

Matrimandir

February 2012

The main news from Matrimandir this month is about the aftermath of the cyclone Thane that crossed Auroville on the night of 29th December. This has affected the work in several ways. The Matrimandir structure itself suffered almost no damage: the 1400 golden discs seem not have moved at all. Indeed, early on the morning of the of Dec. 30th , when the winds were still howling across the site, some of us came to see if any of the discs too had blown away, or, more likely, been pushed out of position by the strong winds. But no....everything seemed to be perfectly in place. It was a relief! The only damage was right on top of the structure, where the polyester cap of one of the two stationary mirrors system that catches the of the sun-ray had been blown open and torn. The exposed mirror had moved slightly under the force of the wind, causing the sun ray in the chamber to move off center. It was corrected two days later, after the rains had stopped and the position of the sun-ray became visible again.

Getting to the Matrimandir that morning was not so simple however. All of the roads and cycle paths in Auroville were blocked by fallen trees and downed electric lines. One could literally not move more than a few meters by any vehicle on that first morning: all movement was by foot, under the swirling rain. In fact, even finding the road was a challenge in places...all the familiarity of the avenue through the trees was lost. On one 500-meter stretch on the north east of Matrimandir , a trip that took normally just a few minutes by cycle or motorbike took literally an hour to navigate on foot, crossing- if one had the stamina- a veritable jungle of fallen trees. The only indications of the



The Auroville Tree Care team removing the broken branch of the Banyan tree

actual location of the road were the two or three solar streetlights that had been put up along the way. It was a sad and amazing experience to see Auroville's beautiful forests torn and reduced to such a state!

The Banyan tree, just next to Matrimandir, did not escape as easily as the main building from the cyclone. A large top branch on the eastern side caught the full force of the wind and was twisted off, but remained lodged high up in the tree's wide branches. A week after the storm, Auroville's most experienced tree care team set to work on the tangle of branches and within two days had managed to clear the debris from the upper part of the Banyan. They then cut the support of the lodged piece – a two ton branch the thickness of a tree in its own right – which then plunged down to earth with a massive impact in the grass and pile of pruned branches which had accumulated under the tree. Another day of pruning and fine cutting by the tree care team has left the tree now with most of the smaller torn branches removed and with a large pile of debris lying in the gardens, waiting to be removed. Leaves will go to the compost section, twigs and small branches will be put in a chipper or shredder machine to make them useable for composting, and the larger branches will join the growing mountain of fire wood and timber being collected on site.

Within the rest of the gardens oval, damage has been moderate: six of the service trees planted around the Amphitheater in 1981 succumbed to the high winds, as well as several neem trees scattered around the gardens. Within the garden of Consciousness, we lost one of the three newly planted trees, a Barringtonia (Supramental Action), and beyond the mini-amphitheater, along with several native trees, we lost a young Supramental Sun sapling. For the rest, the wide grassy gardens area looks calm and neat when compared to the jumbled chaos of fallen trees out in the park area and around the rest of Auroville.



Clearing fallen trees from around the Matrimandir office

The Nursery of Matrimandir, established from 1971 under a grove of mango trees about 400 meters from Matrimandir was badly damaged by Thane. One of the giant old mango trees was toppled by the high winds. Many other large old trees, planted years ago, either succumbed fully or lost large branches during the storm. Several of our large collection of Plumeria trees were knocked down too by the winds. Each of these valuable trees is a mother tree, having a particular color and form of flower unique among the 225 varieties we have in the Nursery. A few of these fallen Plumeria trees still have some unbroken roots, so we will try to pull them upright again using a tractor. It has been a delicate job – still not over – to rescue the smaller plants trapped under the branches of these trees. Cyclone Thane has left its mark on Matrimandir's gardens and has ravaged the forests of Auroville. The damage will take years to heal. Yet nature has been quick to react: by the time Pongal came fresh new green leaves had appeared on the branches of the Banyan tree and on many of the other trees that had lost their leaves to the winds of the cyclone. It was amazing and reassuring to see this demonstration of the resilience of Nature.

For the first two weeks after the cyclone our entire heavy labour garden force was sent out to help with emergency operations in the community, first to open the roads, and then, in the days following, to help out with the enormous job of clearing trees on fallen electric lines, both incoming high tension lines that feed several transformers in Auroville, and then the low tension lines that supply various communities including the Matrimandir compound.

Matrimandir itself, being near to an incoming source of electricity was fortunate to receive electrical supply again on Monday, January 9th. For the intervening 13 days we depended entirely on our diesel generator supplemented by the output of our 36 kw solar plant, which provided the lighting needs on the site at nights. Supply was slowly returned to the communities in the city center and on the first day of Pongal in mid-January power was restored to much of the residential zone.



Clearing a giant tree from the Matrimandir parking one month after the cyclone

What has been wonderful, in the midst of this chaos of broken trees and interrupted water and electric supply, has been the spontaneous coming forward to help of so many people, to clean up and get things functioning again as rapidly as possible.

After the cyclone, our reception area at the office was strewn with fallen trees and piles of debris, but we did not have the time to clear it up until later. Volunteers and guests working normally in the gardens here made a good start clearing of this area, but still the trees were full of overhanging broken branches and the circulation was blocked by piles of debris. Thus Matrimandir was closed to general public for almost three weeks until the area could be fully cleared after the Pongal break.

Around the site, there are still weeks of clean up to be done, and months more of pruning and tree care work will be needed; everywhere in Auroville we are face to face once again with the fundamental forces of Nature that sweep over this once barren land that we inhabit, that give it life, and occasionally bring great destruction.

In addition to the high winds of cyclone Thane, about 30 centimeters of rain fell, and this contributed in an unexpected way to the work in the garden of Consciousness. For it was high on our agenda to fill the fully-clad teardrop shaped pond in the garden to check the level of the rim before fitting it with pieces of green Cuddapah stone. When we looked on that morning of January 30th, we found the pond almost half full with rain from the storm! Within a day or two we had pumped in the balance required to fill the pond and then could verify that the rim level of the entire 120 sq. mt. pond was quite accurate indeed.



The Pond in the Garden of Consciousness filled for the first time

FORTY years from the beginning of the concreting of the pillars of Matrimandir

In our newsletter February 2011 newsletter, we reviewed the forty years of the construction of Matrimandir, starting with the beginning of the excavation in 1971. This year 2012, marks the fortieth anniversary of the beginning of the concreting of the structure of Matrimandir. The ceremony on

Mother's birthday -Feb 21st 1972 - marking this event was recorded in the diary of Ruud Lohman, one of the pioneer builders of Matrimandir:

"Today a year ago there was a grand solemnity in the heart of Auroville where nothing was to be seen except the Banyan tree and some palmyras. Hundreds of people had gathered before sunrise to attend the laying of the first stone of the 'Soul of Auroville' the Matrimandir, the Temple of Truth. It was a tremendous event, it is told, which reminded many of Vedic times, the ancient history of India.

This morning we had another grand solemnity, at sunrise. Again hundreds of people had gathered in the splendid light of the rising sun. On the hill formed by the excavated earth, twelve fires had been lit and later another great fire was lit in the center of the crater. This time we had gathered to officially commence the next phase of the work: casting the four huge pillars which emerge from the depths up to zero level to carry the large sphere. There were twelve people, all in some way close to Mother. The group descended towards the first level at three meters depth, where they all received a stone. They walked in procession all around the excavation and then put their stone in the cement mixer.

Behind them then followed the hundreds, even thousands, each contributing a pebble.

The remarkable intensity in and around the crater was this morning more perceptible than ever. At Matrimandir you are one with a tremendous stream flowing through the centuries and driving you on toward higher realizations. You are one with all great events and all great people of history and of this moment, you're one with the greatest consciousness and the consciousness.

A Divine Presence manifesting in the world in an ever increasing intensity and clarity."

Nolini-da, elder disciple from the Ashram, read out the following message from the Mother, which she had given for this occasion:

"Let Auroville be the symbol of a progressive Unity.

And the best way to realize this is a unity of aspiration towards the Divine Perfection in work and in feeling, in a consecration of the entire life."



A stone bearing the writing (Om) and Mother's signature was put in the base of the East pillar on that day by two Auroville children (Marta and Ramalingam)

Address for donations and correspondence:
(Please make your cheque, money order or DD payable to 'Matrimandir')
MATRIMANDIR – AUROVILLE 605101 – TAMIL NADU – INDIA
Bookings: Tel (+91) (0413) 262-2268; accounts: 262-2228
Email: matrimandir@auroville.org.in