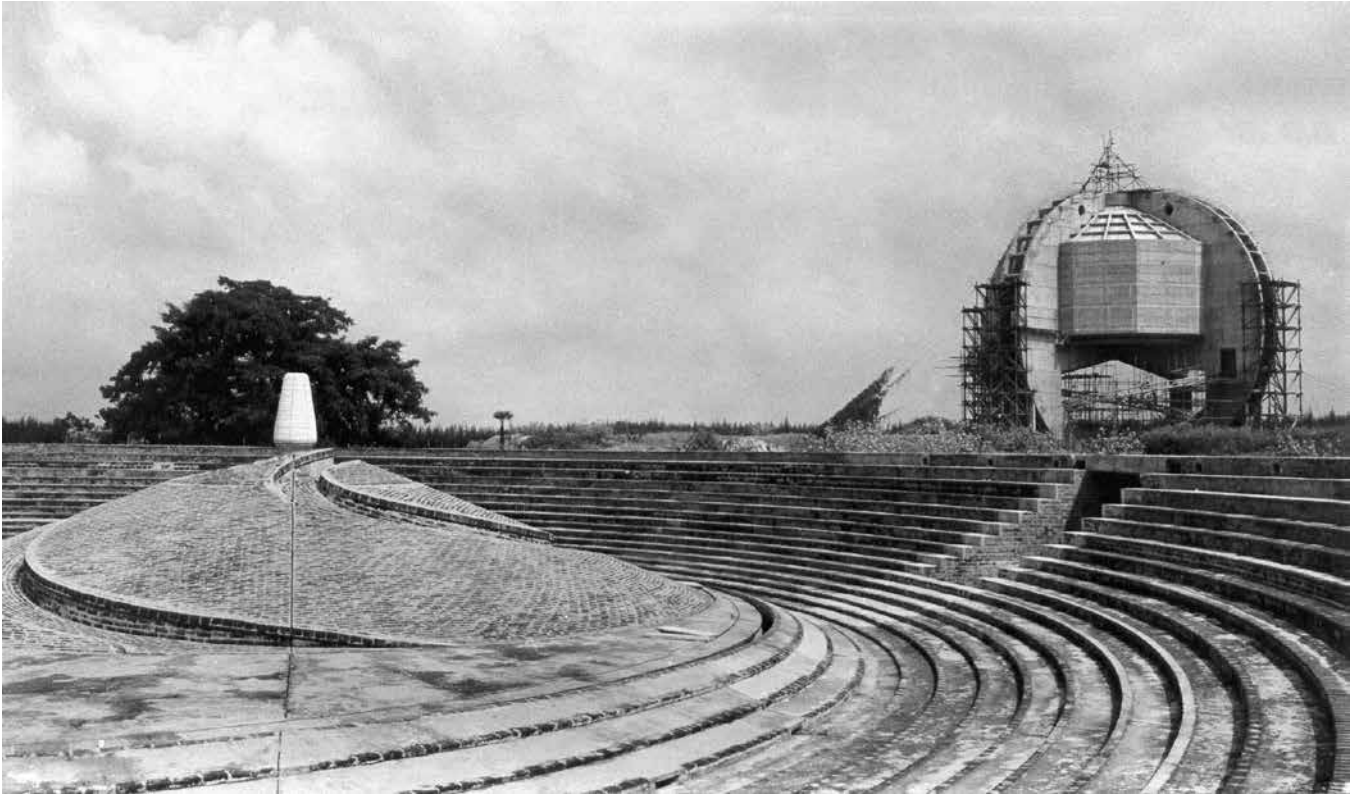


Matrimandir

May 2015



Matrimandir and the Amphitheater as they looked in 1979-80.
(Notice here the large opening cut through the steps of the Amphitheater to the right of the Urn)

Working in the Underground rooms at the edge of the Amphitheater.

The photo shown above was taken in 1979-80. The landscape and Matrimandir of course looked very different then. We were just at the stage of starting to create the spherical outer skin of Matrimandir. The production of the precast concrete beams needed to create that sphere would take nine years....

You can see in this photo that the tubular steel pipe structures of the ramps which spiral up to the Chamber have been put in place. Nothing more would happen on those ramps or in the Inner Chamber itself, for the next nine years until the construction of the outer spherical space frame of Matrimandir was complete. The Chamber was, at that time, an empty concrete shell waiting for the day when it would see marble on its walls, a white carpet on its concrete floor and finally house that amazing crystal globe at its center. There was no sunbeam in the room then. Sunlight filtered into this space through the open ring on the top of the room, lighting the bare room with a gentle half light. There, one could go to relax, spend a few moments out of the heat and dust of the construction site, and dream, perhaps, of the day when this room would be filled with marble, and a beam of golden sunlight piercing its center.....

If you look at the foreground in this photo, you see the amphitheater, cast in rough lime concrete, with the marble inaugural Urn at its focus. Still to come, over the following years, would be the final cladding of red sandstone that one sees there today. If you look at the steps of this amphitheater, on the right side of the photo between the Urn and the top edge of the steps, you can clearly see a large doorway cut through the steps. This was the doorway built to give access from the stage at the base of the Urn to an underground room built there to serve the needs of future performers, - men and women who would give musical performances, or dance or act out plays on the low stage which was created next to the Urn. This entrance through the

steps is not visible today. It was closed in the late '80's when the underground room was modified to house the electrical panels and controls which, for the next 30 years, would power the construction site. For some years this space would also house the air-conditioning equipment needed to cool the Inner Chamber.

But today we are entering a new phase of work. It is a phase which aims to put things in their final place, to complete the entire oval island of Matrimandir and to include all of the aspects which may not have been given much attention until now.

One of these aspects is the need for an underground space for performers to prepare themselves,- to put on costumes, to prepare for their appearance in the amphitheater. We envisage more and more usage of the amphitheater for such quality programs in the coming years. Thus this space is being now completely overhauled. The large electrical panels, which still distribute all the electrical energy needed within the site, are being shifted out from their underground room to a location next to our solar plant, situated a few hundred meters to the South, outside of the boundary of the isolating zone (or future lake) which is to surround the gardens oval.



Cable ducts are being built beside the Amphitheater as a part of the work to shift the main panels out of the Amphitheater's underground room

Visiting the site these days one sees new underground ducts being created in masonry to hold the two or three dozen thick power cables which must join the distribution panels near the solar plant to the main building and gardens of Matrimandir. And, interestingly, we have rediscovered on the way parts of buried masonry which were created at the time of the building of the amphitheater in 1972-73 and were intended just for this purpose, as was the entrance through the steps of the amphitheater, to serve the performers' changing room envisaged even then. This space has waited until now to be developed for the use it was originally intended to serve.

Along the way the large underground room has served us in many ways:- from 1978, for example, it gave shelter to all the pristine white polished marble slabs, freshly arrived from Italy, destined for the walls of the Inner Chamber. (As an interesting aside we might mention that the shelter that had been found here for the Chamber wall marble was a mixed blessing: To our horror one day during a heavy monsoon downpour we discovered that this space had been flooded and that these snowy white sheets of marble had been half submerged in pinkish soupy water!..Weeks of work followed to shift all the slabs out, and clean them one by one and then to store them in the second underground room located on the opposite side of the Amphitheater. We thought the other room would be safer, only to discover after a few more years that the slabs had again been attacked, -this time by flying insects that loved to build nests of red mud in the holes that had been pre-drilled in the edges of the marble to assist with fixation on the Chamber walls! Cleaning up the deep, rust colored stains left by those insects was a huge job, bigger than the first time, and obliged us to purchase every single bottle of liquid Polar bleach that could be found in Pondicherry at that time!) It is remarkable now that the wheel of time has brought us back, 42 years later, to carry on with the project that was envisioned for this underground space by the Aurovilians of those earlier days! We will keep you updated as this process of re-creating the underground actors' dressing room proceeds.

The Exhibition of New models for the Matrimandir gardens.

In our February newsletter, we had described the process of preparation that was underway for the upcoming exhibition of new design proposals for the Matrimandir gardens.

Opening on Auroville's birthday, February 28th, the outdoor exhibition of these models and information panels was kept open for the next five weeks under the trees and a pleasant sunshade close to the Matrimandir office. Many people, both guests and Aurovilians came to inspect the models and offer their comments. The models, of course, give just a general view, a rough picture, of how the designers now envisage the remaining nine gardens. There will be much less hard construction when compared to the first three gardens (Existence, Consciousness and Bliss) which are still being finalized on the ground. With this approach, the gardens will be more amenable to change and improvement over time. The designs proposed today seek to express fluidity, with a softness in the gardens, a more organic feel and look to the landscape. The many small details, those points that bring in the beauty and subtleness of feeling to a space, are yet to be filled in, and will only come slowly as the new garden spaces materialize on the ground. But the feeling is there; - a gentler presence, and a promise that something very beautiful is waiting to come.....



The Garden Exhibition space set up near the Matrimandir office.

On March 31st, a slide presentation of the proposal was made to a community gathering in the Cinema Paradiso hall, close to the Matrimandir compound. At the time of writing, we are now gathering community feedback to these proposals, and considering how to organize the immense work that lies ahead,- to plan in detail the many steps needed to translate the design concepts now in hand down into reality on the ground. It is quite an adventure, and one that we hope we will be able to dive fully into during the months ahead.



A model of a detail of the garden of Youth.

Update on the Mini Test Ponds

Also in our last newsletter, we had brought you up to date on the construction of the six mini test ponds being built by Auroville's Lake team just outside the gardens oval at Matrimandir. The goal of that work is to test different sealing techniques for the bottom of the lake that is to one day surround the gardens, to get a bit familiar with the techniques of handling these different sealing materials. Five ponds had been built by February, using either compacted slabs of German clay or sheets of two millimeter thick HDPE foil as a sealing liner, or as third option, sheets of polyester matt embedded with Bentonite clay. Finally we managed to get enough local clay onsite so that the sixth and last mini test pond could be built. Laid down and compacted to form a layer some thirty centimeters thick, and then covered with a protective layer of thick polyester fabric and a final top layer of granite jelly, this last pond was finalized in mid March. Of all the six ponds this one comes closest to being like the ponds, hundreds of years old, that we see adjoining many of the villages around Auroville. The technique is simple, uses local materials, and has a long well tested history of use in our area. But the choice of which of these different techniques will be the one used in a final lake, or in a next test pond, will be the result of observation and more work with these mini test ponds over the months to come.

We would like to underline here that there are a great many questions to be answered before the lake around Matrimandir can be built. Roger Anger, architect of Matrimandir envisaged a lake, up to 100 meters wide, surrounding the central oval island. Where will the water to fill this lake come from? Would we be able to harvest enough rainwater to fill this lake? What will be the role of desalinated sea water in relation to the filling of such a lake? There are many questions of this nature to be solved.

But the seed of this idea was cast long ago, by the Mother, who insisted that the Matrimandir gardens oval should be surrounded by water. She was an immensely practical person, and saw and stated right way that the supply of water for the lake she envisaged would be difficult, and could come only later, perhaps years later. So, we make ourselves as ready as we can. And the studies embodied in the series of mini test ponds are small steps on the way,- to test materials, to test methods of construction and the management techniques needed to bring these materials and human resources together. Thus when the moment comes, when all is ready for such a large project to move forward, we too will be ready, having made preparations for this last and very significant aspect of the Matrimandir work as a whole.



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. Contributions to Matrimandir are exempt under sec. 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act. You may also give your offering in cash/cheque/DD at the Matrimandir Office during your visit for meditation.

