



AUROVILLE TODAY

July 1991

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Number Thirty

In this hot summer, single issue, we could adorn our pages with the designs of Shradhanjali, thanks to its founder who also writes the story of her unit on page four. This issue features young Indians, mostly women, touching on the marvel of Auroville in India and India in Auroville.



INDIAUROVILLE

Auroville and India are inseparable, yet questions of Auroville's Indian-ness, of the dominance of Western approaches, of the delicate balance of cultural influences, often come to the surface. Some people dismiss these questions as irrelevant in the light of Auroville's ideals. A few people are ready to ignite racist and neo-colonial sentiments. Most Aurovilians, as you would hope, are open to explore and learn. Here are some Indian perspectives, necessarily incomplete, of a few people that Bill or Carel (sometimes both, sometimes also Sven) could meet and ask about their personal story with Auroville and its "Eastern/Western" ways.



Photo Sven

Deepti and Arjun, two Punjabis, living in Auroville since '76. As they didn't disagree with each other, actually supported each other, we didn't distinguish who said what.

"In India there is a special quality of *bhakti* where you can go beyond yourself and do things that you couldn't do in a normal state, a sense of love for something larger and vaster than yourself. It changes you for a moment and if those moments keep coming, it changes you. It's like when you listen to beautiful music and there is that upsurge within you. If only something like this could come more in the collective being of Auroville!

We don't need the sort of sentimental heart reaction, the kind of superficial caring we sometimes talk about in Auroville. To care only for the problems is ridiculous. In fact, a sense of caring also comes through being very strong when it is necessary. For me, a sense of caring is not necessarily softness. It can also be Krishna's exhortation to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra to

... the Brahmins were the men of knowledge, the Kshatriyas the men of power, the Vaishyas the producers and support of society, the Shudras its servants.

— the Divine as knowledge in man, the Divine as power, the Divine as production, enjoyment and mutuality, the Divine as service, obedience and work. These divisions answer to four cosmic principles, the Wisdom that conceives the order and principle of things, the Power that sanctions, upholds and enforces it, the Harmony that creates the arrangement of its parts, the Work that carries out what the rest direct.

Sri Aurobindo, SABCL 15, p. 5-6

be true to his *dharma* as a warrior. People interpret caring as this very new-age holding hands number which for me is appalling. I would rather Auroville is the way it is than that. For me, that's not true, you can really get lost in that kind of a thing. If one thinks with the heart, one acts with the heart. There is also the idea of *dharma* which has so pervaded India for twenty centuries and always helped her people to go beyond themselves. This, too, is very relevant to Auroville.

Human nature is not different whether you're Indian or Western, but the approach to problems is so much influenced by one's background.

After living in Auroville all these years, I can say that there is an Indian approach which is deeper. Now how to define that? I recall from childhood growing up with the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, these figures which are human, but larger than life. They have a sense of a higher rule that they bring into every detail of life. That sense of *dharma* is very strong in the psyche of people of India and that, if you could bring it out of people, could change everything. The Freedom Struggle of India is a case in point where especially Sri Aurobindo brought in a dimension where the country became a goddess, your religion was to free her, it became your highest *dharma*. It made each and every person in the struggle transcend themselves. So I believe that conditions can be created where ordinary people can transcend themselves. But if society creates conditions that make them small, narrow, turned in on themselves which is what we as a society are doing, then the result is that you get a small narrow parochial society. I see it in myself — this terrible fear that we have no money, the

maintenance is ridiculously low and all that. It weighs on you but it's all wrong. India was at its lowest ebb when the British came and in the space of several decades they reversed everything.

Now Auroville is in that kind of state. When we all first came to Auroville there was a kind of blazing idealism which I still feel. But what I really miss today is more people with that blazing idealism about Auroville, a faith that it will be, the whole of it, not just these little work areas, these businesses that have cropped up here and there. Most of the people appear to have forgotten why they came: to realize the city, to realize Sri Aurobindo and Mother's dream. What has happened is that it has become so specialized — we do our little numbers and we contribute to the smaller aspect, in ourselves also. That is definitely not acceptable. We have to break out of this and you can see the whole country also is in exactly the same state. If you think of all those wonderful people, in every imaginable sphere of activity, from the resurgence of the soul of India that Sri Ramakrishna represented, and the great socio-political movements like the Arya Samaj and Brama Samaj and the renaissance in Bengal that revitalized the whole cultural fabric of India. They were for India that goddess, that *bhavani bharti* we are talking about. They were ready to do anything, it didn't matter what. What you were called upon to do for the country, — not "country" in the sense of the modern nation, but the soul of India, the Mother or *bhavani bharti*, that is what I feel about Auroville, exactly the same. We need a miracle to shake people out of their pettiness and narrowness. The country will decline and so will Auroville if this doesn't happen. We've got

to take a leap. Something of that innate fire just has to manifest.

You have to be poised to take that leap. When one says that Auroville is too Western, it's not that you need an injection of this blood or that. Maybe it's just a question of one or two more Indians, as you call them, to provide that balance, maybe more people from the Orient or Africa, I don't know. It is not a question of Indians as a nationality. It's a question of balance and attitude. If you could get five people with that attitude — which doesn't just belong to India, even though it might be more easily available to Indians, if they choose to find it; Indians, even in Auroville, don't necessarily have it. They get so westernized when they come to Auroville they forget that deeper sense. You can only contribute definitively and progressively if you are steeped in that higher attitude of your culture and I believe each culture has that, and you contribute that in the forum called Auroville. Then all these streams merge. That creates the collective being of Auroville. In the end it's a question of self-development. The more you develop, the more you're open to different things.

The India we believe in is Sri Aurobindo's India which is not so manifest today. It is the India that exists in the soul, the soul quality which is beyond the religions. The Vedas belong to all streams of India — Muslims, Sikhs or whatever. If you say the culture of India is just an ancient culture or a Hindu culture, that is ridiculous because it reduces it to sectarian interpretations that are often used for political ends. The divisions are stupid. We are talking about a soul quality. In spite of all the contradictions, there is a thread of Indian-ness. There is something that seems to shine right through all the diver-

continued on page 2



“Thinking”

continued from page 1

sity, through all the squalor and poverty, through all the mess this country is in, there is this incredible soul quality that expresses itself in the glow of the eyes, for instance.

What can Indian ideas, what Sri Aurobindo called the “seed time” in the Vedic Age, give to Auroville? From the idea of *dharma* flows the concept of *chaturvarna*, the four-fold division of society. Sri Aurobindo, surprisingly, speaks of it a lot, stressing that any society must have these four types, each living by its own *dharma* or you have a sick society.

For example, there is a type of person that automatically goes for production of wealth. It is the *dharma* of that type in the Indian tradition to support everybody else, the other three types of people. This classification now has the negative connotation of caste, but the truth behind it is something else. In the con-

text of Auroville, this could change everything because each type of person would be fulfilling his *dharma* in Auroville in the deeper sense of the word. It would be for his own progress as well as a way of doing something for the community, as a *dharma*, very consciously. That is something, I think, Auroville could borrow. Of course we can't go back to ancient India but we've got to find our own way, and it's worth looking at practically.



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Take the government of Auroville, even that could be guided by a sense of *dharma*. That would change the approach of the so-called politicians. Anybody who gets into the role of governing falls into the same trap in the syndrome we now have. You kick out people, but the new ones do the same thing. Now the question would be, if one is blazing with that idealism and one's natural tendency is to produce wealth, for whom is one producing wealth? If one has given one's life

can define. The goal and the objective is to manifest that city on a very practical level.

As a practical thing also, anything that narrows, reduces, makes a person turn in on himself and look at his navel — my livelihood, my family, my house, is a limiting attitude and has to be reversed, widened out. This holds the key to everything. And you see a lot of people who have such a tremendous capacity to give to something higher, but if you look at them today, they are reduced to something pathetic. This has to be removed from people's minds if at all possible — this “I have to get my scene together”, — it should be provided for. Then we hope for that city, for that fire to start blazing again. You could stoke the fire by removing this economic necessity. It's a millstone around people's neck — even those who don't feel it. One should be able to contribute every bit of one's energy to the building of the city.”

Rita is from Karnataka and has worked in afforestation and administration and is presently involved in education.



“My entry into Auroville was very different from that of most people. As an orphan, I didn't have a normal childhood or any family support and did not fit into any “respectable” category in Indian society. Because of my own efforts, when I was 25 I had a good job and money, but I knew this was not the answer.

Destiny brought me to Auroville through the pretext of work, when I had no idea at all about what Auroville really was. I took a job at Lotus (a commercial unit in Fraternity). Once here, I truly felt I had come home and Auroville was my place (1980). The Dream and the Charter were the most inspiring documents I had ever read. Some Aurovilians I met I judged for their failure to live the ideals. I was not accepted into the elitist Auroville social structure. To cut my hair and wear shorts was simple for me but



Mona is an architect from Ahmedabad.

“We were two students who came in 1987 for a six-month practical training in architecture with Poppo Pingel. Auroville was such a lot of fun for us and we did all kinds of things, even the excavation of the megalithic cairn circles which was an archaeological rescue operation. In 1988, I did an architectural study in Pondicherry that gave me a chance to visit Auroville again. Then I did my graduate thesis on “Form, Structure and Energy — a study of the Great Pyramid and Matrimandir”, (Ref. AV Today No. 25-Eds) for which I got a scholarship from Aster Patel through the Centre of Indian Culture. I completed my graduation in June 1990 and came straight away back to continue working with Poppo.

For me an important aspect of Auroville is the meeting of so many people from different cultures, because it is only when you are taken out of your own context that you generally realize your inherent value systems. Coming to Auroville made me aware of what it was to be an Indian. Living in the

Indian context I took everything about myself for granted and as all the people around me have the same behaviour patterns, everything was accepted and never questioned. It is a big break to come to Auroville, which has apparently a kind of Western set-up. It is not easy to do this and then on top of it, you are questioned by people like the Entry Group about your commitment to Auroville!! Of course, we are here for the ideals. I never really knew what it meant to be materialistic. Ideals always made perfect sense to me but now I see the illusions. My first impressions were so enthusiastic but things are tough and complex when you really come to stay. Yet I feel this is the right place for me. Different parts of the being are satisfied and the 24 hour questioning of yourself goes on to understand what your real priorities in life are. The differences between people culturally are subtle and so inherent, that it makes it hard to talk about them. With other Indians in Auroville I relate very well because I feel the connection spontaneously and strongly with them, even if we have our differences.

The work here is special because of the freedom and non-commercialization compared with outside. At the same time it has its problems — the super slow speed of the workers who have absolutely no technical background or pride in their work; the lack of availability of certain materials in Pondicherry, so that you have to run to Madras for fittings, etc. But for me it is an excellent opportunity to learn since I am part architect, contractor and supervisor — an experience I couldn't have had easily in Ahmedabad. I think building a house in Auroville is a “process” in itself, for the learning it provides.

When you go to a bonfire or an all-Auroville gathering and see everyone at the same time, it is then that you feel, even without speaking, the subtle connectedness of people of different cultures; a belonging together.”

Srimayee is a Bengali and lives in Udayan with her husband, Igor and daughter Aditi.

“I was a student in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram School from 1969 to 1978, so I know all about Auroville. My sister Joy left the Ashram with a whole group that came to Auroville and started the community of Djaima. When I finished my education at the Ashram, I decided to live and work on my own, mostly in Bombay and for a year in Calcutta. In 1985 I returned to Pondicherry to look for a job there. I went to work for Igor on his drip irrigation project. We got married, and I moved to Auroville in 1986. I felt at home in Auroville because my Ashram background had given me an understanding of Mother's vision for Auroville.

It is difficult for Indians to come to Auroville because of the problem of livelihood. I still have that problem and have opened a new shop in Pondicherry called “The Green Connection” where we sell products from our farm and handicrafts of Auroville.

My real interest is in dance and drama, but there is no time for that. The Auroville we see today is not what Mother had in mind, it's a “mess”.

We are all waiting for the real Auroville, the city of dawn, to happen. It might not even happen in my lifetime but it will come and in the meantime this is the best place for me to be, because here I feel close to Mother.”

to deal on the vital level, to compete and push my weight around, I couldn't do. I reacted very emotionally through revolts and suffering in difficult situations and avoided conflicts — ran from them. I had to study some psychology, read Sri Aurobindo and Mother every night to try and get my mind and emotions in order. I wanted to find my psychic being to lead me, but I ended up finding my vital being first, which now makes my life a lot easier. I can now stand up and assert and do not need to constantly run away.

I also had experience working in France where the surface being is refined but underneath there are problems; Westerners react with their minds and Indians with their emotions. Neither is superior. So I did tree planting for 3-4 years and that was really fulfilling. I discovered the vegetal kingdom. Then dogs came into my life, in order to

watch the place and I learned with pleasure the “dumb teaching of four footed things”

Then I shyly re-entered the human world again at school, still full of illusions and having to learn from seven-year-old children vitally stronger than I. Patience, endurance and love seemed not to work.

Auroville is the place for self-development and here I've lived so many lives.

At present I could only live in Auroville, as only here can I be creative and law-abiding at the same time. I don't really care if the city is developed as a square or a triangle, as Human Unity will be a consequence of our living in our souls.

The transfer of ourselves from our mental or emotional headquarters to our souls is our real work.

Life is a process of undoing and becoming what we really are.”

Anupama is from Bengal and is working as an architect and photo-journalist.

"In India, Auroville is not generally known. I happened to quickly visit in 1987, while touring the South with an architectural group and from then on Auroville kept coming indirectly into my life. At a conference on Earth Architecture in Trivandrum, I met Peter Anderschitz who made a statement I never forgot: 'What are you doing here, you should be in Auroville!'"

I received a scholarship for further studies in the USA, but I didn't feel convinced to accept it... almost like I would be wasting time with more academics. I refused it, and got a sudden urge to come to Auroville. Immediately, I phoned the editor of an architecture magazine about an article on Auroville. Then the rest came smooth and easy... I took the assignment, some advance money and the next train to Madras. In a month I was back in Bombay with the cover story, and in 20 days, after winding up all my activities there, I was again in Auroville.

There were no problems or objections from my family. My "freedom struggle" had begun already two years ago and such issues were already settled when I moved into a separate flat, during my last year in Bombay. Today, in fact, my family is quite happy I finally found the place where I fit.

For me, it was easy to fit into Auroville. The experience of differing cultures in India and the cosmopolitan life of Bombay is a good background. Also I was immediately working in Auroville — there is so much work that all went very smoothly.



I enjoy so much the physical beauty of Auroville and the creative freedom in the work. I feel totally at home here. So much so, that I find myself playing the role of "host" to other Aurovilians as if they were the "guests" of India. People used to ask me what was my status in Auroville and if I said "Newcomer", they said that's impossible because I've only been here two months so I could only be a "guest" I didn't know these were "official" terms and that there was an Entry Group to decide about your status. After a year in Auroville I still don't know my official status.



balance with the Western people and it doesn't matter to me if they come from North or South India, except I only know the people from the South, how they live.

If I had stayed in the village my mind would have stayed like the small place the village is. Auroville is like a huge place. Of course, I changed a lot on account of my visit to America. It would be really good if more people could do that. Also the Western people here have a lot to learn from our culture — at least they could try to learn Tamil because they are living here. I'm here, I don't have to learn English but I like it, and it makes it easy to talk to you or other people but still people should learn some Tamil.

Western people can be kind but it doesn't go as deep as with Indian people. For example, Indian people will always care for their parents but Western people are able to forget them. It would be better for Auroville if it goes the Indian way. Still I would say Auroville shouldn't be Indian style or Western style — it should be like a new world."



Amudha is from a village near Auroville and is a kindergarten teacher.

"At first I felt Auroville was a western dominated society but now I don't feel it so much. You know in this area, the local people were very conservative and twenty years ago most of the people did not even go to Pondicherry. When I was around twelve I used to go to Pondy because my grandparents lived there, and when I came back to the village, people would ask me what Pondy was like. Now that is all changed, partly due to Auroville because they saw how free the people were in Auroville especially the women and children. Now I know how to live in Auroville but new people coming from South India have problems with English and because they are shy, especially the women. They need more activities to bring them into the community. It would be better for Auroville to have more Indians for the

While I'm not "Aurovilian", I experience in Auroville a fear of new people... when I was here on my first visit and read, "... all men of goodwill are invited..." I thought at once, "that's me!" And I felt already welcome. In Mother's words there is the warm feeling of invitation, but some Aurovilians are worried you are taking advantage of Auroville, or that you are here just to escape ordinary social pressures... Everyone agrees that Auroville needs more people. Yet Aurovilians basically find them difficult to accept. I think we have to admit we need the help and support of these new individuals, and not just tolerate them.

Similarly, we need to acknowledge also that we are dependent on the local villages, Pondicherry and the outside sources of funding, that we tend to condemn them on one hand and on the other, we depend on them.

So, we definitely need more humility and to check this superiority complex that tends to come up.

Auroville needs to become economically self-sufficient, and with the wide range of life-styles and standards of living here, while we struggle to achieve this high ideal of no money-transactions, more flexibility and openness must come, so that neither the poor, nor the rich are made to feel guilty."



Poonam is an architect. She is from Roorkee and is working at CSR.

"I first visited Auroville for one day in 1987. Initially, I felt the hostility of the place, the unfriendliness, but came to realize it was the concentration with which people were involved in their work that gave this impression. By the end of the day I was convinced that I would come back here someday but totally forgot that thought for the next three years during which I completed my studies in architecture. I felt myself exploring the different possibilities but nothing appealed or fitted.

I came back to Auroville as if coming home. And I remembered my first visit. I've only been here a few months but the difference between the world I come from and Auroville is a qualitative one. Here it is easy to get up in the morning and get going with a sense of purpose. Of course, there are problems in Auroville but the life has a vibrational sense of freedom and creativity. I was a little shocked by the reaction of some of my friends who wrote me that now that I was in Auroville I would become a "loose" person. That thought had never occurred to me and is a reflection on where these people are blocked. Auroville opens a new horizon for people who want it. You can do anything in Auroville and it is for a certain type of person who is ready, and this does not depend on nationality or background; this is neither the point nor the problem."

Joy is a Bengali who is a teacher and dancer.

"Thinking with the heart has a special quality, it has the quality of strength and tenderness at the same time, of clarity of vision, and emotion. I think Bengalis all have it, and when they read Bengali literature, they absorb it even more. This is what I most miss in Auroville.

I grew up in the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, and, through growing up amongst other Indians, there was not much to stress one's awareness of one's nationality, so I was not really aware that I still had it in me. Mother always stressed that we were all equal human beings, even to the point that boys and girls shared all sporting activities, even martial arts, up to an age where it started to become difficult physically. Only, when I came to live in Auroville it came up again, probably



due to the scarcity of Indian people here. Your roots are felt more strongly.

It is of course true that, percentage wise, the Indian population is the highest in Auroville. But a large part of that comes from the surrounding villages, and whenever people talk about the low number of Indians in Auroville, they automatically mean North Indians. We do not have the same background. But I feel increasingly close to the Tamil people in my heart, almost as much as the Bengalis, I feel that they are my people. I feel close to them, completely at home, something that flows and makes me feel very comfortable. On the intellectual level, of course, there is not much communication, but that is not very important.

Auroville is still predominantly a westernized society, and I think it is normal — maybe even necessary for the moment. Materially speaking the Indians are very far behind and it is very clear to me that for Auroville to grow up we need the vitality and mental capacities and all these qualities of the western people which Indians are, for some reason or other, not yet able to manifest. Auroville is such a huge task, and there is such a long way to go, that if you do not have these capacities...it simply wouldn't work.

I try to go beyond it, beyond this awareness of nationality, for that is one of the reasons for the existence of Auroville. Auroville is a big potpourri, and something very beautiful."

Auroville Information Centre opened in New Delhi

New Delhi, Saturday June 15th.

About 50 people assembled at 15, Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, for the inauguration of the Auroville Information Centre. Dr. Karan Singh, Chairman of the Governing Board of the Auroville Foundation, who was instrumental in obtaining this location, gave the opening address.

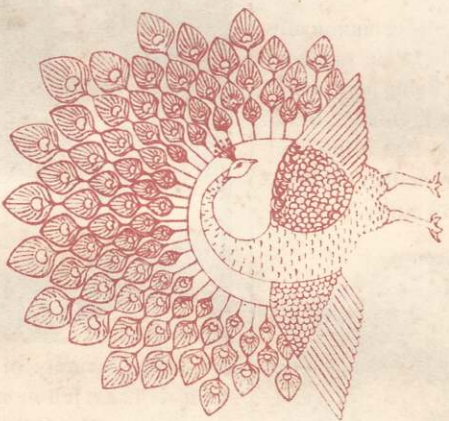
The opening of the centre marks a new phase in informing the people of India about the aims and ideals of Auroville.



Photo Sven

AUROVILLE TODAY

C.S.R. Office,
Auroville 605101,
Tamil Nadu - India



In this issue: India — Auroville; Shradhanjali

By Airmail
Bookpost

ANKE AND MICHAEL
GRADE
AUROVILLE

July 1991 - Number Thirty



Abha began one of the Auroville commercial units that has very successfully developed beautiful products.

"Early 1980: with great enthusiasm (and a little trepidation), Radhika and I give the name 'Shradhanjali' to the unit which we hope will materialize our ideas and dreams. 'Shradha' means faith and 'anjali', means offering in Sanskrit. We begin by learning the process of silk screen printing in a small corner of the Aurofuture building which has been cleared especially for us by our encouraging well-wishers.

In those early days, we would scout around for Aurovilians willing to spend an afternoon being "tambi" for us, that is taking the printed paper off the screen and transferring it to the adjacent rack while one of us did the actual printing (many good natured Aspirationites obligingly fell victim for several months!). Since Auroville Press had not yet started, we had to make numerous trips to Pondicherry and Madras to buy supplies. Trudging around with rucksacks full of printing ink and paper samples, waiting for the Pour Tous bullock cart to transport big parcels, was part of the routine.

Fortunately for Shradhanjali, the Auroville Today exhibition (not the famous newspaper of the same name) was just taking off on its tour of some major Indian cities. Among the handicrafts it carried were the first creations of Shradhanjali cards and stationery (which today embarrass me thoroughly by their amateur style) and thus the first business contacts were made (some of which have lasted all these years). I must mention that most people — clients, suppliers or friends, were veritable fountains of goodwill, encouragement and even at times, indulgence, and that helped us pass through initial doubts and disheartenings until the unit was on its feet and rolling!

By the end of the first year, we were able to employ one girl from a nearby village to help us. Gradually the number has grown and now there are 13 girls. The atmosphere in the

workshop (occupying three rooms in the Aurofuture building) is informal and relaxed rather than factory-like or production oriented. The girls employed are all young and unmarried (between 13 – 20 years of age). They are offered the opportunity to attend evening school after work (Tamil, health and hygiene are taught) though their parents do not always permit them to attend. Bank accounts are opened in each of their names where money is deposited on a monthly basis, so that when they leave the unit, or in a time of urgent need, they have a sum of money which is their own (in these village settings an important confidence booster for young women). In spite of often having very difficult family situations, it is marvellous how these girls always manage to smile and bear up under their problems.

Most of Shradhanjali's sales are within India. Until now we have been unable to supply very large quantities (due to lack of sufficient space, problems with supply of handmade paper, insufficient water to first grow flowers and then to keep scavenging goats off them!) and hence our export sales have been limited. However, this has been changing over the past year and we hope to continue to expand slowly while keeping the quality of the products high.

In terms of turnover, Shradhanjali is still a small unit. However, even in times of financial constraints we have always maintained our contribution to Auroville since this has been and still remains our primary goal. We are presently three Aurovilians working in Shradhanjali: Flore, François and myself and Krishna who writes Mother's significance on the back of each flower card. There are many aspects and dimensions of paper products which we would like to 'explore' and 'still develop. And so the work goes on with all attending problems and joys, and there is always more to learn, and further to go." □

♦ ♦ ♦ To Receive Auroville Today ♦ ♦ ♦

The contribution for the next 12 issues of Auroville Today is for India Rs. 100, for abroad Rs. 450, Can. \$ 27, French F. 145, DM 45, It. Lira 31,500, D.Gl. 50, US \$ 22.50, U.K. £ 13.50. This includes the postage by airmail. Please send your contribution (or your supporting contribution of double the amount) either to the Auroville International centre in your country (add 10%) or to Auroville Today, CSR Office, Auroville 605101. Cheques should be made payable to Auroville Fund, specifying: Contribution for Auroville Today. You will receive the issues directly from Auroville. Personal cheques are preferred to bank cheques. Please avoid postal orders.

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