

Matrimandir

November 2013

Sitting at night under the mid October full moon and looking up at the illumined sphere of Matrimandir, one can look with imagination's eye and see the white Inner Chamber which sits cradled in the upper half of the building.

Twenty years have now passed since this Chamber has been completed and opened for use. In 1993, the outer shell of Matrimandir was still unclosed; - the spherical shape of the building was simply an open lattice work of H-shaped concrete beams which were solidly joined to form the space frame. The two ramps, leading up to the Chamber were open to the sky and the rains passed through the concrete lattice work during the monsoons and drenched the long spiraling ramps and anyone who might venture out in the weather! Only in the years that followed was the space frame covered with its layers of ferrocement cladding and the double layer of golden discs.

Why did the Chamber get finished before the outer protection was there? It is a fair question and perhaps any reasonable person might have said that the protective outer layers of the building should have been in place before finishing the inner Chamber with its cladding of white marble, its 12 high columns, its central globe and even with its white wool carpet.

There came a moment, probably in mid 1988, as the construction of the lattice of the space frame was nearing its completion (the final concreting of the cap took place on 8-8-88) when a decision had to be made. Those working on the structure at the time, under the guidance of Piero who had overseen the construction since its inception in 1972, gathered one day in the office of Matrimandir, (- a simple thatch roofed structure close to the growing building). Piero placed a question before us: Should we continue with the work on the outer shell once the space frame was complete, - to add a solid weather proof layer to the building? Or should we turn our attention now to the completion of the inner room itself?



Access to the Chamber while it was being finished, and for some years afterwards, was via the ramp which was open to the sun and the rains.

Those gathered in that small room were united in their response; - it was time to concentrate now on the heart of Matrimandir, and to materialize as soon as possible that room that the Mother had described 18 years earlier. It was clear that the work of finishing of the outer structure would be a job of several more years, and we all wanted so much to see the materialization of that marvelous white space that the Mother had described in 1970. It was important for everyone that the Chamber should be there as soon as it could be.

The Mother had described her vision of the Chamber in a series of conversations in January 1970.

It is interesting to look at each of these three separate descriptions of Her vision because they each show it from a slightly different angle and increase in precision as the days pass, until virtually every aspect of the twelve sided Chamber of silence had been made clear to those who were recording the descriptions.

The first description of the Chamber was noted by Roger Anger, architect of Matrimandir, after his conversation on 1st January with the Mother (source: facsimile at AV archives; Auroville in Mother's Words p 249)

"Mother told me this morning with precision:

Today itself I want to tell you something about Auroville.

Since some time I have clearly before my eyes the vision of the centre.

There is a large covered area with four columns, quite high, lit from above by openings through which the light enters corresponding to each hour of the day.

This vision keeps on coming since quite some time now, it is the thing to be carried out in the very first place;

It would be sufficient if we could just build the interior – the outside after. Inside there would be nothing except the rays of light converging onto something very simple – no furniture.

There would be no windows; the light coming from above through openings corresponding to each hour of the day. A large covered area would be sufficient, with nothing on the floor.

Voilà, will you think about it?"

Next, on 3rd January she recounted her vision to one disciple (source: Mother's Agenda 1970 pp 15-24; CWM XIII, p 286) :

"I clearly saw – very, very distinctly saw, which means it was like that and it still IS like that, it's there [*gesture showing an eternal plane*] – the interior of that place [*the Matrimandir*].....

It will be a tower with twelve facets – each facet representing one month of the year – and the top, the roof of the tower will be like this. [*Mother makes a gesture*]

Then, inside, there will be twelve columns – the walls and twelve columns – and right at the centre; on the floor; my symbol, with above it, four symbols of Sri Aurobindo joining in a square, and above... a globe. A globe possibly made of some transparent substance, with or without a light inside, but the sun will have to strike this globe; so, depending on the particular month or hour, it will be from here or there or there [*gesture showing the sun's course*]. Do you understand? There will always be an opening with a sunbeam. Not a diffused light, but always a beam that will have to come and strike the globe. That requires technical knowledge for its execution, and that's why I want to make a drawing with an engineer.

But inside, there will be neither windows nor lights, it will always be in a sort of clear half-light: night and day: during the day with sunlight, at night with artificial light. And on the ground, nothing, except for a floor like this one [*in Mother's room*], that is, first a wooden floor (wooden or something else), then a sort of thick rubber foam, very soft, and then a carpet. A carpet covering everything – except for the centre. And people will be able to sit anywhere. The twelve columns are for those who need a backrest!

But then, people will not come for a "regular meditations" or anything of the kind (the internal organization will be taken care of later): it will be a place for concentration. Not everyone will be allowed in; there will be a time of the week or the day (I don't know) when visitors will be allowed to come, but anyway without mixture. There will be a fixed hour or day to show the visitors, and the rest of the time only for those who are... serious – serious, sincere, who truly want to learn to concentrate.

So I think that is good.

It was there [*gesture of vision above*]; I still see it when I talk about it – I SEE. As I see it, it's very beautiful, really very beautiful... A sort of half-light: you can see, but it's VERY peaceful, and with very clear and strong beams of light (the projected artificial light will have to be slightly golden, it shouldn't be cold – it will depend on the spotlights). A globe that will be made of a plastic material or... I don't know.”

On 10th January, having now in hand drawings made by an ashram engineer following her description, Mother again described what she had seen, giving further precisions regarding the lighting and substance of the central globe and symbols in the room. (source: Mother's Agenda '70, pp 34-37; CWM, XIII p295)

“I told you that I saw the central building of Auroville... I have a plan. Would you be interested to see it?.. There are three scrolls there [*Mother unrolls Udar's plan while explaining*]:

There will be twelve facets. It's a circle. And, at the same distance from the centre, twelve columns. At the centre, on the floor, my symbol, and at the centre of my symbol, there are four symbols of Sri Aurobindo, upright, forming a square. And atop the square, a translucent globe (we don't yet know what substance it will be made of). Then, from the top of the roof, when the sun shines, a ray of sunlight will fall on the globe (only there, nowhere else); when there is no sunlight, electric spotlights will shine a beam (ONE beam again, not a diffuse light) just there on the globe.

Then, no doors, but... after going deep down one comes back up into the temple; one goes under the wall and comes back up again inside – it's again a symbol. Everything is symbolic.

And then, no furniture, but as with a wooden floor here, probably (like here), then over the wooden floor, a thick foam rubber, and over it, a carpet, like here. We have to choose the colour. The whole thing will be white. I am not sure if the Sri Aurobindo's symbols will be white... I don't think so. I didn't see them white; I saw them with an indefinable colour, between gold and orange. A colour of that sort. They will stand upright, carved in stone. And a globe not transparent but translucent. Then, at the bottom (of the globe), a light will be projected upward and will enter the globe diffusely. And from outside, rays of light will fall onto the centre. No other lights: no windows, an electric ventilation. And not furniture, nothing. A place... to try and find one's consciousness.”

These are the descriptions that we had all in mind in those days in 1988 when attention turned to the task of completing the Chamber. There were enormous jobs to be done,- not only to clad the walls of the room with the white Italian marble that had been carefully stored in the underground rooms under the edge of the Amphitheatre since 1978, but to build a device to catch the sun ray, to find the 70 cm globe that would be the centre point of the room, and then to fashion the stand for it out of four symbols of Sri Aurobindo...and more: to make or find those twelve huge columns that were to stand in the room, to find out who could make the enormous white wool carpet that would cover the floor, and then to air condition the whole place !!

The five years that followed were extraordinary times of concentrated work in a room growing ever more white and silent, and they were times too of great joy, as the Mother's vision of the Inner Chamber became a growing material reality.



The automatic sliding door at the Matrimandir entrance opens to welcome us as we go up to the Chamber

The winter monsoon is imminent as the winds freshen and shift from the southwesterly breezes of the lazy hot days of summer to the rain laden winds that come from the North West this season.

A marvelous billowing thunderhead drifts from the North through the afternoon sky rumbling as it goes. The sun plays hide and seek as it dips behind the silver lined top of the magnificent monsoon cloud. We wait for the rains, as they bring life to the whole region, - filling the village reservoirs and recharging the groundwater table that we all rely on for our water during the rest of the year.

On the Matrimandir site, work moves apace to complete the underground control room in the garden of Consciousness before the onset of the rains. Today, its aluminum sliding door is installed, making sure that the work space below will be dry during the coming few months while the pumps and electric controls for the first three of the twelve Matrimandir gardens are installed here.



Electric cables powering pumps and lights in the first three gardens are rerouted under the pathways to go to the new underground control room in the Garden of Consciousness.

In the garden of Bliss, work has been completed now on the pathways surrounding the central area which is to hold the seven quiet bowl-shaped fountains of the garden. The level terraces surrounding this central area have been largely filled with a well composted soil mix, prepared here on site, so that planting of many of the shrubs, flowers and grass lawns of this garden can begin before the expected heavy rains of November.

And, over in the garden of Unity, just beyond the banyan tree, the work of cladding the 12 meter wide pond there with white granite has been brought to a close giving a magnificent appearance to this pond. Pumps for the many-jetted fountain which is now to be installed in the pool have been purchased and the stainless steel framework for the fountain, long under construction in our metal workshop, will soon be carried over the gardens and placed there in the pool. Next will come the job of hooking up the plumbing, filtration and water purification systems associated with this fountain before the system is ready. When complete, there will be many low water jets, and a series of higher and higher jets, rising to a height of 3.5 meters in the center. This fountain was designed by Roger Anger, architect of Matrimandir, as the focal point of the garden of Unity. We hope to have it ready and running by the year's end.

On the roof of Matrimandir, work has been underway to replace the 32 oil seals of the hydraulic system of our large rooftop crane. Seldom seen by the visiting public, this crane, built in Germany and shipped here especially for Matrimandir, can lift up to 500 kilos from the ground to the top of the building if required. Trials are being carried out on how to best use the crane for the ongoing job of cleaning the outer surface of the 1400 golden discs of the decorative cladding of Matrimandir. For the last few years this work has been done, and is still being done, by teams of agile men and women who rappel down the outer surface of the building polishing the discs as they go. It is a demanding job, which could be made somewhat easier if the gondola of the crane could be brought into service for a part, at least, of the structure.

Address for donations and correspondence:

(Please make your cheque, money order or DD payable to '**Matrimandir**')
MATRIMANDIR – AUROVILLE 605101 – TAMIL NADU – INDIA

Bookings : (0413)262-2204 between 10 to 11:30 am daily ; accounts 262-2228

Email : matrimandir@auroville.org.in