

# Matrimandir

February 2015



Two members of the garden design team work on the large gardens model

The energy in the Matrimandir garden design office is concentrated and intense these days, as a team of four work towards a community presentation of the design for the remaining nine garden segments at Matrimandir. Two members of the team sit quietly today, constructing highly realistic models of trees, bushes and people which will be used in the large gardens model that is being built; - the model will show all the 12 sections of the garden at Matrimandir. The model trees being fashioned are of many species and are remarkably true to life in appearance, - the tiny people are so well crafted that clothes, face and hair style can all be shown!

Two years of preparation have culminated in this final phase of the design work. There has been a long series of interviews with Aurovilians, and others, to look deeply into the spirit and direction which they envisage for the Matrimandir gardens. Each has his or her understanding of these gardens, they have their personal experience of gardens around the world, and each has their feeling about how we have done until now and how the manner of manifesting the gardens in matter might be changed and improved. The design team, during these two last years, has delved deeply into the meaning of the gardens to come: Light, Life, Power, Wealth, Utility, Progress, Youth, Harmony and Perfection. Studying these powers and immersing themselves too in the important significances that the Mother has given to the key flowers that she has

chosen for these gardens, the team has slowly distilled key design elements which, in their view, will best help in supporting the essential experiential significance that the Mother has given to each of these garden areas.

The large model of the gardens, measuring 2.4 by 1.8 meters, is being prepared as a chief visual aid to the presentation to come. Accompanying this, both in model form and in the design team's computer, will be more detailed, zoomed in views into some of the garden areas. Explanatory background notes are also being prepared to highlight areas of information such as the various plants that will be used in each garden area and the various ways that water will be used within the gardens; - water bodies and flowing water will be strong linking elements in the overall project.

Our goal is that in the month of February this material will be put on display for the Auroville community so that they can also begin to immerse themselves in the many layers of meaning and expression that the proposed garden designs hold. There will be a process of community discussion, of evaluation and feedback and finally a moment when we decide, as a community, to move ahead concretely with the realization of the full set of the remaining garden segments of Matrimandir.

To realize these gardens, to materialize them on the ground, will be a huge job, requiring input and participation from a larger team than we have presently on the site. It will be a grand opportunity to work on a large scale together, with the goal of achieving these gardens, at least in their preliminary phase of manifestation, by Auroville's 50th anniversary in 2018, just three years away.

The building of gardens is never over in a short time, as we have learned. The living garden is always in a process of change, - as plants grow and blend more and more together, as water etches the stones and basins that hold it, and, most importantly for us, - as our understanding deepens and we see things in the garden that we had not seen before, or had not understood deeply enough in the first phase of building. The garden grows, and becomes richer, more subtle in its expression and we, all children of the earth, try to follow....

Even as these planning preparations go on in the design office, work proceeds in the gardens on the finalization of the garden of Bliss. Attention here is focused on the central circular area that will hold seven small fountains arranged in the pattern of the seven stars of the constellation called the "Seven Rishis", or the "Great Bear". These stars, in the Indian tradition, are related to the concept of Ananda, or Bliss, and thus play a key symbolic role in the garden. On Jan 20th and 21st the base of this 18 meter wide circle was cast with a mix of tiny pebbles, lime and white cement. A final top layer of small white pebbles will be loosely laid down over this base once the seven bowl-shaped fountains have been installed.



A wide level base of lime and pebbles is laid down in the center of the garden of Bliss in mid January. Once the seven bowl-shaped fountains are in place, this circular area will be finished with a layer of loose, white quartz pebbles.

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Just outside the gardens oval of Matrimandir, five out of six mini test ponds have been completed and filled with water. In our last Newsletter we described to you the process of the building of the first of these ponds. Its waterproof base had been formed by a thick layer of compacted German clay and then this mini test pond had been filled by the first sudden downpour of the monsoon rains.

That pond is still doing well. In fact, it was so inviting that it became home, within just a few days, to a large turtle. (some thirty centimeters wide!) The turtle just ambled out of its concealed burrow in the surrounding forest to take up residence in this wonderful pond which, for it, must have appeared as if by magic in a single night!

One of the test ponds, sealed with an imported product called “Bentonite matt’ ( polyester mats filled with clay powder), seems not to be doing too well, as it is losing water at a rate too fast to be explained by simple daily evaporation from its surface. Another type of sealant, made of a Plastic foil, (HDPE) two millimeters thick, is doing much better, and may be finally the best of all the options for sealing a future lake.



One of the two mini test ponds which are sealed with HDPE foil is shown here under construction. The joints of the HDPE were welded together by a marvelous self propelled robot welder which formed a perfect double seam. The seams were then subjected to strict mechanical tests to ensure that there were no leaks in the sealant layer.

Still to be built is the last pond, which is to be sealed with a layer of local clay. But, to get permission from the State authorities to dig and transport this clay from the local village tanks is an uphill task, so the realization of this last pond can happen only after a few more months. Later in spring, these mini test ponds will be evaluated by various advisors who have been involved in their design. Only then will we know the direction that can be proposed for any next trial in the long process of seeing how to build, seal, and fill the future lake which will one day surround the Matrimandir gardens.



There is another field of activity moving ahead at Matrimandir these days, which is not too visible, but which is preparing the way for developments in a large scale over the next three years. We introduced this topic in our newsletter of May last year, and it includes works which are to get underway even as the final nine gardens areas of Matrimandir are being built. This field concerns the full completion of the other project areas on the Matrimandir Gardens oval as well as the relocation of all the support facilities which presently surround it to other final locations within the city.

We list here the six major work areas which are presently under design consideration;

**1) Building of the one kilometer long Oval Road which encircles the gardens.**

Trial samples of different paving patterns for this road using pink and grey granite cobble stones are nearing their end. Soon we will be in a position to begin purchasing the required materials so we can start the construction of this road.

**2) Construction of Green Room under the Eastern edge of the Amphitheater.**

The green room is the concealed space where singers, dancers and theatrical performers will put on their costumes in preparation for programs to be presented on the stage in the center of the amphitheater. This stage has always been present in the center of the amphitheater, and many cultural programs have been held there over the years, but a proper green room has been missing until now.

**3) Completion of the final underground space which exists on the Western edge of the Amphitheater.**

Both of these underground spaces, east and west, were constructed at the time of the building of the amphitheater in 1971, but only the space on the east has been developed to some extent, to house our main

electrical distribution boards. During the 1990's it also held the AC plant that served the Inner Chamber, though this latter facility has now been moved up into the Matrimandir structure itself. On the west, we envisage the building of a service space which will house all the lighter garden tools that will be used by the teams which will maintain the Matrimandir gardens in future. The design aim in this project is to find suitable ways to allow wheel barrows, sprayer machines as well as rakes, pruners and all the rest, to be easily stored and accessed in this large underground space.

#### **4) Construction of the new Reception Pavilion outside the Western axis of the gardens.**

Roger Anger, architect of Matrimandir, has left a few sketches of his concept of this pavilion which would receive all those coming for concentration in Matrimandir. The task ahead is to take Roger's lead and to design a suitable building which can provide all the facilities needed for this task in a simple and beautiful structure. Once the "brief" has been formulated detailing the facilities to be included in this building such as reception spaces, toilets, lockers etc., an architect will take up the design of the Pavilion itself.

#### **5) Construction of the future support and service facility for Matrimandir.**

All our offices, workshops, Chamber laundry, workers' eating area, parking and changing rooms are now also located in the belt just outside the gardens of Matrimandir, and as such they too must be moved to a final location close to, but not within, the isolating zone, or lake, which is meant to surround Matrimandir in the future. Studies are well advanced as to the spaces required and their interlinking relationships. This service facility can be built over the next few years as the gardens themselves are being brought to completion.

#### **6) Relocation of the compost production facility.**

Like all the existing office and workshop areas described above, our two acre compost production area lies right within the future lake, or isolating zone which will surround the Matrimandir gardens, and as such, it must to be relocated in the near future. High quality compost and vermi compost will always be the driving engine of the growth of the gardens. Plans are well advanced to relocate this essential Matrimandir support area to a site within Auroville's greenbelt. From there it will serve in future, not only the garden of Matrimandir, but will take in green waste and food waste from around Auroville and produce from them valuable compost to be used also in Auroville's many farms.

There will come a moment, perhaps not too far way, when it will be time to move,- for our old, roughly built offices and workshops to say goodbye to their close proximity to the gardens oval. Other structures have gone before them, like the old "Matrimandir Workers Camp" that housed, in 20 simple rooms, a rotating population of volunteers dedicated to the process of constructing Matrimandir. That rambling keet-roofed structure stayed for some 25 years right inside the gardens oval of Matrimandir until it was finally taken down in 1996 to make way for the completion of the oval on its western side. In a similar manner, all the existing buildings will be taken down in the next few years and their functions, where needed, will be given a fresh new breath of life in these structures yet to come. It will be a time of great nostalgia, for these present buildings hold a world of memories: their walls and tables can tell endless tales of the joys and the difficulties of the building of Matrimandir over the last 44 years.... As for all things, their time will pass, and their life force will be transformed and passed on to the new forms which are waiting to manifest here at the center of Auroville.



*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!*

**Important information on sending your offerings:** We would like to encourage you to send your offerings by cheque or DD payable to Matrimandir, and avoid, if possible, sending money orders. You may also give your offering in cash/cheque/DD at the Matrimandir Office during your visit for meditation. Contributions to Matrimandir are exempt under sec. 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act.