

Auroville Today

APRIL 2011, No.262

Auroville's monthly news magazine since 1988



The excavation in full progress

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Matrimandir excavation 40 years ago

On the 14th March, 1971, the excavation began for the foundation of the Matrimandir. Mother sent the following message for the occasion: *La fraternite de la collaboration. L'aspiration vers l'Unité dans la joie et la Lumière. Bénédiction.* (The fraternity of collaboration. The aspiration towards Unity and joy and Light. Blessings.) Here are some Aurovilians' memories of the excavation work.

Alain Grandcolas remembers:

There have been two foundation ceremonies for the Matrimandir. The first occurred at dawn on 21st February, 1971. At that time, the land on which the Matrimandir was to be built had not yet been purchased. Therefore it was decided to lay the foundation stone between the Banyan tree and the centre of the future Matrimandir. A hole more than two metres deep was dug and a sandalwood casket given by The Mother was placed within it. I'm not sure that anybody knows what was inside the casket. Nolini placed the casket, as requested by The Mother, and a grey granite stone was placed above it at ground level to mark its position. However, after we began excavating the Matrimandir crater that stone was covered over by earth and today nobody knows where the stone and the casket are.

We purchased the land for the Matrimandir construction in early March 1971 and digging started on 14th. To begin with, only Aurovilians did the digging because the Mother wrote in February 1971 that "it is preferable that the work be organised without paid labour so that it is sure to continue in all circumstances". We all understood by

this that the Matrimandir had to be built only by the 'holy people', in other words, the Aurovilians, the Ashramites and volunteers.

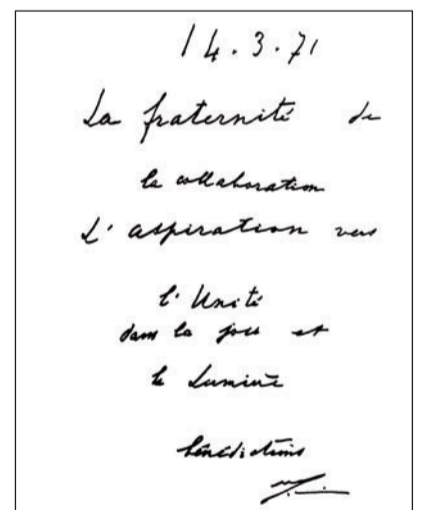
On the first day I came with a theodolite and Kalya (the Mother's great grandson) and I located the centre of the future Matrimandir. We were using the Urn and the Banyan tree and doing a triangulation to find out where the centre should be. At the beginning

few people came to dig, but very soon, on a daily basis, 20 people would come from Aspiration and work between 6-8 a.m., 40 people would work between 8-12 and another 20 people in the afternoon. The Ashramites would come every Saturday night after 10 o'clock when the Ashram film was over. Two buses would bring them here and they would work until four or five o'clock in the morning, digging the excavation.

On Sundays, many other Aurovilians would join in.

I remember I kept pestering Roger to get a drawing so we would know how wide and deep the excavation should be. Then Nata was put in charge of the construction of Matrimandir and he got the same treatment! Finally, in August, Nata asked Piero to do the drawing. When Piero gave it to us we discovered that the excavation crater had to be 15 metres deep and 50 metres wide, which was about ten times bigger than we had thought!

I made a calculation of how many cubic meters we had excavated in the past five months and how long it would take to excavate the rest. Even if we doubled the number of Aurovilians digging, we would not finish the excavation by February, 1978! This was the date we had set for the completion of the



Matrimandir as it would have been Mother's 100th birthday and she had said that for her centenary she would come to Matrimandir. But how were we going to complete it in time?

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Early Aurovilians starting the excavation.

PHOTO COURTESY MATRIMANDIR

Navoditte remembers:

There was no hubris in this act (that came later). No bickering. No cynicism. Nothing of the mind at all. Lots of laughter. No one complained that we were not very well organized. No one seemed reluctant to go out into the mid-day sun for something they thought they might not even see completed. The pit was simply something that needed to be dug; we just felt lucky to be digging it.

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