of Liberty is just one of the many worldwide. The Odaiba statue of Liberty, 39 foot tall is easily the nicest of all the copycats. It was erected in 1998 as part of a one year tribute to Japan's connection with France. It is easy to pretend you're really in New York while you are in Tokyo bay.

The 'Dancing Girl' in tribanga posture found from Mohenjo-Daro is the earliest bronze sculpture in India datable to 2500 BC. Most of the bronze sculptures that religions promoted were used for ritualistic worship. Through centuries the art developed to perfection. With independence, a new personality cult developed substituting kings and saints with politicians. In South India, particularly Tamil Nadu, it has reached bizarre levels. Roads and other open spaces continue to be defaced with statues which impede traffic flows as well. Ambedkar Memorial Park in Gomti Nagar, Lucknow built during Mayawati's regime spread on 108 acres of land honours all those who served for the upliftment of the down trodden. A colossal wastage of public funds according to many, it is today subject to CBI inquiry for nefarious deals. But it caught the imagination of other political parties and a rat race began. Does Sardar Patel's statue of unity fall into that category? 'YES' and 'NO'.

Maharashtra is erecting a statue of Shivaji in the Arabian Sea near the coast of Mumbai city. Its total height including pedestal is 212 metres. It would cost the public exchequer Rs. 3600 crores. Yogi Adityanath is not far behind. He wants the tallest statue of Lord Ram in Ayodhya. In a country where 1/3rd of the population lives below poverty line, such extravagance is insult to humanity. How can the business of statues continue? Only if they can be converted into tourist centres



and attract tourists the world over and over time the cost of the statue and related infrastructure is recouped and channelised back to public welfare. Exactly like the way Built Operate Transfer (BOT) in flyovers, mass rapid transit corridors, sea transport operation etc. Will the Sardar's Statue of Unity possibly achieve that? Time alone can tell.

Statues and busts may be necessary for little great men who live in piteous dread of premature abortion of their counterfeit celebrity; but they never perish who live in the hearts of men. Great men become deathless institutions from being mortal individuals, when they disappear from the physical plane, and their influence becomes the warp and woof of the thoughts and dreams of succeeding generations. They carve for themselves a niche in the Rocky Temple of Reverential Gratitude. Sardar Patel belongs to this category.

Long live the inspiration of Patel – Sardar, the devoted Servant of India; the gifted administrator and above all, Sardar, the noble soul, who toiled unknown to fame and lighted hundreds of Indian hearts with wisdom and culture!



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