

Matrimandir

February 2013

At Matrimandir there are a multitude of activities that are woven into the fabric of each day. On the side of gardens construction, for the maintenance of the building and gardens, and for receiving each day's visitors to the Chamber, there are manifold interweaving threads that, all together, create the tapestry of the day. But it was not always thus.....

In the beginning of construction, and for many years up to the completion of the Chamber in the early 1990's, the activity of each day was very much focused on one single goal, one task to be accomplished in the isolated and much more barren environment of those years. There was, in the 1970's for example, the work to prepare one by one the long series of concretings of the four main pillars, with steel rods to be placed in position, then shuttering plywood to be oiled and bolted in place, and then the crowning days of concretings as the pillars rose up, so striking, above the empty landscape. Or, in the late 1980's, when the finishing of the Inner Chamber was being done, all our energy was concentrated there in the room, with the placing of one more slab, one more horizontal row of the white Italian marble that was to clad the 12 walls of the room, culminating in the marvelous day when the protecting plastic was removed from the walls to show for the first time the completed marble whiteness that had been installed over a period of two years. Always, it was one step at a time, one goal to be accomplished, one more step forward in the work to be done...

Masons trim the edges of the sandstone path in the garden of Consciousness



There was, it must be added, the beginning and slow growth of the green world of Matrimandir during those years too: the starting of the Nursery in the early 70's and it's steady development. But the work of construction was, for the first 20 years, very much a steady step by step process...each step seen and planned ahead in minutest detail by the engineer who was guiding the work. It was a marvelous time, almost like a child's play time,-each day picking up the building blocks of the day to assemble finally the most wonderful structure one could imagine...There was laughter and fun even while one sweated under the endless rays of the hot Tamil Nadu sun, or waded through the red mud of the monsoon.

After the completion of the Chamber the work began to take on a more multi pronged nature;-the construction of the petals began while simultaneously the outer skin was installed, and then the golden discs were put in place. As this outer cover was being placed we took up too the complex interconnected works of the entire interior finishing : the inner skin, the glass ramp parapets and the completion of the marbling of the first and second levels. Our work force peaked at that time to over 350 workers and volunteers. The garden paths were laid down too during this time.

With the completion of the building in 2007-8 the frenetic pace of activity tapered off to a large degree and the work force began to decrease. But at the same time new teams began to take up the development of the gardens, and other teams were formed to greet the increasing number of visitors. A team was also formed to attend to the cleaning and maintenance of the completed building...this being a huge task in itself.

Let's now take a tour around the site, and see what is happening today.

Standing in the gardens to the north- east of Matrimandir, one sees quite a lot of activity. A team of masons is busy in the garden of Consciousness trimming the edges of the agra sandstones that have been laid on the pathway around the main pool there. There had been a design decision pending there for some time, as to whether to leave these stones arranged in a kind of random edged, spontaneous way, or to trim them in a smooth flowing line...The decision has been made, so now trimming is going on!

Close to these masons one can see a drawing in white powder on the ground, about three meters long by two meters wide. This is the first sketch on the ground where we will now start to excavate for the construction of an underground room that will house the water storage tank, the pumps and the electrical controls for the system which will power the main fountain and cascade of this garden. It will house also the light controls for the two adjacent gardens; - Bliss and Existence. The detailed planning for this underground installation has taken quite some time, integrating the needs of water supply, electrification and garden design, but now we are ready to go ahead with this work.

In these gardens, teams of green workers are busy too with the regular upkeep of the finished plantation: cutting the grass, spraying the plants with organic fertilizers and pest repellants and just plain weeding.

In the garden of Bliss, just beside, there is steady work underway on two fronts: one job is to fill the spaces between the completed low circular walls within the garden with compost in preparation for plantation there. This action within the garden is backed up by a large operation going on out behind our workshops where raw

Work underway in the garden of Consciousness



Masons interact with garden designers in Bliss garden





Installing the garden crest near the West path of the gardens



New solar panels being added to our solar plant.

compost is being received, sieved and mixed with topsoil in preparation for its being shifted into one of the gardens. Four small trees have also been planted here in Bliss garden. They have the significant names of: “Psychic Peace” and “Adoration”. They will contribute the colors of their flowers, and a little shade, without obscuring the overall garden view. In this garden, a team of masons is busy just beginning to clad the “sunken path” which leads around the central, yet-to-be-finished raised circular area which will be the site of seven small raised fountains. One of these fountains is to be musical,- with a multitude of gentle sounds being produced by the flow of the water from it. Recently a team of music specialist of Auroville came to demonstrate how we might achieve this difficult goal. The sounds they have demonstrated already show that there is indeed a way to do this, and that we will be able to achieve, after enough research, this special musical “fountain of one thousand drops”.

Over in the garden of Unity adjacent to the Banyan tree, activity is exclusively centered on the stone cladding of the pool which is close to the mini-amphitheater there. The final shaping in concrete and plastering was completed a month ago, and now white granite stones are being carefully fixed on its floor and sloping edges as the last step in the building of the pool.

Associated with this pool, work continues steadily in our metal workshop on the fabrication of the stainless steel support frame for the stage (7 meters in diameter) that will be mounted in the center of the pool. Smaller music programs will be held there in future. This support structure is also integrated with a large number of fountain nozzles, which will work together to create a 3 ½ meter high fountain. The completion of all this work will occupy our team for a next few months.

Leaving the Unity garden and walking to the south we come soon to the main west axis of the Matrimandir gardens oval. It is along this main path, four meters wide, that all visitors to the gardens and Inner Chamber will come in future. They will enter onto this wide path after crossing a bridge which will span the future lake which will surround the entire gardens. On the outer bank of this lake a visitors’ reception building will be constructed.

Along the edges of this west path we are presently giving the final definition to the sweeping contour that outlines the crest of the gardens, or park areas that will eventually be built here. This work of defining the crest levels is something that is being steadily undertaken in the gardens as a whole. This is the final step in creating the “framework” of the gardens, and, along with the 12 radial pathways, defines the specific area for each of the future gardens. Whatever specific garden designs are built in the coming years, they will respect the crest lines and radial pathways that Roger, the architect of Matrimandir, has envisioned for the overall layout of the gardens.

Defining the crests is a matter of first surveying the land to establish and mark the changing heights of the crests...each garden has a different crest curvature and height, but the overall pattern is one of a series of waves...which echo the waves of the large inner petals and then the smaller petals just beyond them. Once the heights have been established, then a curving line of ferrocement panels, 45 cm deep, is fixed in place by masons, and then the earth is refilled to match the curves of the top of the crests. The purpose of these

deep panels on the crests is first to give a long term stability to the crest height, and secondly, to prevent the unwanted spread of weeds and grass roots across the crest lines. Compost is added wherever there is already plantation to be installed. Only three of the 12 gardens have been started till now, the other nine await the completion of the design process.... And we will not yet hazard a guess as to how long that process will take as the challenge of garden design, to even begin to arrive at the level that the Mother had expressed, is immense.

Moving over to the amphitheater, just adjacent to the west path, lighting trials are underway there to install permanent lighting which can be used whenever there is a program. Similarly, other lighting changes are underway all around the site



One of the disc cleaning teams active on Matrimandir

with the goal of installing low energy consuming fixtures. The spotlights illuminating the main structure, for example, till now consisted of a set of twelve halogen bulbs, each of 300 watts. They are now being replaced with a set of twelve 30 watt LED spotlights giving almost the same effect on the structure. Thus this one lighting load is being reduced from 3,600 watts to just 360! -a huge saving in electricity for the future. LED lights, as a rule, are to play a major role in our final lighting installation.

Stepping further out beyond the gardens area to our solar plant, there is a great new initiative being under taken there. We are expanding our long established 36 kw solar plant by adding another 15 kw of new solar panels, and soon will expand this facility even more. This plant is used every sunny day to run the entire AC installation that cools the Inner Chamber of Matrimandir. With the new additional solar power, we will be able to take on too a good chunk of the other power needs of the site. Our overall power load on the site is of the order of 100 kw on a busy day, so there is need to increase our solar plant even more if we want to meet most of the demand by using the sun's energy directly. With the ever present power cuts of the local electricity grid, this is certainly a direction which we want to grow in.

These are the basic activities that one sees on site during the day. And if you happen to look up at the Matrimandir during the early morning, or the late afternoon when the sun is not too hot, you might spot one of the regular disc cleaning teams as they rappel down the outer surface of Matrimandir rubbing and polishing discs as they go. This wonderful activity, undertaken by both men and women alike, goes on regularly all through the year, keeping the outer surface of Matrimandir clean and glowing. The cleaning work inside the building is going on each day too. It is a very regular and meticulous job, staffed by volunteers, who make sure the entire interior of Matrimandir is kept as clean as can possibly be.

The other side of the activity here, principally in the mornings, is to attend to the reception of the many people who come to concentrate in the Inner Chamber each day. About two dozen volunteers are active each morning to receive and guide these guests, and to wash and dry the white socks and cushions that they all need inside the building too!

Thus it is very much a multi stranded flow of activity each day here:...all activities being woven into a tapestry of life that is rich and colorful, - with the peace of the air, the stillness of the banyan tree and the deep quietude of the Chamber always there, always present, always reminding us of the reason that the Matrimandir is here.

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