

# Matrimandir

August 2016

Construction proceeds steadily beneath the Matrimandir Amphitheater to complete the Gardens Tools Center under its western side and the Performers' Dressing rooms below its eastern rim. These two projects are moving ahead very actively, as the 45 year old cavern-like underground spaces are transformed into two functional working rooms. Concretings of the wide floor of the Tools Centre are being made regularly twice a week, while the installation there of the hydraulic lift for garden equipment nears completion. On the eastern side, completion of the passageway from the underground room inwards towards the Urn within the Amphitheater is the immediate aim. The goal is to have both of these spaces completed and functioning by July 2017.



The passageway from the dressing rooms beneath the Amphitheater is being finalized, and gives this unique view of Auroville's inaugural Urn.

Beyond this activity beneath the Amphitheater, the site has a certain air of quietness these days.... It is a time of incubation for several major projects. Two of these projects are the building of the remaining nine gardens around Matrimandir and the construction of the 1.1 kilometer long cobblestone road which is to encircle these gardens. A third, looking farther ahead, is the construction of a new Service Facility beyond the future lake, or isolating zone which is to encircle Matrimandir. Once this Facility is built we will transfer to it the many activities currently housed in the scattered collection of workshops and office spaces which have been built up around the perimeter of the gardens oval over the last 45 years. Once emptied, these old structures will come down, leaving this 100 meter wide belt free to become the quiet isolating zone, - and eventually the lake - which the Mother had envisioned as surrounding the whole garden island of Matrimandir.

Of these larger projects, the work on completing the gardens has begun to take its first steps forward, yet all three are still involved in various stages of preparation and planning, as the necessary knowledge and resources are gathered to enable us to begin the full activity of construction.

Having this breathing space in the pace of activity on the site, it might be interesting to look back on how the site has appeared in the month of August in previous decades. Here, then, we give you some glimpses of the activity and atmosphere at Matrimandir in decades gone by:

### **Matrimandir in August 2006 ...**

Looking back ten years we find ourselves in 2006, just two years before the completion of all the major aspects of the Matrimandir building. The site is alive and bustling with the activity of 250 paid workers and about 40 Aurovilians all engaged in the complex process of finishing the Matrimandir. A variety of different tasks, all part of the "completion phase" are being undertaken simultaneously. The outer ferrocement panel surface of the building has just received its fresh coat of German waterproofing membrane, and the task of replacing the 1400 golden



Matrimandir in 2006, with the Golden discs being mounted on the building.

discs begins to move ahead steadily. On the roof of Matrimandir the new and improved version of the Heliostat is being installed, - the computer controlled mirror which will soon direct a single shaft of sunlight down into the Chamber to illuminate the crystal globe at its center. The interior of the building, - the 36 meter wide sphere that holds the Inner Chamber in its upper half, - is being radically transformed as the concrete beams of the space frame, having been in place already for some twenty years, are being given a coat of white paint in preparation for being covered by the translucent triangular panels of the "inner skin". After years of research and trials this final approach to creating the inner skin, - using a fabric of thin glass fiber stretched over aluminum triangular frames, seems to be a very fine and beautiful solution. It is a time of rapid transformation for the wide interior space of Matrimandir. Each day there is progress, each day one is amazed at the freshness and beauty of the interior that is being revealed. The twin spiral ramps leading up to the Chamber are also being prepared to receive their parapets of crystal clear glass. These transparent glass panels, to be curved for us in factories in nearby Chennai will soon trace their elegant spiraling lines from their starting points on the second level of the building up towards the doors of the Inner Room. Special sheets of honeycombed aluminum are being shipped over from America to be fashioned into light weight floor panels for the ramps. It is a very energetic time, with all of us looking forward to that momentous day when the building, so long under construction, will finally be complete.

**Matrimandir in August 1996...** Stepping back another decade in time, almost half way back now to the beginning of construction, we find ourselves near the beginning of a great phase of expansion in the works at Matrimandir. Just three years previously, the Inner Chamber had been completed, - a feat which was nothing short of a miracle. Imagine: to have created this exquisitely beautiful space, with its immaculate white marble walls, its piercing golden sunray striking upon a perfect transparent globe, and to have included in this space the twelve majestic nine meter tall columns, a vast white carpet covering the entire floor, and to have kept all of this space air-conditioned, and all this while the exterior of the building was still in a very rudimentary state, with no cladding at all on the external spherical space frame, and with its twin spiral ramps leading up to the chamber still fully exposed to the weather. Indeed, there is no other word to describe this accomplishment than "a miracle". And then, having given birth to the Inner Room, - to this amazing Child, with its sun-bright face and a heart bursting with love, the force of contrast with its rough outer surroundings could have led to nothing else than a wide movement to radiate its perfection outwards and begin a many-leveled radical transformation of the environment all around.

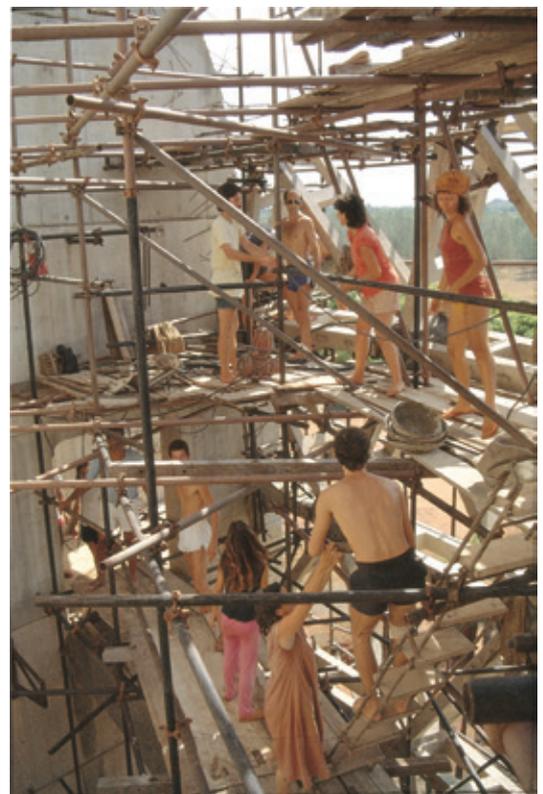
Thus, by 1996, the team working at Matrimandir had begun to expand dramatically from the small, concentrated crew who worked for years to achieve the Inner Chamber. We began to take up, in parallel, the projects of building the twelve petals around Matrimandir, the cladding of the open space frame of the structure with its hundreds of prefabricated ferrocement panels and the broad landscaping of the wave-shaped contouring of the twelve gardens which are to surround Matrimandir. The wide Amphitheater, holding Auroville's inaugural Urn at its focus, was being fully clad with slabs of red Agra sandstone. More



In 1996, the Petals were being constructed and the first golden discs were tried out on the structure.

and more people were needed on the site, as experiments were also begun on the techniques of gilding, with an eye on the future outer covering of the globe in golden discs. In contrast to the concentrated work of the previous few years, the mid '90s were a time of multifaceted expansion, - taking up the manifold works which, a decade later, would lead to the completion of Matrimandir.

**Matrimandir in August 1986...** If we get back in to our time machine and travel back yet another decade, we find ourselves in the middle of that long stretch of time when the spherical outer space-frame of the Matrimandir was being created. Precast concrete beams, shaped like H's were being cast regularly in sets of three down in the Matrimandir workshop. After being cured for a month in a pond built near the workshop, the beams were then winched out of the water by volunteers and kept ready for the team who would take them to the structure and hoist them up into position on the growing sphere of Matrimandir. The lifting of the beams was accomplished by using a large crane, designed just for this purpose and built here at the Matrimandir workshop! Once a horizontal row of beams had been clamped in place, a call would go out to the community and people, feet covered in red dust from all corners of Auroville, would arrive for the day to take their places in the long human chain, passing chetties of concrete up and up, from the mixing machine in the excavated crater below, to reach finally the row of new beams positioned in the air high above. The concrete would be poured there into the small shutterings enclosing the steel work joining the beams, until the work of the day was done. And the Matrimandir would have grown a little bit more. These were great days, - like all large concretings at Matrimandir have been, - times of Joy and Unity, with an air of unspoken kinship invisibly, yet very palpably, linking all those present.



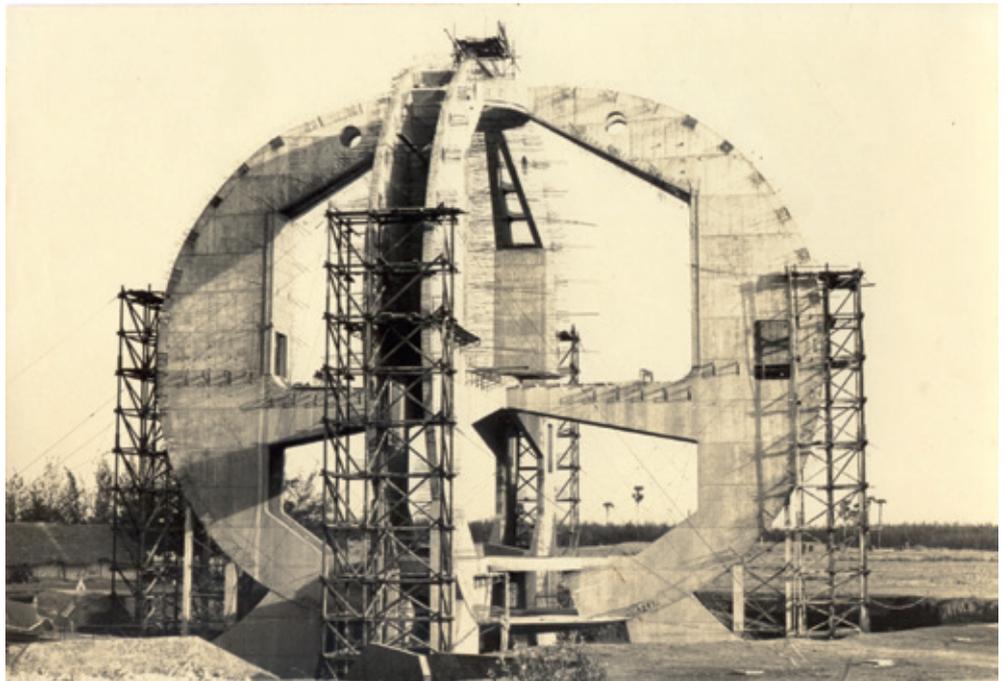
A human chain lifts chetties of concrete up to fix a new row of the space frame beams in place.

The preparation between these concretings was a work which occupied the rather small full time team on site for nine years, to be completed by the casting of the top cap on the propitious date of 8-8-'88. It was a closely knit working team, many of whom lived in the nearby "Matrimandir Workers Camp", - a rambling twenty-roomed keet roofed structure built just beyond the banyan tree. "Hot and dusty days under the blazing sun of Tamil Nadu"... this was the feeling of that time. The decade of the '80's will end as the work on the structure turns inwards, to

the grand task of the placing of the marvelous white marble slabs on the inner walls of the Chamber, and then to the accomplishment of all the other unique tasks needed to build that Inner Room.

**Matrimandir in August 1976...** We can make one final step ten years back in time, and arrive in August of 1976, just four years after the beginning of the construction of Matrimandir. We find ourselves in another very special time. Indeed, one becomes aware that all times at Matrimandir are special, -each moment in its own particular way, each with its particular stress of development, each related intimately to the growth of the fledgling Auroville around it. 1976 is a greatly significant year in the history of the construction of Matrimandir. It is now just three years after the physical passing of the Mother. Auroville is passing through turbulent times. On the 29th of May 1976 the four great concrete pillars of Matrimandir are joined at their tops through the concreting of the massive "ring of Unity". A statement is being made in matter : Auroville is strong, and the Matrimandir is being built and will move steadily towards completion.

In August of 1976 preparations are being made for a second greatly significant concreting, - that of the casting of the floor of the Inner Chamber itself. That concreting will take place in the coming November, and will mark the visible beginning of the construction of the Inner Chamber. In the following year the double walls of the twelve sided Chamber will be built, and by spring of 1978, the final concreting of the roof of the Chamber will have been made. The work of completing that Chamber would then wait for a decade, as the sections of the spiral ramps leading up to its doors are welded in place and as the spherical concrete space frame is built up layer by layer. During those long years, after '78, one could always take a break, go into the deep shade of that large empty concrete inner room, and dream of the future, - of a future when there would be a golden ray of sunlight touching upon a marvelous crystal globe at its center, with the softest white carpet to sit upon.



Matrimandir in the summer of 1976, before the Chamber floor had been cast.

But those dreams were of things then seemingly far in the future,- our joy was to do the work of each day, to live in each precious moment and to share the joy of simply building together towards a beautiful future, certain to be realized one day.

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*We would like to remind everyone that this Matrimandir Newsletter is available on line. We encourage you to receive it in that way so as to save paper in future! Please send us an e-mail to this effect and we will put you on our e-mailing list. Thank you!*

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