

Matrimandir

December 2009

Pathways

In the Gardens, this fall has been a time for building pathways – two in particular, the first being the long spiral path in the garden of Existence, and the second the twin curving paths beneath the outer branches of the Banyan tree.

In the garden of Existence, concretings for the foundations of the path around the central massive stone have mostly been completed. The photo here shows you the scene, with work temporarily halted due to the heavy November rains. This concrete base will be clad with long slabs of dressed white granite. One will move along this path around the large stone, and see the bubbling fountain under its raised tip. The inner part of the garden surrounding the stone will feature a level field of white quartz gravel, with different flowering plants in the outer ring of the leveled space. An outer border of taller pink Hibiscus plants with the significance “Psychic Power in Existence” will add to the concentrated atmosphere of the garden.



The Garden of Existence flooded by heavy November rains

The work in progress under the Banyan tree is part of the project to complete the Garden of Unity, which reaches from there out to the pond and mini-amphitheater 40 m. to the west. It is a delicate task to work around or under the Banyan tree, for this is the geographical center of Auroville, and it holds many special memories and a very special atmosphere too. The work here is done in careful, rapidly executed steps, so as not to disturb the space under the tree for too long at a time.

To prevent the pooling of monsoon rains under the Banyan, the soil level had to be raised by some 25 centimeters under much of its 40 m. wide canopy. Specialists were consulted....would this filling have any adverse effect on the health of the tree? - no such negative consequence could be tolerated. The consensus was that the added soil would not harm the tree in any way, but that care

must be taken not to put soil directly around the main trunk because such a blanket of soil, when wet, might accelerate the decay of the old wood of the trunk. This tree is thought to be about 100 years old, and its main trunk is already hollow, so great care has to be taken to preserve it. The tree has 29 secondary trunks at present, as these aerial roots, descending from the tree's high branches, have taken root and grown so as to give support to the spreading branches of the Banyan. Some of these secondary trunks are massive, with a diameter of up to one meter. These will support the canopy of the tree as the central trunk slowly decays. The earth filling was made with a mixture of light soils, so that rainwater can easily soak in and reach the roots below. At the same time, two narrow paths were laid under the branches of the tree on the eastern side, closest to Matrimandir. Each of these curved paths forms the border one for one of the gardens near the tree: the garden of Life to the north and the garden of Power to the south.

Grass was then replanted under the shade of the tree, and with the monsoon rains it begins to cover this space again with a carpet of soft green.

The work under the Banyan tree will be completed when a new set of granite benches is installed, curving under its westernmost branches. This work is underway....we will show you photos of it in an upcoming newsletter!

Composting the Gardens

The engine behind the greening of the Matrimandir gardens, apart from the essential water and sunshine, is the rich compost that is mixed with the soil at the very beginning of planting, whether it be for the stretches of grass that cover the borders of all the twelve gardens or for the increasingly diverse varieties of flowering plants that are gradually being planted at different locations on the site.



Building up a compost pile, with bamboo poles inserted to create hot air chimneys

Matrimandir has a very active and interesting compost and soil preparation section, covering an area about one acre situated just behind our workshops on the eastern side of the site. There are several streams of raw materials flowing into the compost section: loads of fresh cow dung are purchased from the local villages along with mixed compost brought from up to 20 kilometers away. These ingredients are combined with all the green matter collected from the site – grass cuttings and leaves, as well as cuttings of specially grown nitrogen-rich gliricidia plants. We also collect tractor loads of leaves from all over the Auroville community, from those locations which are not set up to make their own compost.

Having gathered these raw ingredients we proceed to make our compost piles, about 3 m. by 4 m. wide and about 2 m. high. They are built up in layers, the first being grass and leaves followed by a rich layer of cow dung, layer by layer like a tall cake! Due to the micro-biological action in these piles, which breaks down the grass and leaves, they will heat up to as much as 60° C during the first two weeks, and can even overheat, so the pile needs to be constantly ventilated. A dozen or so large bamboo poles are placed vertically in the pile while building it and are then removed when the pile is complete, to leave vertical chimneys. After just a few days, one can see steam rising up from each

of these holes! Our compost yard has many of these piles, each of which is tagged with the date it was created. After one month it has to be turned over to speed up the process of decay. After three months the pile is ready to be sifted; any large sticks or lumps are then separated out. The sifted compost is then mixed with a layer of topsoil and carted off by tractor to the spot where it will be used in the gardens. This is an ongoing process, month in and month out, for the quantities of compost required for any new garden plot are huge!

There is an experimental side to the composting area too: we have two sheds which produce ‘vermicompost’, a very rich grade of compost created by the action of earthworms digesting leaf compost. Powder from the seeds of the local neem trees is added to these vermincompost batches during the composting process to add nutrition. The compost obtained from this process is very finely broken down and even in texture, perfect for the more delicate flowering plants being produced in the Nursery.

Thus this composting section is an active place indeed...and as a bonus, someone has thrown some vegetable seeds in a small pit (well composted of course) near one of the vermincompost sheds and its roof is now covered with a mass of vines producing a prodigious quantity of snake gourds!

Aside from all this activity in the main composting area there is another spot where a very special type of compost is being made at Matrimandir. This compost is made entirely from flowers which have bloomed in the gardens area.

In two sets of cement rings located under a large “Prosperity” tree (Cannonball tree) at the farthest west end of the Matrimandir oval, a small dedicated team of volunteers regularly arranges these flowers in an artistic, mandala-like fashion within the concrete rings. Over the course of a few months the rings get filled up with this rapidly decaying mass of flowers and a super rich batch of compost is produced. The production of this flower compost is really a work of love and dedication towards the world of flowers here.

More light at night

Quietly, in an electronics research-cum-repair center in the underground rooms beneath the eastern slope of the amphitheater near Matrimandir, a special project is underway. Here we are assembling a newly designed spotlight fixture which will provide an artificial sunray to illuminate the globe in the Inner Chamber on cloudy days and at night.

“Why do we need a new light for the Chamber?” you might ask.

This play of light on the globe is the most significant visual aspect of the Chamber. In fact, speaking about the globe, the Mother said “the important thing is the play of the sun on the center. Because it becomes a symbol – the symbol of the future realization.”

About the artificial light needed to illumine the globe when there is no sun, She said: “When there is no sunlight, electric spotlights will shine a beam (ONE beam again, not a diffuse light) just there on the globe”,... “which will have the same effect and the same color.[as the sun ray]” and then, “the projected artificial light will have to be slightly golden, it shouldn’t be cold..” [3rd and 10th January 1970]

The use of most types of bulbs in the confined space available at the top of the Chamber would tend to build up too much heat there and would require cooling fans which would be too noisy to use so near the Chamber, so we are currently using LED’s (light- emitting diodes) to provide the artificial lighting.

We have a set of 44 LED’s which come on progressively in the evenings, or on cloudy days, to



Testing the new artificial light for the Chamber

illuminate the globe as the sunlight fades. These lights are set in a ring at the top of the Chamber and form a circle around the 23 cm wide opening through which the sun's ray enters the Chamber. The effect of this ring of lights is presently adequate, but is not yet strong and warm enough to give an effect similar to an actual ray of sunlight striking the globe. And as this is such an important visual symbol in the room we are always seeking to improve the system. Thus, as new and more powerful LED's have come onto the market we have launched this new project to produce a more powerful illuminating ray for the globe. This search for the best artificial ray is one that will surely progress in stages for some years to come until this beam too is like a sun ray!

Passings

Two people who have given a great deal of heartfelt energy to the construction of Matrimandir left us in late October.

Narayan, who came to Auroville in 1970 and lived for many years here on the site with his wife and three children, passed away peacefully on October 26th at the age of 89. Perumal, who grew up in Auroville, died on October 24th after a stroke. Both will be remembered for their contributions to the construction here.

Narayan applied himself with enthusiastic energy for some 25 years, taking up a variety of tasks at Matrimandir, from participating in all of the concretings in the early years to painstakingly bending thousands of steel stirrups used in the precast beams of the outer skin. Narayan always worked intensely for perfection, in any of the hundred jobs that came his way. His temperament was sometimes spicy, but his heart was completely given to the goal of carrying out Mother's work as perfectly as possible.

Perumal is fondly remembered for his recent participation in the tough job of helping complete the spiral ramps that lead up to the Inner Chamber. As a child he grew up in the free and sometimes difficult ambience of those early days in Auroville. As a young adult he was involved in many facets of Auroville life, but was always on hand to help out at Matrimandir when some extra energy was needed.

Hundreds of people have participated in the adventure of building the Matrimandir over the years, and it is always a very special moment when one of them passes away. And when the community gathers to remember and to honor that person, we are brought face to face with the intense reality of our lives here, of the difficulties, of the challenges and, most of all, of our being together in this adventure. When one of us leaves, the day-to-day flow of community life is suspended for a moment, and we focus on why we are really here, and how the one who is departing has participated in the dream of Auroville.



Narayan



Perumal

Address for donations and correspondence:
(Please make your cheque, money order or DD payable to 'Matrimandir')

MATRIMANDIR – AUROVILLE 605101 – TAMIL NADU – INDIA

Bookings: Tel (+91) (0413) 262-2268; accounts: 262-2228

Email: matrimandir@auroville.org.in