

Matrimandir

August 2020

July 5th 2020 is a Sunday and, as has been declared for all of Tamil Nadu, all Sundays in July will be days of total lockdown as the effort to contain the Covid - 19 virus continues.

The Matrimandir site is very quiet today; the only sounds to be heard are the calling of many birds, and the gurgling of the fountains in the gardens.

After the weeks of full shut down, Matrimandir came back to life on May 7th, with 50 % of the work force again active on site. The previously normal flow of visitors to the Chamber and the steady stream of tourists walking to the public view point just outside the gardens had, of course, come abruptly to a halt on March 25th, as lock down came into force all over the country... and eventually all over the world.

Clean up

During May and June we have been concentrating very much on cleaning up... attending to jobs, big and small, which we had not found time to attend to in the previous busy months. It is always wonderful when this clean up atmosphere sweeps like a white wave over the site.

Even with the best of intentions, there are always those storerooms and remote corners that tend to accumulate old unused things, not to mention plain dust and dirt. So the cleanup campaign, which still continues, has swept clean rooms and corners which had waited literally years for this kind of deeper cleaning attention. Freshness has come into corners which were often almost invisible.



One aspect of the clean up on site involved a cooling dip in the lotus pool in the garden of Consciousness to remove old dead growth.

All over the world cupboards are being cleaned as people, home bound, awake to this need for a deeper cleaning, involving not only a physical cleaning of neglected rooms but a psychological cleaning. There is a re-ordering of ourselves, an opening of new windows, individual or collective, to let in new fresh breezes and rays of sunshine into our being. It is as if a stronger, more organized base is being prepared upon which to move forwards when the Covid clouds begin to clear...

There is also forward movement and development underway on the site, though at a slowed pace. Resources, frankly, are thin at the moment, with postal services having been disrupted for months, visitors absent, and everyone struggling with the hard realities of the day. We proceed with the work, but have reduced the purchase of new materials and are employing only half of the normal labor force.

The Garden of the Unexpected

One project that continues to develop nicely is the Garden of the Unexpected on the western side of the gardens oval. Inaugurated on February 21st 2019,



A colorful corner in the “Rock Garden”, featuring purple blooms of the flower which Mother named Sri Aurobindo’s Compassion.

this garden with four major sub sections is now half completed. The major features ready are the rock garden in the sub section called the “Garden of Adolescence” and the pool and garden area in the sub section called: the “Garden of Birth “.

The third section, named the “Garden of Youthfulness“, is presently in its detailed design phase, and will feature two ponds linked by a small stream flowing for forty meters over the joined surfaces of large limestone boulders.

At the upper end of the stream there will be a monsoon pavilion so that one may sit quietly and watch the flowing stream, with a view of the Banyan Tree and Matrimandir in the distance. A new nine-toned wind chime has been recently hung high up in a large old Neem tree so that in the evening one can begin to feel the atmosphere of the garden to come.



July 6th Just before filling the pond in the Garden of Birth, the team planted it with a variety of water plants .

The Large Test Pond

The other development project underway on site is that of the large test pond just beyond the south eastern edge of the gardens. This test pond is the first section of the future lake which the Mother envisaged as encircling the entire gardens oval of Matrimandir.

This pond will be fed by harvested rainwater flowing from a channel to be built all around the outer perimeter of the gardens. This seven meter wide channel will collect all the runoff rain water from the gardens and feed it to the test pond. If there are normal monsoon rains it is estimated that the test pond will be filled to overflowing in three years. Ground water from bore wells is too scarce and precious to be used to fill the test pond!

This is an experiment, – not only in the building technology for the pond, but in a major way with regard to the principal of using harvested rainwater for its supply. As ground water tables continue to drop in Auroville and all over India, it is of paramount importance that the harvesting of rainwater is brought into the forefront as a source for community water supply. This project aims to be a living example of this principle in action.

A large excavator is permanently on site to dig this test pond, filling lorries throughout the day with the rich red earth of Auroville. (Below the red soil layers we know there are layers of yellowish gravelly clay, but we have not yet dug down that far). The excavated earth is being piled up in large heaps in the Matrimandir outer gardens area.

This work of digging the pond will take perhaps eight more months, and will be interrupted by the winter monsoon from mid October to December. Even the lighter summer monsoon rains we are experiencing this month stop the work for a day or two each time it rains because the loaded lorries slip and slither in the red mud and are not able to haul their loads up out of the deepening crater of the pond.



A bird's eye view of the completed "Rock Garden" in the Garden of the Unexpected

When complete, this test pond will be about 100 meters wide, 100 meters long and have sides sloping gently to a depth of 10 meters at the center of the pond. On a busy day one gets a real sense of development with several machines working in concert to excavate, remove, level and compact the freshly moved earth.

The open call for designs for the gardens of Light, Life, Power and Wealth

A third activity is the ongoing work to select designs for the next four of the remaining eight of the main gardens of Matrimandir.

During the last year a call had gone out to designers in India and in countries abroad, asking those interested to sign up for the exercise of creating designs for the Matrimandir gardens of Light, Life, Power and Wealth. Seventy eight designers had signed up, and by the submission deadline of December 12th 2019, some thirty four design concepts had been received.

An international expert panel and an onsite technical team had then reviewed these designs, filtered them down to seventeen and, by 28th March this year, had selected the top three designs. The final phase of review and selection is to be made in coordination with an Auroville public panel. Elements of these three designs may also be merged together by the designers in this final phase. The lock down has delayed the process at this last stage, and we are now exploring how to proceed with the final selection

using online viewing and perhaps an outdoor display of the top designs. Hopefully, well before the end of the year we will have the chosen designs in hand.

Thus the days move forward one by one at Matrimandir.

The time when visitors will be allowed to come to the Matrimandir Inner Chamber is difficult to predict. Work continues, the wonderful site cleanup continues, and

the birds enjoy themselves in the quieter garden areas. The public view point, now entirely devoid of the usual thousands of daily visitors, is a special haven for the birds – they perch on the flowering tree branches there and watch the fresh gardens of Matrimandir under the gentler skies of the summer monsoon days.



Excavation of the large test pond, a first portion of the future Matrimandir Lake, is underway bordering the south eastern edge of the gardens oval. The deep red color of the earth is how the land of Auroville appeared in its early years.

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Important information on sending your offerings.

Contributions to Matrimandir are exempt under section 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act. You can send us your offering by post with a DD/Cheque payable to “**Matrimandir**”.

Postal address: MATRIMANDIR – AUROVILLE 605101 – TAMIL NADU – INDIA

You may also send your offerings for Matrimandir by bank transfer to **Auroville Unity Fund**. To do so please follow the procedure as mentioned below:

- 1) Write to matrimandir.donations@auroville.org.in requesting bank transfer details. We will send you the appropriate account number. (Account numbers are different for offerings coming from outside of India or from within India.)
- 2) During the transaction, please specify that it is for Matrimandir.
- 3) After the transaction, please send another email to matrimandir.donations@auroville.org.in with transaction details. If you need a tax exemption receipt, please send PAN DETAILS in this email.

Phone number for accounts : 0413- 262-2228, **Email:** matrimandir@auroville.org.in