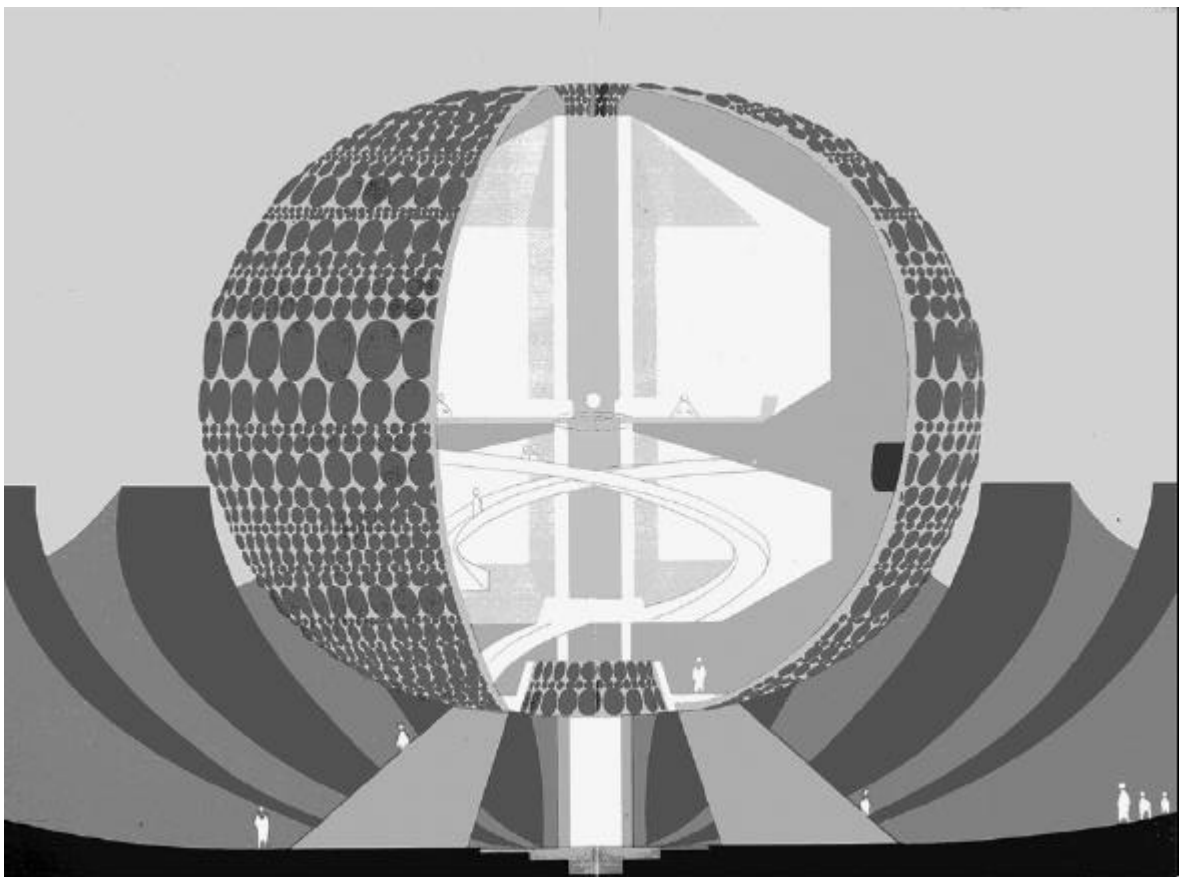


MATRIMANDIR

VISION FOR AN EVER EVOLVING CONCEPT



AUROVILLE, MOTHER'S 125TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY

21 - 2 - 2003

CONTENTS

Page

AGELONG DREAM IN MANIFESTATION

The Avatar's model town	2
Chief architect appointed by the Mother: a task unique	3

THE EARLY VISION OF MATRIMANDIR

A Mogul miniature surrounded by a Japanese garden?	8
The Golden Pavilion, Kyoto: a Zen temple in a thick pine forest	10
The dry gardens of Zen Buddhism	11
An ornamental lake – or a sheer necessity?	12
The 'nebula': 'an artificial round lake'	14
'Auroville the town of the future': the Yin-Yang layout	16
The 'galaxy': the final layout for the town approved by the Mother	16
A first attempt to commence the gardens	19

THE FINAL MATRIMANDIR

The Mother chose the model in harmony with her vision	21
Built in a few years by the best contractor	25
Shaped by the technique and arts of our time	27
The fundraising brochure blessed by the Mother	29

WORK FOR THE GARDENS WAS ABOUT TO COMMENCE

'Seeing the Matrimandir without anything to distract the eye'	34
The Mother's symbol: twelve gardens designed like 'opened lotus petals'	35
A Japanese Pavilion, a Japanese Garden	35
The Mother chose to commence the Matrimandir gardens on November 24, 1972	37
Mother's last words on the Matrimandir gardens	39

EPILOGUE

October 15, 1987: the 'final' Matrimandir meeting	40
---	----

CONCLUSION

A futuristic vision calling for a futuristic architecture	42
Matrimandir: the fourth dimension	42
"The Mother's symbol... a kind of seal which is integrated into the whole project"	43
Objective – or subjective consciousness?	44
Japanese gardens: the soul of one single nation – or humanity as a single soul?	44
The ultimate reality of a flower	45

AN INITIATORY JOURNEY [ADDENDUM]

"In principle not for visitors, reserved for Aurovilians, but not everyone will be admitted"	48
"A symbol of the inner pilgrimage that each Aurovilian must make in order to find his own soul"	49

APPENDIX	53
----------------	----

NOTE: This research-paper is based on all the available documentation on Matrimandir. Gathering statements from the most various sources, the entries are preferably listed in chronological order. Mother's words appear in italic; others', within quotation marks and with a different font. In Mother's Agenda, R. is Roger Anger.

Taking birth life after life with her own people, the Mother used to say “We all have met in previous lives”. For, Sri Aurobindo wrote it, the Avatar cannot fulfill his mission alone. He takes birth with those he needs to accomplish his mission – as well will those to destroy it. Sri Aurobindo also wrote about a ‘circle’ to which his people belong; even if they quit, or fail, still they are with him.

MATRIMANDIR

VISION FOR AN EVER EVOLVING CONCEPT

AGELONG DREAM IN MANIFESTATION

The Avatar’s model town

The Mother had been dreaming of a special creation since an early age. Heralding a new world and society, in 1912 she wrote in an essay to be read to a small group of seekers in Paris:

The general aim to be attained is the advent of a progressing universal harmony.

The means for attaining this aim, in regard to the earth, is the realisation of human unity through the awakening in all and the manifestation by all of the inner Divinity which is One.

In other words, - to create unity by founding the Kingdom of God which is within us all.

This, therefore, is the most useful work to be done:

1. For each individually, to be conscious in himself of the Divine Presence and to identify himself with it.

2. To individualise the states of being that were never till now conscious in man and, by that, to put the earth in connection with one or more of the fountains of universal force that are still sealed to it.

3. To speak again to the world the eternal word under a new form adapted to its present mentality. It will be the synthesis of all human knowledge.

4. Collectively, to establish an ideal society in a propitious spot for the flowering of the new race, the race of the Sons of God.

CWMCE, Vol. 2, p.47



Both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother envisaged an ideal society that the spiritual change only could make true. However, Sri Aurobindo was concerned with the coming into existence of an ideal *sangha* (spiritual community). Whereas the goal of an Avatar’s model town (‘the city of God’ of all traditions Sri Aurobindo evokes in *The Life Divine*) is the Mother’s. In 1930 she wrote:

The work of achieving a continuity which permits one to go up and down and bring into the material what is above, is done inside the consciousness. He who is meant to do it, the Avatar, even if he were shut up in a prison and saw nobody and never moved out, still would he do the work, because it is a work in the consciousness, a work of connection between the Supermind and the material being. He does not need to be recognised, he needs have no outward power in order to be able to establish this conscious connection. Once, however, the connection is made, it must have its effect in the outward world in the form of a new creation, beginning with a model town and ending with a perfect world.

CWMCE, Vol.3, pp.178-9

In the thirties the Mother made a first plan of 'the ideal city'. At the top of a hill, at the centre, was Sri Aurobindo's house. A big river flowed below:

In the old formation I had made, there had to be a hill and a river. A hill was necessary because Sri Aurobindo's house was on top of the hill. But Sri Aurobindo was there, in the centre. It was arranged according to the plan of my symbol, that is to say, a central point with Sri Aurobindo and all that concerns Sri Aurobindo's life, then four large petals (which weren't the same as in this drawing, they were something different), then twelve petals around (the city proper), then around that, there were the disciples' residential quarters (you know my symbol: instead of [partition] lines, there are strips; well, the last circular strip formed the residential place of the disciples) ... I nearly had the land: it was at the time of Sir Akbar (you remember?) of Hyderabad. They sent me photographs of Hyderabad State, and there, among those photos, I found my ideal place: an isolated hill (a rather large hill), below which a big river flowed.

Mother's Agenda, 23.6.1965

The formation of "an ideal city, the nucleus of a small ideal country ... the embryo or seed of the future supramental world" surfaced again in 1961:

Is it possible to find a place where the embryo or seed of the future supramental world might be created?



What I myself have seen... was a plan that came complete in all details, but that doesn't at all conform in spirit and consciousness with what is possible on earth now (although, in its most material manifestation, the plan was based on existing terrestrial conditions). It was the idea of an ideal city, the nucleus of a small ideal country, having only superficial and extremely limited contacts with the old world. Is it possible to find a place where the embryo or seed of the future supramental world might be created?

(...)

The realisation under community or group conditions would clearly be far more complete, integral, total and probably more perfect than any individual realisation, which is always, necessarily — necessarily — extremely limited on the external material level, because it's only one way of being, one mode of manifestation, one microscopic set of vibrations that is touched.

Mother's Agenda, 18.7.61

Chief architect appointed by the Mother: a task unique

Had the time come? With an inaugural message from the Mother the First World Conference of the Sri Aurobindo Society was held in August 1964. One decision was to develop a new township at the outskirts

of Pondicherry. A few months later the Mother will name this new town Auroville. On June 23, 1965 the Mother unveiled to Satprem her general concept of the town:

For a long time, I had had a plan of the "ideal city," but that was during Sri Aurobindo's lifetime, with Sri Aurobindo living at its centre. Afterwards ... I was no longer interested. Then, we took up the idea of Auroville again (I was the one who called it "Auroville"), but from the other end: instead of the formation having to find the place, it was the place (near the Lake) that caused the formation to be born; and up to now I took a very secondary interest in it because I hadn't received anything direct. Then that little H. took it into her head to have a house there, near the Lake, and have a house for me next to hers to offer me. And she wrote to me all her dreams; one or two sentences suddenly awakened an old, old memory of something that had tried to manifest - a creation - when I was very small (I don't remember what age), and that had again tried to manifest at the very beginning of the century when I was with Théon. Then I had forgotten all about it. And it came back with that letter: suddenly I had my plan of Auroville. Now I have my general plan; I am waiting for R. to make the detailed plans because since the beginning I have said, "R. will be the architect," and I have written to R.

When he came here last year he went to see Chandigarh, the city built by Le Corbusier up there in Punjab, and he wasn't very happy (it seems to me rather mediocre - I don't know, I haven't seen it; I only saw photographs that were dreadful). And when he spoke to me, I saw that he was feeling, "Oh, if I had a city to build! ..." So I wrote to him, "If you want, I have a city to build." He is so very glad, he is coming. And when he comes, I'll show him my plan, then he will build the city.

Mother's Agenda, 23.6.65

Who was the architect whom the Mother chose? From an interview with = I, an early Auroville journal, around 1967:

= 1: Auroville may be said to be the progressive manifestation of the vision of a great psychologist and sociologist, Sri Aurobindo. That manifestation is thrust forward by the Mother's realizing power and shaped by the technique and arts of our time. As you, Roger Anger, are the originator of Auroville's architectural conception, we should first like to know you better: what was your activity up to now? What creative principles do you follow?

R.A.: ... Like any French architect I studied at the "Beaux Arts". Very soon I had the opportunity to build a good number of spectacular projects. In France I am considered as belonging, not to a revolutionary, but to an 'avant-garde' architectural trend. At the beginning of my career, I was very much concerned with the renewal of shape, with an architecture very strongly centred around the study of space. For a certain number of years now I have been led to devote myself to an architecture concerned with man viewed as a social being and to conceive a kind of architecture with which man would actually be merged. The group of architects I am working with is studying pan-social architectural forms. They constitute a preview of the flexible type of architecture necessary for Auroville's first modules and could meet the dynamic imperatives of its construction through the years. Inevitably, I became more and more interested in the principles of urbanism and have utilized them for Auroville's successive layouts and, even more so, in the latest model of the town."

Then in his early forties, Roger Anger was married to Purna Prema, Mother's granddaughter. Roger spent six months a year in Pondy, discussing daily with the Mother not only the town and Matrimandir but life in Auroville as well, its finance and organization, the conduct and guidelines for being an Aurovilian and whatever issue or problem might arise. Regarding Auroville, no one was as close to the Mother as Roger. In spite of this intimacy, though, the Mother never requested Roger to give up his studio in Paris. There, assisted by his team of architects, Roger translated into models and layout the detailed instructions he was receiving from the Mother, day in and day out; year in and year out.

Shyam Sunder, to whom the Mother had "*entrusted the responsibility of Auroville*" (written statement, 8.2.73), regarding all of Auroville's affairs was the only other person whom the Mother met daily,

minutely instructing him how to proceed. The following excerpts from *Down the Memory Lane* (Shyam Sunder's notes about his years serving the Mother, pp.70-1) help to shed light on how the Mother related to Roger:

"I heard of Roger Anger the day Mother spoke to Navajata about him in connection with Auroville. That was when the Auroville idea was just getting known. An offer was received from him in his firm's name for the architectural services to be rendered by him to Auroville.

'I am giving you a costly architect,' Mother said to Navajata when she gave him the paper of offer, and asked him, *'Are you willing?'* With his characteristic enthusiasm Navajata had expressed his readiness and given me the offer for comments. It was the usual commercial type of offer and needed a lot of finance. When I told Navajata that he was incurring a big liability by signing his acceptance, he hoped that in the course of Mother's working the offer and its acceptance would be forgotten and money for Roger's services will not be needed. That is how it happened later. Roger would not only render his architectural services without any honorarium, he would spend from his own pocket for it. ...

Mother told me clearly that in architecture we have to do as Roger says. I have always adhered to it, whether I agreed with him or not, and this has brought upon me the displeasure of other architects who have different tastes.

Once Mother told me, *'What you are saying is right; what Roger is saying is also right. Do as he says.'* I do not exactly remember the occasion of it, but I do remember that for the sake of harmonization, Mother expected me to get over my conceptions of being right."

Here are a few more excerpts:

"Mother says she is in agreement with Roger's plan. The Auroville constructions should be in accordance with his plan. She also asked, *"Is it that those who are already there do not wish to come in the community constructions?"* (23.3.71)

"I asked Mother, *'28 February is the anniversary of Auroville. What programme should we have that day?'*

"Has Roger made any programme?" (23.2.72)

"I spoke to Mother about Roger's letter to me and Mother's approval for the soap industry in the industrial zone of Auroville.

Mother confirmed it, also the fact that Roger is in charge of the architecture in Auroville. She laid stress on harmony. ...

In the evening I informed Mother that I have asked the soap industry man not to construct at Aurogarage and that when Roger comes she can reassure him that he is the only person responsible for the Auroville architecture and its execution. (1.6.72)"

"[Replying to Shanti's letter, point III reads as:]

III. Roger is the architect. If anyone is not willing to use what he makes, there will be others to use it. (11.2.73)"

The Mother stressed the choice of Roger as the architect to whom she had entrusted the construction of the town and its soul-centre also in a few letters to Huta and conversations:

Meanwhile it is not to Nava that I shall show the letter but to the architect of Auroville when he arrives and see with him the way of giving concrete realization to the beautiful plans. (20.6.65)

I will explain to you more when I have spoken to the architect who will be coming in September... (25.6.65)

Roger has just arrived yesterday. I am seeing him this morning to explain to him the plan of Auroville. The central park will be the park of Unity containing the Pavilion and its 'annexe' [Huta's house] as formerly decided. (7.9.65)

Child, Roger is coming on the 7th and I am going to see him on the 8th. I shall tell you all about the plan when you come on the 10th. (3.4.66)

At the end of March, when Roger will come, the final plan [of Matrimandir] will be made. (14.2.69)

The Mother made clear to everybody that Roger was the architect of her own choice and it was between the two of them; still she had to defend her architect all the time. These two letters to Huta, on July 24 and on October 15, 1965 are highly significant:

... What you have just written is news to me – I know nothing about it. I told you already that I am waiting for the architect of Auroville who is coming at the beginning of September and we shall do together the plan of the town. I shall explain to him what I want and thing will be done accordingly.

Nobody else has any saying in the matter. If sincerely you want to know the Truth, you must first abstain from believing all the stories that people tell you, not always with a very harmonious intention. ...

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p.27

... It is Roger who will lay the first stone of the Pavilion, in front of a few people (one of each country) and you will be there.

Roger will come back in February or March of next year 1966; so the ceremony cannot take place before that. ...

Once more, I warn you not to listen to what people tell you, whoever they are, about Auroville, because nobody except me knows the exact thing. If you want to know something about Auroville, ask me, and nobody else and about the Pavilion I will certainly let you informed on all happenings. ...

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p. 28

Matrimandir: was it purely between the Mother, Roger – and Shyam Sunder? On March 12, 1974 Andre Morisset¹, Mother's only son, wrote to Huta about Matrimandir:

*"Of the plans for the building itself she **[the Mother]** never spoke to me, so that I understood it was a matter between her, Roger and Shyam Sunder, and I never asked a question. Usually she saw Roger after me, but I clearly remember the instance when Roger and Gabriel explained to her what could be done for the flame. In spite of the importance of the decision and the interest she had in it, she did not utter a word to me."*

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, pp. 179-80

In August 1974 Roger issued a statement, marked "Only for the information of Aurovilians", explaining his "decision to withdraw from the existing system of organization and administration of the township." [Appendix, p.] Expressing his many reasons of dissatisfaction, Roger pointed out in particular:

*"The publication of the brochure *Matrimandir – The Mother's Truth and Love* has reaffirmed for me the fact that the absence of a responsible group directive has permitted to make official, in the eyes of the world outside, our lack of unity, has increased confusion in the mind of the people, and in addition has put into question the personality of the Mother."*

¹ Andre was one of the very few who remained physically close to the Mother up to the very end. To her son only, and to Nolini Kanta Gupta (whom Sri Aurobindo considered his most advanced disciple) the Mother confided, two months ahead, that she was getting ready to drop the body.

Commenting about Roger's letter, on 5.9.74 Andre wrote to Huta:

"Concerning his [Roger's] 'resignation' I have pointed out that it is not in his power to get rid of the responsibility which Mother has placed in him."

Huta, *The Spirit of Auroville*, p. 211

If one has to believe the experience that Satprem had on the Matrimandir foundation day, the bond that he and Roger have with the Mother goes back to Vedic times. On February 22, 1971 (the day after the laying of the first stone of Matrimandir) Satprem sent the following message to Roger. From the original French:

"Dear Roger,

I wished to tell you that yesterday, in front of that fire, I had a very strong perception or sensation. I suddenly felt as if an OM sprang from very far, from the Vedic time of the Vedic sacrifice, and we were there to close a whole cycle – to such an extent that when I heard Sunil's music I was surprised, as if I was listening to the Vedas' hymns to Agni. Something did happen yesterday. It's good for the future.

With my really fraternal friendship

Satprem"



On April 28th, 1971, the Mother commented with Satprem: "*interesting, 'good', it will be published in the "Gazette Aurovilienne"*".

THE EARLY VISION OF MATRIMANDIR

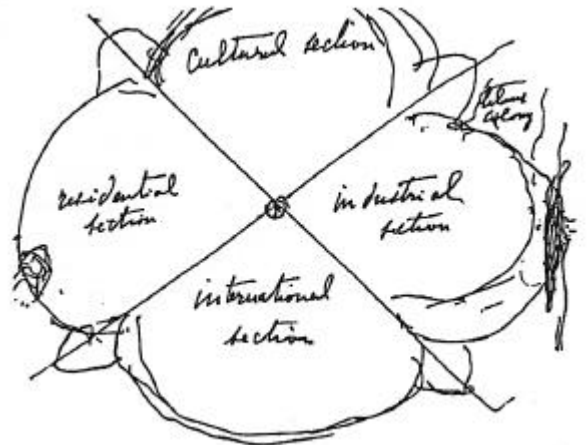
A Mogul miniature surrounded by a Japanese garden?

Are there two concepts for Matrimandir? Mother's early vision, as she described it to Satprem and Huta in June 1965 – versus the final concept, after the Mother had the ultimate vision of the Chamber, at the end of December 1969? The implications of such duality should be thoroughly examined. Without denying any of the two concepts, yet acknowledging that the soul of Auroville is, like the Avatar's model town, an ever-changing entity, where every single aspect is part of the indissoluble whole. The following is an attempt to put all elements together and reconcile the opposites. The Mother saw Auroville as a flower whose four petals, same in shape and size, corresponded to the four zones of the city: international, residential, cultural, and industrial.

What was at the centre? She told Satprem:

This central point is a park I had seen when I was a little girl (perhaps the most beautiful thing in the world with regard to physical, material Nature), a park with water and trees like all parks, and flowers, but not too many (flowers in the form of creepers), palm trees and ferns (all species of palm trees), water (if possible, running water) and, if possible, a small waterfall. From a practical point of view, it would be very good: at the edge, outside the park, we could build reservoirs that would provide water to the residents.

So in that park I had seen the "Pavilion of Love" (but I don't like to use that word because men have turned it into something ludicrous); I am referring to the principle of divine Love. But it has been changed: it will be the "Pavilion of the Mother"; but not this (Mother points to herself): the Mother, the true Mother, the principle of the Mother. (I say "Mother" because Sri Aurobindo used the word, otherwise I would have put something else - I would have put "creative principle" or "realizing principle" or ... something of that sort.) And it will be a small building, not a big one, with just a meditation room downstairs, with columns and probably a circular shape (I say "probably" because I am leaving it for R. to decide). Upstairs, the top floor will be a room, and the roof will be a covered terrace. Do you know the old Indian Mogul miniatures with palaces in which there are terraces and small roofs supported by columns? Do you know those old miniatures? I've had hundreds of them in my hands. ... But this pavilion is very, very lovely: a small pavilion like this, with a roof over a terrace, and low walls against which there will be divans where people can sit and meditate in the open air in the evening or at night. And downstairs, at the very bottom, on the ground floor, simply a meditation room - a place with nothing in it. There would probably be, at the far end, something that would be a living light (perhaps the symbol¹ made of living light), a constant light. Otherwise, a very calm, very silent place.



Mother's sketch of the town, 1965



Fathpur Sikri, The Jami Masjid

¹ Mother's and Sri Aurobindo's symbol.

As regards the construction, it will depend on R.'s plasticity. ...

I am not concerned about the details at all, there is only that pavilion that I would like to be very pretty - I see it. Because I saw it, I had a vision of it, so I'll try to make him understand what I saw. The park, too, I

Mother's Agenda, 23.6.65

The Mother had passed two important statements: it was up to Roger to decide whether the meditation room (out of which the Matrimandir Chamber would emerge) would be circular. The other essential statement concerns Mother's reference to a Mogul miniature.

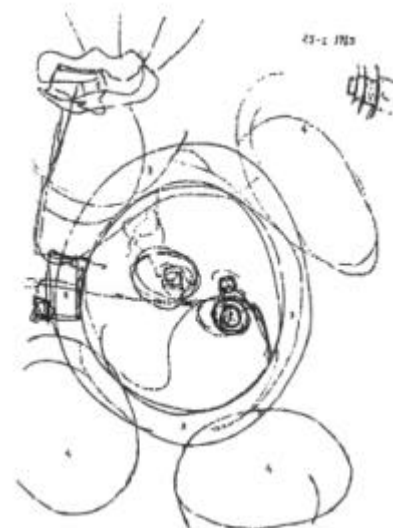
This early concept of the Matrimandir profoundly differs from the final one that the Mother approved after she had the final vision of the Chamber, in March 1970. There are also substantial differences with the concept expounded by Huta. As an example, in Huta's two books there is no mention of the meditation room, probably circular, with columns – anticipating Mother's vision of the Chamber. Moreover, whereas the Mother told Satprem that she wished “*a small building, not a big one*”, two days later she told Huta about “*a huge marble hall*”. Besides, there was no lake yet, only reservoirs. There was no mention of an outer park either, only of a circular road: “*From a practical point of view, it would be very good: at the edge, outside the park, we could build reservoirs that would provide water to the residents. ... All around, there is a circular road, which isolates it from the rest.*”

There are substantial differences between the two versions of the ‘park’ that the Mother presented to Satprem and to Huta; and even between the two versions of the ‘park’ as Huta described it in her two books, *Matrimandir – Mother's Truth and Love*, 1974, and *The Spirit of Auroville*, 2002: twenty-eight years later. Does the Mother use the term ‘park’ in the French sense, meaning both the trees and the flower-beds – in Paris, the habitual scenario? If so, how would this relate to a ‘Japanese’ park? In the absence of taped-recorded conversations or written statements, are Huta's recordings accurate? Independently from all this it appears that, when translating vision into matter, important details kept evolving; momentous changes would occur any time, from one day to the next. The Mother wrote to Huta plenty of general messages; but regarding the materialization of the city and its centre, apart from the exceedingly important message on 28.3.70 the Mother hardly conveyed anything in writing to her. Also, Huta's second book presents oral statements by the Mother that did not appear in the first book or differ.



Mother's sketch of the town, 25.6.65

Let's now examine Huta's version of the conversation the Mother had with her, two days after that with Satprem. On June 25, 1965, the Mother drew several sketches in front of Huta. She gave her two: one of the shrine, and a second one with the shrine along with the four-petal town. These are the two only sketches we know the Mother made for Matrimandir and the surrounding area. Both drawings represent an almost oval island surrounded by a large lake, without any park around it.



Matrimandir, the island and the lake

This oral statements by the Mother are taken from Huta's second book, *The Spirit of Auroville*, pp. 12-3:

Ah! Now the Mother Pavilion. This will be a separate island surrounded by a lake, tall trees, gardens with various kinds of flowers. I especially want the creepers of red hibiscus (Power) upon the outer dome of the Mother's Pavilion. They will look like living jewels against the white marble. There will be rockeries in Japanese style, varieties of cactus, small waterfalls, small ponds with lilies, lotuses, small bridges, various kinds of fountains and marble statues – one of them will be Shiva in deep trance. From his matted hair flows the water like a fountain...

There will be only one entrance. I want precious, semi-precious and artificial stones to be paved from the gate to the Mother's Pavilion in gradations, because they are full of meaning.

... The Pavilion will be in white marble and will have three storeys. The ground floor will have a huge marble hall – nothing material is to be kept in it except an arrangement by which there will be a perpetual flame representing the Immortal Flame of the Supreme Truth.

This flame will burn in a lotus built in the centre of Sri Aurobindo's symbol and my symbol combined, in a design made of pure gold. The Supreme Truth will be invoked in it.

The Golden Pavilion, Kyoto: a Zen Temple in a thick pine forest

Two months later, on September 1, 1965, Huta showed to the Mother some Japanese books. Pointing to the picture of the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, Japan, the Mother said:



Kinkakuji (The Golden Pavilion), Kyoto.

Child, this is exactly what we shall have at the Centre, except for the shape of the roof – it must be a terrace and a dome; but the surroundings will be the same – lake, flowers, trees, rockeries, small waterfalls and so on. Gardening is a wonderful thing – especially in Japan.

Whereas the sentence “*The Mother's Shrine will be like that*” in Huta's second book no longer appears, the sentence “*The shape of the roof – it must be a terrace and a dome*”, repeated in Huta's two books, rather points to the Indo-Mogul miniatures the Mother had emphasized while speaking to Satprem; ruling out the Kyoto Golden Pavilion with the upward eaves typical of all pagodas' roofs. Further questions do arise because of the pagoda-like drawing, four floors high (not three as stated by Huta), in the corner of one of the drawings by the Mother. Huta reproduces this detail, magnified, in her latest book, pp. 12-13, commenting, “*Here is the sketch of the Mother's Pavilion done on the same piece of paper by the Mother.*” But where is the dome on top of her Shrine that the Mother mentioned not just to Satprem but to Huta as well, on 25.5.65 and on 1.9.65? Last but not least, to Satprem the Mother had expressed the wish to have “*a meditation room downstairs, but with columns and probably a circular shape. I say probably, because I am leaving that for Roger to decide.*” Would such pattern, anticipating Mother's vision of the Chamber, fit with a pagoda-like building in the Japanese style? Hence the question: Mogul (Satprem) – or Japanese (Huta)? Both exclude each other.

Nowhere in the twelve-page conversation, tape-recorded, which the Mother had with Satprem is a Japanese park mentioned. Also, there are not many flowers, only “*flowers in the form of creepers*”. Yet this is the park that Mother saw when a little girl, “*perhaps the most beautiful thing in the world with regard to physical, material Nature*”, which she saw in France, not in Japan. The quasi-absence of flowers in that French park is in sheer contrast with the twelve gardens of the Park of Unity the Mother will describe to Huta two days later. Moreover, how does the Golden Pavilion's thick pine forest with

occasional snowfalls, situated between the northern mountains and the western Mt. Kinugasa, relate to Auroville? The rare alternative being deciduous trees, at fall turning red? Without any flower for this is a Zen Temple in a Zen set-up, with living quarters in a typically Zen style? What about the ‘garden’ in front of the chief priest’s chamber, made mostly of pines, along with rocks with moss (in Kyoto’s outskirts moss grows spontaneously) – and not one single flower?

In addition, Huta mentions marble everywhere. And not just for the Shrine, but for the park as well; whereas not once does Satprem mention marble. None of the features Huta mentions appears in Satprem’s records. Paths and pavements with precious, semi-precious and artificial stones? Marble plates attached to the trees? Carved marble seats, under the trees – as well on the top terrace, with velvet and satin cushions? Marble fountains and marble statues, *“one of them will be Shiva in deep trance. From his matted hair flows the water like a fountain...”*? Incidentally, this Shiva fountain is a latest addition; nowhere is it mentioned in Huta’s first book. How does such opulence relate to the elegant simplicity of the Japanese spirit and life-style, strongly influenced by Zen Buddhism? To its search for perfection in wood, straw, bamboo partitions and earth walls – forerunners of contemporary design? Turning the gardens’ abstract beauty into objects d’art, yet endowed with the same power mandalas have, for every single item enhances the quest of the Sacred?

The dry gardens of Zen Buddhism

What does a Zen garden look like, particularly in the light of Kyoto’s tradition – of which the Golden Pavilion is a noble example? Where Zen gardens are to foster contemplation, and gardening is part of the monks’ daily meditation? How would this relate to Matrimandir? In our query, these are essential questions.

By Zen gardens it is usually meant the dry landscape of kare san sui. This is the abstract representation of a mountain and water (the sea, or a river) where there is no water at all. The main change was the introduction of stones as symbols of the allegorical scenes of Zen Buddhism; this will later lead to the classical kare san sui, profoundly marking the history of the Japanese gardens: a relatively small court, hosting a sculpted garden that could take illimitable dimensions, to be contemplated from a nearby pavilion. An allegory of vastness within smallness. Hence the name of contemplation-gardens. Hosting monks along with artists in a mixture of spiritual and profane, the Zen temples became centres propagating art and culture. This profoundly reflected in the art of Zen gardens, whose sculptural beauty leads to contemplation – and whose keeping up was part of the daily Zen practices. At the exhibition about Mother in Japan, sponsored in April 2002 by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the first text read as follows:

“The ancient gardens in and around Kyoto are among the foremost creations of Oriental art. And yet they were designed not so much to produce aesthetic pleasure as to promote a meditative calm. Contemplation of man’s place in the cosmos plays an essential part in Zen, a Buddhist sect that became Japan’s most influential religion in the 13th century; accordingly, the gardens that Zen priests and laymen studied during their meditations were symbolic, miniature versions of the world of nature. The



Ginkakuji (The Silver Pavilion)
Kyoto, Zen garden

profundity of nature could best be rendered, Zen gardeners thought, not by ornate statues and brightly colored trees, but by evergreens, dark mosses and rustic paths, or by a stark design of black rocks on white sand. Such gardens, they believed, preserved some of the mystery and the spirit of a lesson taught by the Buddha who, when asked to define ultimate reality, silently pointed to a flower.”

An ornamental lake – or a sheer necessity?

Is the lake of Mother's drawing, encircling the Matrimandir islet on top of a hill, a purely aesthetic feat? Can it be reduced to a canal? Or, in the absence of "*the big river*" of the early creation, would the lake be the *deus ex machina* for the water supply of a city that the Mother had planned for 50,000 inhabitants?

With Satprem, the Mother put the emphasis on "*water (if possible, running water – it must be running water) and, if possible, a small waterfall – running water*". It is with Satprem that the Mother stressed the necessity of providing water to the town, whereas in Huta's records this cogent problem never surfaces. Telling Satprem about her first concept of an ideal town, thirty years earlier, the Mother had stressed the presence of a big river flowing downhill. Not by chance. In the past, the wealth and splendor of cities largely depended upon the presence of a river – the sea being the other alternative. "*There was even N. who was a sailor and who said he would obtain a sailing boat from England to sail up the river, collect all the products and bring them back to us here - everything was very well seen to!*" the Mother had told Satprem, while describing the ideal town where Sri Aurobindo would have lived at the centre. And then, about Auroville:

The biggest difficulty is water, because there is no nearby river up there; but they are already trying to harness rivers. There is even a project to divert water from the Himalayas and bring it across the whole of India (L. had made a plan and discussed it in Delhi; of course, they objected that it would be a little costly!). But anyway, without going into such grandiose things, something has to be done to bring water; that will be the biggest difficulty, that's what will take the longest time. As for the rest - light, power - it will be made on the spot in the industrial section - but you can't manufacture water! The Americans have given serious thought to a way of using sea water, because the earth no longer has enough drinking water for people (the water they call "fresh"¹ ... it's ironical); the amount of water is insufficient for people's use, so they have already started chemical experiments on a big scale to transform sea water and make it usable - obviously that would be the solution to the problem.

But it already exists.

It exists, but not in a sufficient proportion.

Yes, in Israel.

They do it in Israel? They use sea water? Obviously, that would be the solution - the sea is there.

It has to be studied.

Then the water would have to be sent uphill.

Mother's Agenda, 23.6.65

The Mother's preoccupation with the endemic scarcity of water re-appears in a four years later conversation, this too taped, like the previous one. She told Satprem:

R.'s idea is an island at the centre, with water around, running water which will be used for the whole water supply of the city; and when it has flowed through the city, it will be sent to a plant, and from there to irrigate all the cultivated lands around. So this centre is like an islet, and at this centre, there is what we first called the "Matrimandir" ...

There are material difficulties: for this islet, we need water - naturally, otherwise it's not an islet! To have the water, we must transform it - there isn't enough underground water.

¹ 'Fresh water' is eau douce in French, douce meaning 'gentle' or 'sweet'.

Not enough water?

There is water, but it's enough for one or two houses, anyway not enough to create a permanent flow. We would need transformed sea water. In Israel they have found a way to do it economically (we even have brochures on this), but you understand, economical for a city, not economical for an individual! So then, we'd need to have water to make this islet, that's the difficulty.

But before building the islet, we can begin building the "temple" itself ... Begin by lifting a pebble.

Yes, we could do that. ...

Mother's Agenda, 31.12.69

Huta repeatedly wrote about a large lake surrounding the Matrimandir island. On 25.6.95 the Mother told her:

This shrine must have a vast area – not like this (Mother took her handkerchief in her palm and closed her hand), so small. Also there must be a silent zone. No vehicles should move in this area, there should be no noise of any kind.

The Park of Unity will be divided into twelve gardens, which will represent the Twelve Attributes of the Supreme Mother.

On the other side, towards the boundary of the gardens, I wish to have huge trees like palms, varieties of ferns, neem, Indian cork-trees, eucalyptus and many other beautiful big trees.

The whole area will be surrounded by a lake so that the Mother's Shrine may be on an island.

When the lake will be dug, all the soil will be collected on one side in order to make it look like a mountain where there will be fir trees.

Huta, Matrimandir: the Mother's Truth and Love, p. 6-7

The circular road and the water reservoirs about which two days earlier the Mother had told Satprem were no longer mentioned. Instead, a lake encircled by his uniform contour an almost oval island on which was the Mother's Shrine along with the Park of Unity, divided into twelve gardens. These represented the twelve attributes of the Mother. The single entrance-gate into the park had changed into a bridge. The concept of an unspecified silent zone, with no vehicles, and to which one had access only with permission, was being introduced: was this the island surrounded by the lake? The size of the lake was not mentioned, but that of the Shrine's area was defined as 'vast'. Towards the gardens' boundary, at the outer edge of the lake, there would be huge trees and a variety of ferns.. At the North-West corner was a hillock¹ planted with fir trees. Are the four ovals outside the lake, at the four corners of Mother's drawing, representing areas planted with huge trees – as Narad interprets it? Would these correspond to the Mother's 'Four Powers' – in Huta's second book, a late addition? This would not agree with Mother's symbol. For, if we interpret the twelve gardens in the light of that written above, the twelve attributes of the Mother would be the outer ring; while the four powers would be in the middle ring surrounding the centre: the opposite of the sketch the Mother drew.

When recollecting Mother's words Huta never mentioned Auroville's acute shortage of water, of which the Mother, Roger and Satprem were so dramatically aware. In the same interview with = I, published around 1967, Roger said:

“Technically, with up to five thousand inhabitants we may utilize existing facilities, connect the power-lines to Neyveli supply and use artesian wells for water. With a population of twenty-five thousand, water problems become more acute in a district where water is scarce. We envisage then a sea-water desalinization plant.”

¹ During the conversation on 16.2.68 Huta uses the plural, hillocks.

This was one early option. It would take another thirty years before the ecological, all-comprehensive approach of Harald Kraft (a German engineer and a consultant of GTZ, technical wing of the German Federal Government), investigating the issue since when a university student, would manifest; when hopes to fulfill Mother's vision of a "huge lake" seemed lost. Is the lake the Mother envisaged around Matrimandir the way to supply water to a town of 50,000 inhabitants? In her latest book Huta comments:

"I am told that in 1985 M. Harald Kraft, a leading water-engineer from Germany who has been associated with Auroville since the 1970s, realized that the Mother's vision of a large lake at the centre of Auroville could provide the solution for assuring a constant supply of pure water to the city, even when it grows to have 50,000 inhabitants, as she had wished. He has prepared a proposal explaining how this can be done, and I believe this is now under discussion in Auroville. I sincerely hope that the Mother's wish for a big lake around the Matrimandir will be fulfilled. But it should be very far from Matrimandir, because the Mother wanted the Matrimandir as a huge island."

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p. 284

The 'nebula': 'an artificial round lake'

For reasons we don't know the planned town of 'Auroville' had been shifted from near Usteri Lake (which for the Mother had such a power of attraction that it called back the early formation of an ideal town, thirty years before) - to the top of the hill where is now the early settlement of Promesse. On September 7, 1965, Roger handed over to the Mother his first report on the township she had asked him to build. Objecting to the location along the main Pondicherry-Madras highway, Roger had written:

"... in the particular case of Auroville the centre should be as far as possible from the main highways because of the presence of the Pavilion of the Mother in the Park of Unity."

The Mother wrote her comments on the report point by point. Regarding the above statement, she replied:

The Park of Unity must be surrounded by a kind of isolating zone so that it is solitary and silent. One has access to it only with permission.



As a result, the Mother shifted once more the centre of Auroville; this time to its present location. This is the first and only written statement by the Mother mentioning the 'Park of Unity' around her Pavilion; afterwards this will be called 'the Garden of Unity'.

In March 1966 Roger presented to the Mother his first two layouts for the city. She discarded the square plan without even opening the album. Was it a mere coincidence that the only layout for the town that the Mother rejected was the only one that did not have a circular shape, mandala-like? After mentioning again her first creation, in the thirties, of a city-country with Sri Aurobindo living at the centre, the Mother told Satprem, about a brochure on Auroville she carefully went through:

The photos are very pretty. One is quite like a nebula. ...It's sure to work, I KNOW it exists- the city is already there (it has been for many, many years). Interestingly, my creation was with Sri Aurobindo in the centre, then when Sri Aurobindo left, I let it all rest, I didn't budge anymore. Then it suddenly started coming again, as if to say, "Now is the time, it must be done." Very well. The Muslims would say, "It's fated." It's fated, it's sure to exist. I don't know how much time it will take, but it seems to be going fast.

The city already exists.

And the remarkable thing is that I simply told R. the broad outlines, asking him if he was interested. Then he went back to France and he received my formation (my old formation, which I myself had left asleep); he received it there. I found that very interesting. He received it, he said to me, 'It came all at once, I seemed to be possessed by something, and in one night the whole thing was done.'

Mother's Agenda, 3.4.66

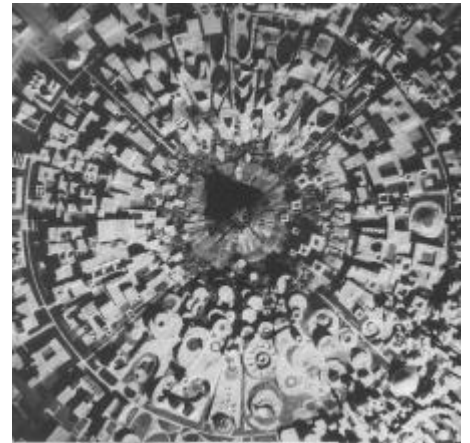
On March 10, 1966 the Mother had written to Huta about the 'nebula':

... I have said nothing about Auroville this morning because I had not yet had a talk with Roger. Yesterday, I saw only the plans and models of the town that are simply wonderful, just as I wanted them to be. They will be exhibited in the Auroville office in front of the Ashram. You can see them there, and I am sure that you are happy as the Truth Pavilion is a kind of islet in the centre of an artificial round lake and looks like an immense lotus opened towards heaven. I talked with Roger only this afternoon and he told me all his plans of action and work which are excellent.

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p. 44

In that brochure, published for the UNESCO, the Matrimandir was described so:

"The axes of communication towards the centre create a convergence, a densification of buildings, increasing to a point where they suddenly open out upon the gardens of Unity. In the centre of these gardens, surrounded by a lake, will be situated 'The Sanctuary of Truth', and the Matrimandir, (Shrine of the Mother). (...) At the centre of the town, the Park of Unity is formed by a crown of gardens overhanging the lake which surrounds the Sanctuary of Truth with the Matrimandir"



The Mother's Pavilion stood on an islet having the appearance of a mound at the centre of a large, circular lake. Nothing else appears, besides the Shrine. As for the symbolism of the "immense lotus opened towards heaven", this will remain the symbol of Matrimandir – a stylized sculpture – until the Mother, having had her final vision of the Chamber, approved in March 1970 the final concept of Matrimandir.

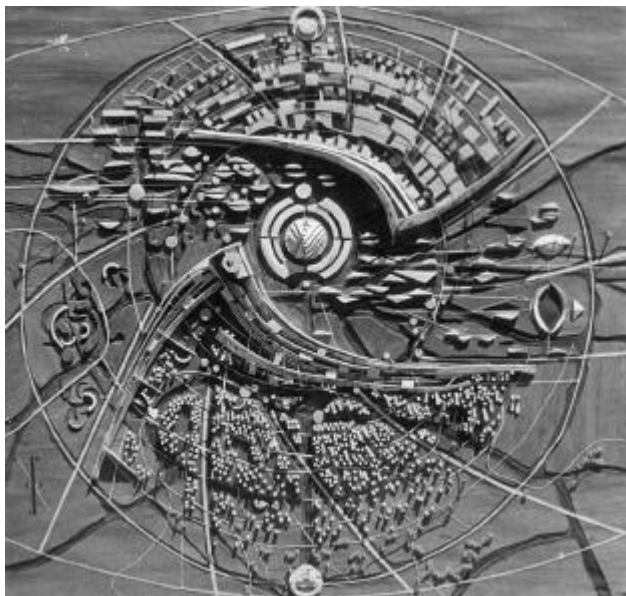
On September 11, 1967 the Mother told Huta:

The Truth Pavilion and your tiny house will be very close to each other – your house will stand between the Banyan tree and the Truth Pavilion. All these will be on an island – surrounded by water, trees and the gardens of Unity. It will take five years if we have sufficient money. Yes... otherwise... But I want the whole town to be built within ten years' time.

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p. 64

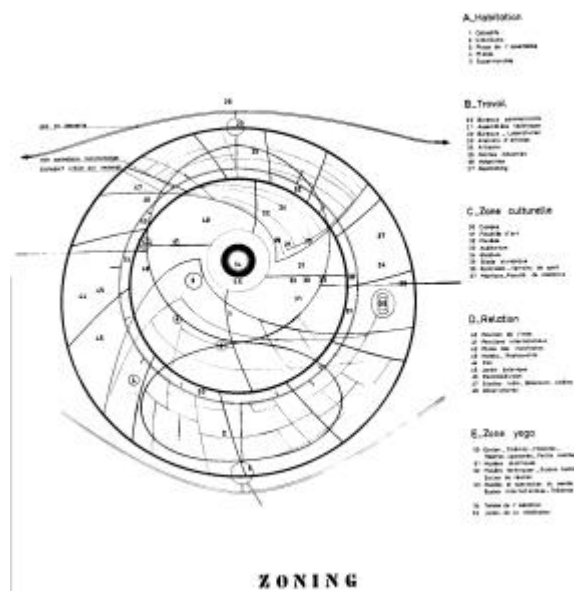
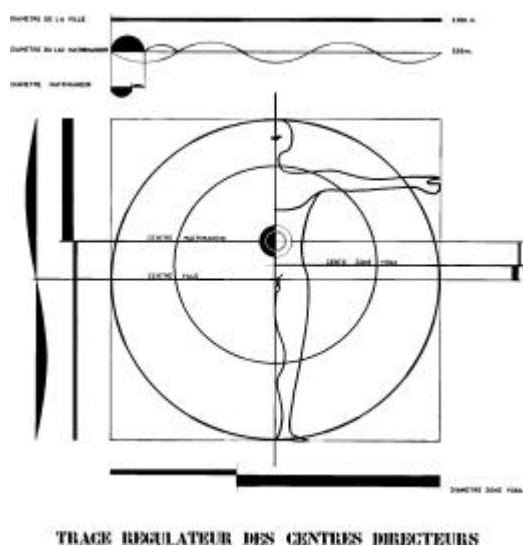
Two most important statements had been passed: if money was available, the Pavilion and the surrounding area would be completed in five years. As for the town, the Mother wanted it "to be built within ten years' time."

'Auroville the town of the future': the Yin-Yang layout



In the issue of November 1967 the Ashram's *Bulletin* presented the latest model of the town. Two macrostructures (then the latest fashion in architecture), which Roger saw as the Yin and the Yang, encircled Matrimandir. The model, reproduced on brochures published at the end of 1967, was still reproduced on brochures, postcards (on which the Mother wrote "*Auroville the town of the future*") and other documents distributed at the ceremony for the foundation of Auroville on February 28, 1968. Regarding the Matrimandir Roger wrote:

"At the foot of this regal balcony, on the inner side of the ring, stretches the garden of Unity, encircling a shining lake whose running waters supply Auroville's canals, waterfalls, fountains and paddy-fields. From this lake rises a symbol of all manifestation, the intersection of all intersections, an unattainable white and golden island, burning like a high flame."



The 'galaxy': the final layout for the town approved by the Mother

In reply to a rumor that there would be just a small lotus instead of the Mother's Pavilion, on February 16, 1968 the Mother told Huta: "*Yes, nasty people speak against the Truth...*" Then Huta proceeded with a description of the gardens that did not appear in her first book and is almost a replica of the conversation on June 25, 1965. The novelty is that the lake is defined as "*huge*". In the description of the town reported by Huta there are details that may not agree with the layouts approved by the Mother.

Your tiny house will be between the Mother's Shrine and the banyan tree. There will be 12 gardens with various kinds of Hibiscus and other flowers, plants, tall trees with marble seats underneath. Marble statues, marble fountains, small waterfalls, small pools with different colored lilies and lotuses, small bridges, rockeries in Japanese style with varieties of cactus. There will be only one entrance. The pavement will be decorated with precious and semiprecious stones. This area will be surrounded by a huge lake. On one side of it, there will be tall trees – they mean Unity. On the other side of the lake there will be hillocks with fir trees. The mother's Shrine will be on an island.

Huta, The Spirit of Auroville, p.68-9

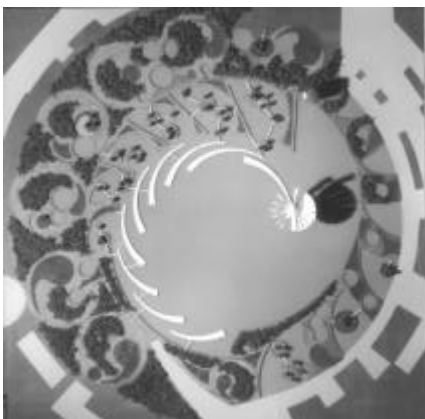
At the beginning of 1968 Roger had brought from Paris two models, with slight variations, of the final layout of the town. In its spiral form the Mother saw a galaxy:

You know that photograph of the galaxy? It's very lovely. And one of the plans for Auroville is almost identical to it, and they did it without seeing the photograph of the galaxy...

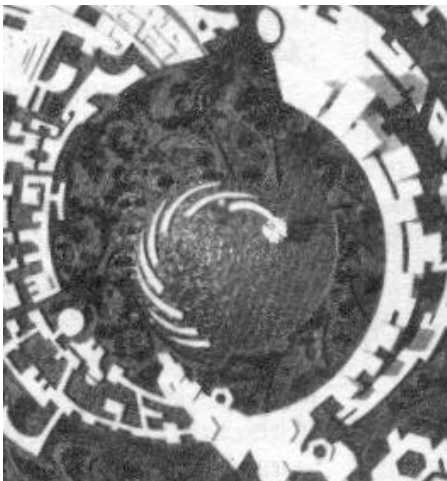
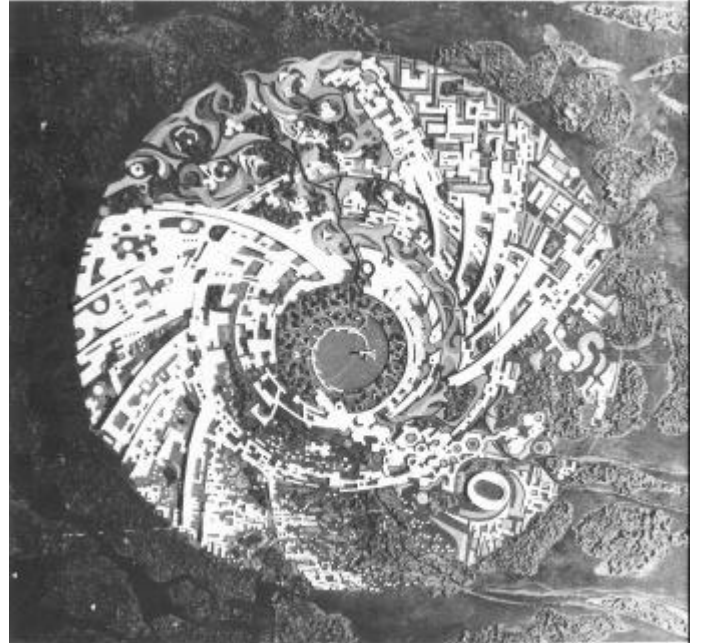
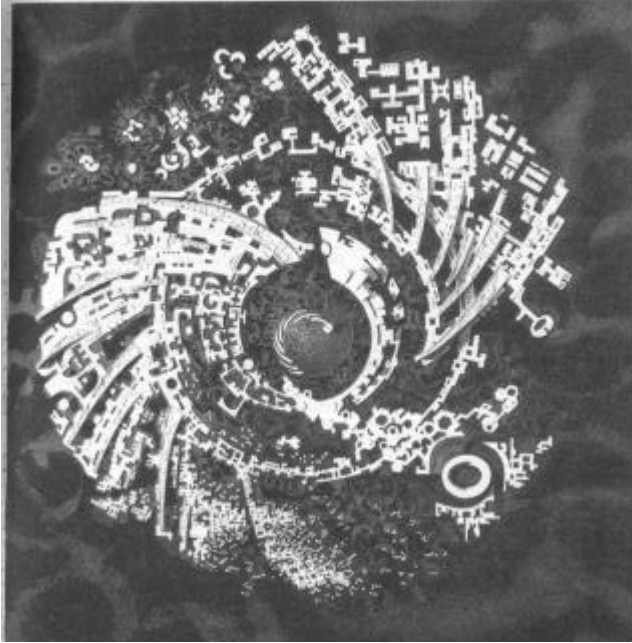
Mother's Agenda, April 20, 1968

In the 'galaxy' the four zones would be separated by parks; a circular 'crown' road hosted essential services. The international zone featured the national pavilions. The residential zone, high-rise buildings, mildly curvilinear, whose height decreased from the centre towards the periphery, where smaller dwellings and a few single houses would be accommodated. The cultural zone foresaw, among others, a large university (the seed for the CIRHU). The industrial zone would host small-scale industries, pollution and noise-free, and ateliers as well; heavier industries were planned outside the city, mainly along the coast. A luxuriant green belt (where no one except guardians was meant to live) encircled the city. All polluting traffic would stop at the outer edge of the green belt. From that point onwards only bicycles were allowed or slow-speed electric cars. For speed traffic, as well to deliver the goods necessary to the daily living, a network of electronically driven capsules was foreseen, underground. Agriculture was to be carried on partly within the green belt's territory, partly outside. Rural cooperatives gathering Aurovilians and villagers alike were foreseen. Producing all that was necessary to the citizen's life, while selling the surplus outside, the town was expected to be economically self-sufficient.

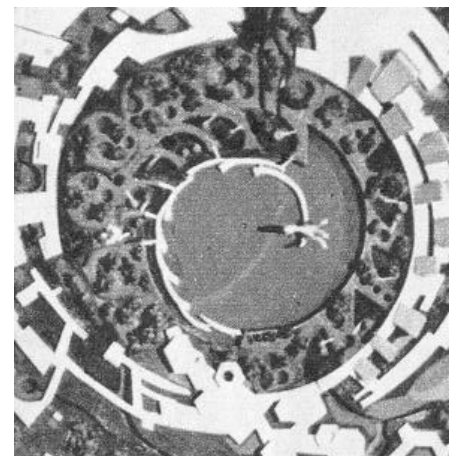
On 28.2.68, Auroville Foundation Day, the two preliminary models of the galaxy had been displayed under the banyan tree. A list of names, in French, that the Mother had given for the twelve gardens was exhibited as well; the Garden of Love (around Matrimandir), and that of Unity (around the banyan tree) had been added. Did the Mother add those two extra gardens after she saw the models? However, in those two early models of the galaxy the banyan tree, the Garden of Unity and the newly-built urn were not yet represented – due to the difficulty of purchasing the land? As for the urn, it had been started just two weeks before Auroville's Foundation Day. There might have been gardens on the outer bank of the lake, but their number was uncertain. The white square behind the Matrimandir-sculpture was probably Huta's house. Emerging out of a circular lake, the Matrimandir was linked to the outer bank by a system of bridges: a sculpture ahead of curvilinear buildings, arranged in a semicircle, this too in a spiral form.



EARLY GALAXY MODELS, 1968



The large model
and
the small one



displayed on Auroville Foundation Day
28.2.1968

A French brochure published in 1970 explained:

“At the centre is located the town’s spiritual and symbolical meeting point, the ‘Matrimandir’, a large water body and gardens surrounded by a row of buildings in which will be gathered all the function of urban management, administration, public services, spreading over 150 acres.”

A first attempt to commence the gardens

In October 1969 the Mother had instructed Roger to go ahead with the twelve Matrimandir gardens. However, on October 17, 1969 Huta wrote to her:

“Nava told Lajibai [Huta’s brother] that the Mother had instructed Roger already to make 12 gardens in the central part of Auroville. And Nava asked Rs. 50,000/- from Laljibai for the purpose. But Laljibai has refused owing to so many reasons.

All this came to know from Laljibai who sometimes tells me about Auroville. He says that he has an intense aspiration to build the Mother’s Shrine and the area around it from the money which will come from the industries. He also says that the money people offer for the purpose might be with various adverse vibrations and desires. So the money for the Mother’s Shrine possibly can come from one source and that also with a pure intention, or from sincere offering from anyone.

He says that the Mother’s Shrine must be built exactly according to the Mother’s will and guidance. ...

Mother, I am sure you will fulfill the aspiration of true and sincere people.

On my side, I pray to you that your Will may be one for everything in all Truth and Love. ...”

The Mother replied:

Very good. I appreciate Laljibai’s attitude and his intention.

You can be sure that the Matrimandir will be done according to the Divine’s inspiration.

With love and blessings.

Auroville Archives¹

The Mother also contacted Narad² in the USA, inviting him to come back and develop the Matrimandir gardens. On December 18 the Mother met Narad and his wife Anie, giving them names for the gardens different from those corresponding to the Mother’s attributes, as she had previously told Huta. Besides, she mentioned two more gardens: ‘Love’, around Matrimandir; and ‘Unity’, around the banyan tree – asking them to commence with the Garden of Unity. Anie reported that the Mother said:

I have chosen all the flowers. It must be a thing of great beauty, of such beauty that when people come they will say ‘Ah, this is it’. It must be an expression of that consciousness which we are trying to bring down. One must know how to move from consciousness to consciousness.

On December 31, 1969, after unveiling to Satprem the final vision she just had of the Chamber, the Mother spoke about the gardens. Matrimandir, the banyan tree and Huta’s house were on the same island. The two banks of the lake were linked by a system of bridges. The outer bank was divided into twelve gardens, each with the flowers representing a specific state of consciousness. The last garden was on the islet, beside the Matrimandir with the banyan tree; there would be a repetition of the twelve outer gardens.

R.’s idea is an island at the centre, with water around, running water which will be used for the whole water supply of the city; and when it has flowed through the city, it will be sent to a plant, and from there to irrigate all the cultivated lands around. So this centre is like an islet, and at this centre, there is what we first called the “Matrimandir... [After describing the Chamber, the Mother continues:] So then, for

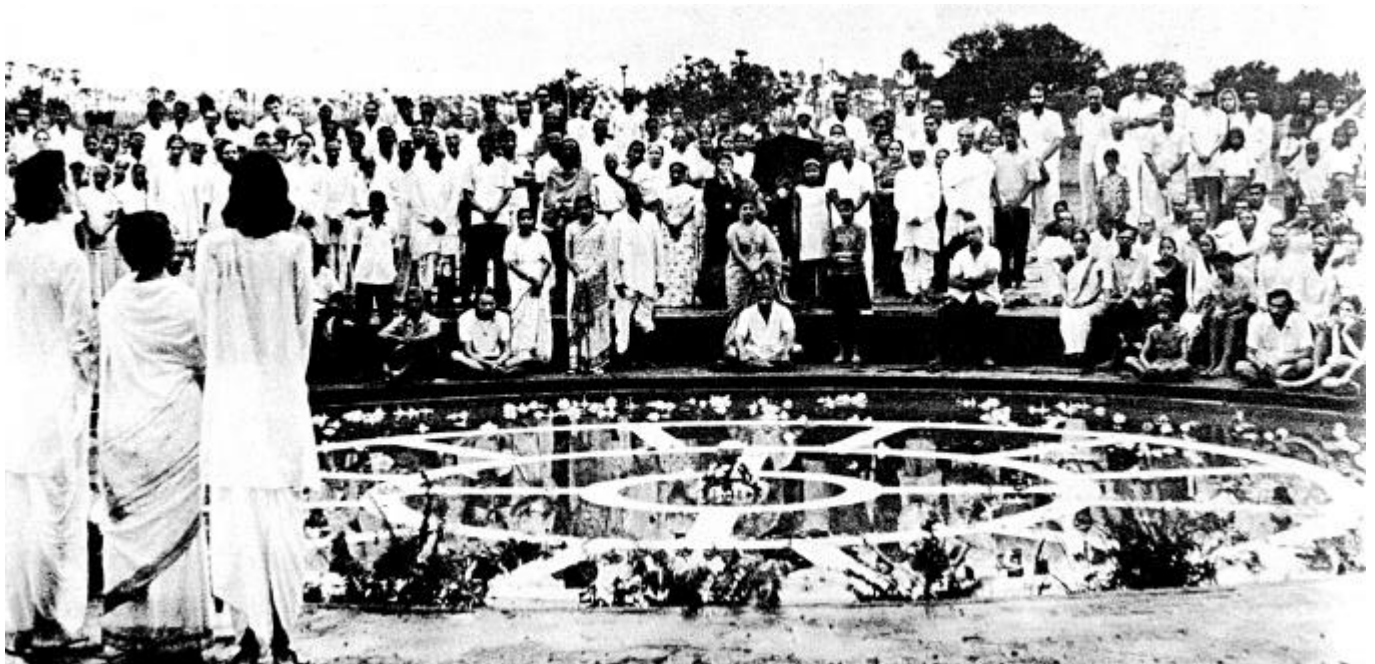
¹ In Huta’s first book, only Mother’s answer to Huta expressing “Laljibai’s feelings towards Matrimandir” is reproduced. In her second book, Huta quotes only her last two sentences and Mother’s second sentence.

² In view of the imminent beginning of the Matrimandir gardens, on February 21st, 1970 Narad (then still Richard Eggenberger) and others started the ‘nursery’.

the rest, it's the same to me, they will do as they like. They first thought of building a dwelling for me, but I'll never go, so it's no use, it's quite unnecessary.¹ And to watch over the islet, it was agreed there would be a small house for H. who wanted to be there simply as a guard²... Then R. had arranged a whole system of bridges to link that to the other bank. The other bank would be entirely made of gardens all around. Those gardens ... we thought of twelve gardens (dividing the distance into twelve), twelve gardens with each of them concentrated on one thing: a state of consciousness with the flowers representing it. And the twelfth garden would be in the islet, around (not around but beside) the "Mandir" with the tree, the banyan which is there.³ That's what is at the centre of the city. And there, there would be a repetition of the twelve gardens around, with the flowers arranged in the same way... There are now two Americans here, husband and wife, and the husband studied there for more than a year the art of gardening, and he came here with that knowledge. So I asked him to start straight away preparing the plan for the inner garden: they're working on it.

Mother's Agenda, 31.12.1969

On January 1st, 1970 the Mother told Roger to start working on a concept for Matrimandir. This was the follow-up of the conversation on December 31 during which the Mother had agreed with Paolo's idea, conveyed by Satprem, to first start with the spiritual centre of the town. The design process of Matrimandir commenced in January 1970, the crucial year during which the concept for the inner and outer Matrimandir was thoroughly worked out. Not a Mogul miniature, or a pagoda-like Pavilion, but a supramental sun radiating its own aura: this is the Matrimandir the Mother chose. The journey had just begun in a new scenario.



August 14, 1970. Invocation for Matrimandir to manifest

¹ Huta, however, will keep insisting with the two 'secret chambers' inside Matrimandir (one for the Mother, and another one for the Lord), until the Mother will put a halt to this on March 15, 1973.

² In the cassette Mother adds: "somebody has to guard".

³ As Gilles pointed out in his book, the sentence recorded in the cassette is slightly different: "And the twel... the last garden would be in the islet, around (not around but beside) the thing [the Mandir] and with the banyan tree, which is there."

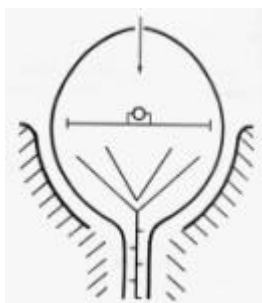
THE FINAL MATRIMANDIR

The Mother chose the model in harmony with her vision

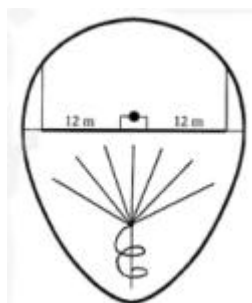
In 1969 Roger was busy preparing the plans of Auromodel. The ‘advanced colony’ was to host a few thousands people for the specific purpose of building the town: architects, engineers, technicians, accountants, general staff etc. As the name indicates, Auromodel would have provided the opportunity as well to experiment with urban design and social interaction. “*It is good – it must be started (...) It is very necessary, it is very good*”, the Mother told Satprem on 3.1.70. Understanding Roger’s position:

And let it not become a religion, for heaven’s sake! ... That was why I did not insist on the construction of the centre first, because it would be that old cathedral again, that old temple, all that old stuff right away (Mother makes the gesture of planting in the earth), and then everything gets organized around that: religion! We DON’T WANT religion!

Mother’s Agenda, 31.12.69



On January 1st, 1970 the Mother unveiled to Roger the vision of the Chamber in all details, asking him to build the Matrimandir. Plans had to be made. Introduced by Satprem, on January 3rd Paolo Tomasi met the Mother. She welcomed the suggestion of the Italian architect to build the Matrimandir first, but did not accept the changes Paolo suggested for the Chamber. As for the outer structure Paolo proposed – a ‘brahmanic egg’ in marble, half white and half black – the Mother dismissed it, concluding:



... For you understand that in order for me to agree to changes, I have to be certain that the source of the inspiration is of the same quality as the one I had... For the execution itself, I am very well aware that people who know their profession are needed to do the work, but for the inspiration, I have to be positive that the source of inspiration is AT LEAST on the same level as mine... And I am not sure, because I saw so very dearly. And immediately, with Paolo’s ideas, I saw a mixture coming in. All of his ideas are mental ideas, I guarantee you because it’s easy for me to see that. Well, they all bring in the same MIXTURE that is found in everything that’s being done in the world. And that... what point is there in beginning again-again-again?

Mother’s Agenda, 17.1.1970

The Mother had wished that Paolo had looked after the construction of Matrimandir alternatively with Roger, during the six months the latter spent every year in Paris to work out Mother’s instructions with his team. If Roger was too busy with Auromodel, Paolo was supposed to pick up the Matrimandir construction. But Paolo, mainly an interior decorator, did not accept; he maintained a cordial relationship with Roger though, and remained in touch with the project via his friend Piero¹ (the Italian architect who will be entrusted with the execution of the Matrimandir structure). In the tape, that first and only meeting between the Mother and Paolo lasted ten minutes; the lake and gardens were not mentioned. Those eighteen days recorded in the Agenda, between December 31, 1969 and January 17, 1970, are the only instance we know in which the Mother mentioned Paolo.

¹ A young architect with knowledge of engineering (this being taught in all Italian universities) Piero had joined Auroville in March 1968 along with his wife Gloria, she too an architect and Piero’s collaborator. Checking his drawings and calculations with SERC, Structural Engineering Research Centre in Chennai, Government-sponsored, Piero fulfilled the role of a site engineer. On Piero’s call, Paolo kept discussing issues, especially those pertaining to design.

The Matrimandir took on its final appearance in 1970, under the Mother's direct guidance and with her full approval. She had accepted Satprem's suggestion to dig the lake later when the city would be built and water found. All previous plans were thus dropped, and the Mother asked Udar (an engineer at the Ashram who had been involved with the construction of Golconde) to draw the sketch of the inner Chamber, which she had seen precise to the centimetre, down to the most minute detail. As for the structure and exterior, she left it entirely to Roger. Filling a notebook with dynamic, sculptural forms – at times, anticipating the Deconstruction trend – Roger set immediately to work.

On March 24, 1970 (Roger's 47th birthday) along with a model of the Chamber (without the columns) Roger presented to the Mother five models for the Matrimandir's structure: a sculpture-like elliptical hibiscus, a polyhedron, a three-sided and a four-sided pyramid, and a flattened sphere, stretching horizontally. The Mother instructed Roger to keep working on this, a small brass pot put upside down. This is the true origin of the final Matrimandir – and not Paolo's vertical 'Brahman egg'.



Recollecting the event in 1977 Roger wrote:

“After having looked at them [the five models] for long, having asked for the necessary explanations and having spent time over each of the models, the Mother chose one to serve for the elaboration of the concept of the present Matrimandir and she gave me her consent for the work as a whole.”

The Gazette Aurovilienne, vol. 5, 1977

Further elaborating this concept, Roger made several models and drawings; that of a sphere too. Until the day Roger found, in a book on Tantra, a form very close to one model he had made, and that was the end of the quest. On March 28, 1970, four days after the Mother chose the final model for Matrimandir, Huta wrote to the Mother. Replying via her son Andre, the Mother passed two important statements: the lake will be dug later, when water will be available. As for the plan she had chosen, it was in harmony with her vision and had her full approval:

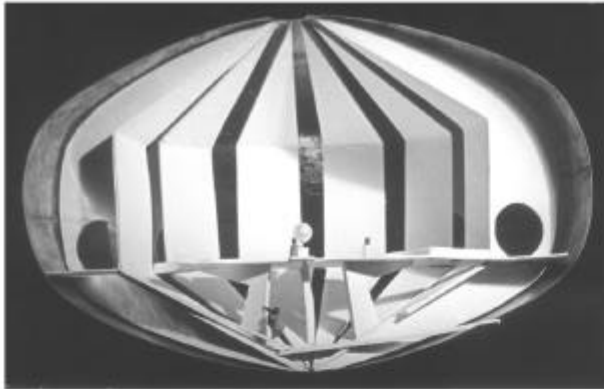
It has been decided and remains decided that the Matrimandir will be surrounded with water. However, water is not available just now and will be available only later; so it is decided to build the Matrimandir now and surround it with water only later; perhaps in a few years' time.

As regards the Matrimandir itself I have selected our plan which agrees with the vision I had of the inside and has my full approval. Therefore there is no need to worry. The Matrimandir will be built now and water brought round it later.

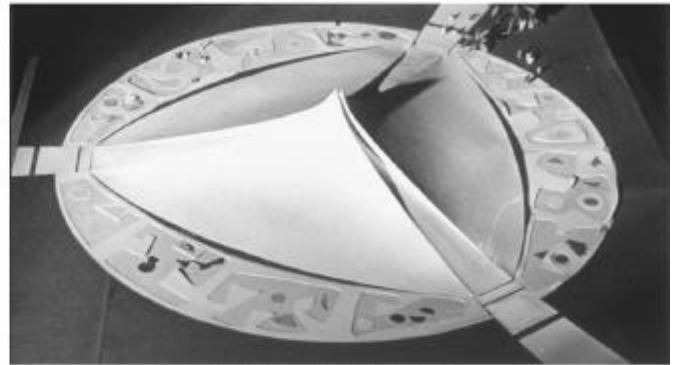
In the two original models of the 'galaxy' (beginning of 1968) the centre of the town was an island surrounded by a large lake, with gardens and a prototype Matrimandir, having the symbolic shape of a many-petal flower. There were no buildings within a 300 metres radius. Under Mother's guidance, in 1970 Roger modified the centre of the two models of the 'galaxy', so as to include Matrimandir and its oval island; he presented two different options, though – and these, temporary only. In the archives of Aurofuture are kept several other drawings, all different. As the size of the lake depends on the availability of water, Roger could never present a final plan for the territory outside the 300 metres radius, between the oval island and the built-up area of the town.

MODELS FOR MATRIMANDIR

24-3-1970



THE CHAMBER



THREE - SIDED MODEL



FOUR - SIDED MODEL



SIX- SIDED MODEL



EIGHT - SIDED MODEL



THE CHOSEN ONE



Matrimandir



The small and the large 'galaxy' models modified, inserting the oval island, after rotation

On August 14, 1970, calling for its material manifestation, people gathered near the site where the Matrimandir would be built. A card was released on that occasion with the photograph of the brass pot (the chosen model); below, the Mother had written '*Matrimandir*'.

In February 1971 Roger brought to the Mother a thermocole model of the Matrimandir and surrounding area – a replica of the original rosewood model, too large to enter Mother's room. A photo of the thermocole model approved by the Mother, representing the Matrimandir with its golden discs (a simplified version, similar to the present ones) and the petals in a nude landscape was reproduced on a card with Mother's handwritten text:

*February 21st, 1971
Laying the foundation stone of Matrimandir
Blessings
The Mother*

On that occasion the large rosewood model was displayed under the banyan tree, on Mother's instruction. The layout of the oval island, worked out with the Mother, was presented for the first time to the public. Whereas there was no trace of outer gardens or parks, the twelve gardens were shifted once more to the island – thus reverting to the original drawing the Mother had made in front of Huta on 23.6.65, six years earlier. To include the twelve 'petals'-meditation rooms around Matrimandir, the twelve gardens, and the urn surrounded by the amphitheatre, the size of the island was increased up to around nine hectares. This implies the increase as well of the size of the lake, proportionately to that of the island.¹ A photograph of the event was reproduced in the *Bulletin* of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram.



The rosewood model under the banyan tree

¹ As in Mother's drawing the length of the island is about six times the width of the lake, this could be 60 metres – and the island's length, 360 metres. The final decision, though, depends on the best option to supply water to the whole township; therefore this measurement is indicative only.



Built in a few years by the best contractor

Thanks to the newly discovered systems engineering approach the town should have been built within five years; afterwards the Mother would have personally selected the inhabitants. For this purpose, in 1969 the Ford Foundation had offered to finance a five crores preliminary study. The Mother had signed as Chairman of the Sri Aurobindo Society the thirteen-page document to be presented to the Ford Foundation. Internal rivalries among those having responsibility posts in Auroville made the Ford Foundation withdraw and that chance got lost. Matrimandir was a new attempt in that spirit. Initially, the completion was targeted for Sri Aurobindo Centenary Day, August 15, 1972. More realistically, later the date was changed to Mother Centenary Day, February 21, 1978.

Such a goal required a highly specialized contractor. The choice fell on ECC, Engineering Construction Company (Larson & Tubro group), already engaged in the construction of the Bharat Nivas. On October 10, 1971 Roger submitted the following to the Mother, who approved it with "*Blessings*":

"The building of the Matrimandir now requires the support of all men of goodwill, both inside and outside Auroville.

The help of specialized and qualified contractors, backed and supported by the faith of the Aurovilians, is necessary for its rapid construction."

The choice of a big contractor had stirred deep emotions. On November 7, 1971 Ruud Lohman, an early Aurovilian involved with Matrimandir since the excavation days, wrote in his journal:

"Yesterday morning we had another meeting at the Centre. We didn't understand anything anymore. Letters went back and forth between Mother and the offices and now all of a sudden things take a new turn, the digging will be done by Tamil workers, to be finished by February 1972 and then a contractor will take over to

complete the pillars by August 1972. It seems a serious thing: the Aurovilians who are here now can't get it done and even here we have to employ paid labour. The Tamilians come with their own teams and have their own rhythm, and we would only be in the way. And so we lost our most important project."

The Mother did not allow major decisions to be taken in Roger's absence or without his consent. This excerpt from Mother's Agenda also sheds light on the controversy raised by Mother's choice of EEC:

... [Piero] has an idea of how to make the Matrimandir, and others have another idea, but then R. is going to arrive soon – I would like to wait for R. to be here, and he will decide.

Because he wrote me a second letter, saying, 'I agree that one must turn to the Source, which is the 'stable and welcoming' reference, but unfortunately one doesn't have direct access to the Source, one has to go through intermediaries....'

(Mother nods her head)

So there are some problems, and he has explained one of them in his letter to me.

Tell me what it is.

For example, he says he wrote you a month ago, in October, and you answered him in writing. He wrote you this: "I have made a detailed study of the work to be done, and I have reached the conclusion that we [Aurovillians] can take upon ourselves the responsibility for the excavation and construction work of the four pillars; then a commercial firm such as EEC [I don't know what it is, it's in Madras, I think] would agree to take over the construction of the Matrimandir itself ..., etc. It therefore appears that the work of the Aurovillians is not an obstacle to the rest of the work being handled by a specialized firm...." Then you answered, "That's very good, I am fully in agreement. The safety and solidity of the work should come BEFORE PERSONAL QUESTIONS. I am counting on you to see that everything goes harmoniously."

And then I realized.... Afterwards, the others told me that he had written that without consulting them.

And he tells me he did it 'after consultation with about 50 Aurovillians.'

No.... Listen, those things are enough to drive anyone crazy!

In a nutshell he wants the work to be handled by the Aurovillians, without barring the participation of experts.

But that's how it is. It will be that way. That's what I said; but when it comes to the actual execution.... I advise you not to get involved in this!

Oh, but I don't intend to at all!

Yes, they're.... It's pretty complicated!

I'll simply tell him to wait for R.'s return and that the decision will be made then.

Yes. But the decision has been made -- I don't know, I thought they were already working.

The 'official' decision is that a firm in Madras will do the work.

Not all the work. We have asked the Aurovilians to be there -- exactly as he puts it.

Well, because he says he is ready even to undertake the foundation work for the pillars.

Oh, no! That's.... Look, tell him that R. will soon arrive and everything will be decided when he's here.

But I really don't want to get involved in their problems!

Well, no!... Did you see the sentence in my letter -- there are also personal questions behind. He is not saying it, but that's what it is. He's hoping to find someone (Satprem) who will give him the authority, you understand?

Yes, I think he is.

So just tell him what I said.

Mother's Agenda, 10.11.71

The Mother had approved Piero's proposal for the construction of the four Matrimandir pillars. Refusing nevertheless the role of a contractor, on November 13, 1971 Piero wrote to the Mother:

"Shyam Sunder now tells us that the work will be executed by a contractor such as E.C.C.

I am very puzzled; my sentiment is still to participate in a creative work directly in contact with matter, to transform it. ...

I only request you to allow me to suspend my work. This is not the direction in which I am working for the past three years in Auroville and I feel that I cannot change now, by reverting to the old position in the relationship with a contractor, which is based on money."

Gilles, Aspiring for Perfection, p.115a

To commence the works ECC had requested an initial capital of 30 lakhs. Even the construction of Bharat Nivas had to be halted, two years; because of lack of funds the construction material for the Bharat Nivas was instead used for the Matrimandir. Out of dire necessity, the Mother had no option but to accept Piero's proposal to supervise the construction site, resorting to paid labour along with Aurovilians. Had the ECC taken over no one else but the Mother and her chief architect would have had any saying, in a contract where the Mother was the client, Roger the architect, and ECC the contractor.

Shaped by the technique and arts of our time

Attempts have been made over the past decades to transcend the limits of matter, raising architecture to the domain of pure art while enhancing technology and science, courting the impossible. Born at the beginning of the seventies, the past twenty years High Tech and its sculptural forms have become true symbols of our age – by reason and intuition becoming one boldly defying the laws of nature. Whereas the High Tech architect creates concepts often futuristic, it is the task of a team of most skilful engineers to accomplish what at first sight may appear to be science fiction. At a time when research along such lines was about to revolutionize architecture, the Mother chose a flattened sphere to enshrine the Chamber, entrusting the execution to Roger. Didn't she say:

Afterwards I had a vision of that room, so I no longer need anyone to see how it should be – I know. What's needed is an engineer more than an architect, because an architect... It has to be as simple as possible. ...

That's why I am getting those kind of sketches [of the Chamber] made by an engineer, so as to show him [Roger], because it's not the job of an architect: it's the job of an engineer, with precise calculations for the sunlight, very precise. It has to be someone really skilled. The architect will have to see that the columns are beautiful, the walls are beautiful, the proportions are correct – all that is quite all right – and also the symbol at the centre. The aspect of beauty is for the architect to see, naturally, but the whole aspect of calculation...

The architect on whom the Mother had put her force sought sculptural forms to be brought into existence by the up-to-date use of new techniques and materials. The 1970 concept of Matrimandir was a High Tech prototype. This implied a light, prefabricated outer structure; in Roger's early dreams this would have been so light that it could be moved, and would have been enwrapped by a translucent membrane as in a cocoon. An early idea was to use the special material by which outnumbered war-ships had been enwrapped for ever-lasting protection, before being deliberately sunk. In 1978, weathered steel was suggested as the best option for the supporting structure – and Teflon (already then a quite successful material) for the covering 'skin'. The whole would have been covered with discs in some synthetic material, they too so light that they would have moved by the wind, mirroring the passing clouds, the wavering water underneath... In the fundraising brochure the golden discs were so described:

"The architectural conception of Matrimandir further enhances its symbolic significance. It shows the emergence of the golden sphere of consciousness out of the earth crater. It tells the story of life, of its multiple changing aspects, of its innumerable facets always in movement, through the similar movements of the golden discs that constitute Matrimandir's most outer appearance. This movement, casting in all directions quanta of energy and looking so much to the observing eye like a haphazard action of the wind, should not make one forget that each disc reflects the sun's rays that fall upon it and contributes to the global luminous appearance of the sphere."

In an interview with Roger in 1971, these were the discs and the 'skin':

"Outside, this basic structure is not covered in a final manner: we choose to leave provision for future changes so that the outer aspect of the Matrimandir may be modified according to the evolution of consciousness of Aurovilians.

In order to achieve this idea, we designed a 'plastic skin' that covers the inner structure. This 'skin' itself will be covered by golden discs also in plastic, fixed at the end of iron rods that will move slightly in the wind. The sunlight will be reflected on this entire moving surface and will produce a sort of vibration which seems to come from the building itself. It will give the feeling of a mass of light that is alive."

Journal of the Indian Institute of Architects, springtime 1971

Was Roger playing alone with new forms and materials? Mother's unconventional approach emerges from her idea of having, at first, "*a globe made of plastic material or... I don't know*" as the most sacred object at the very centre of "*the town of the future*" (*Mother's Agenda*, 3.1.70). It was indeed Satprem (those days, under the influence of Paolo Tomasi) who suggested a crystal, instead of a globe in some plastic material, "about thirty centimetres", as Satprem specified. In June 1971 the Mother told Roger:

Build Matrimandir, put in place my symbol and Sri Aurobindo's and the suspended ball. I take it upon myself to make it into a very strong centre.

Roger's archives, reproduced in Auroville in Mother's words, p. 390

What the "*suspended ball*", in plexiglass, is emerges from that interview with Roger:

"In the centre, our eyes are focused on a luminous ball – 2 feet in diameter. It receives the light coming from the top, diffuses it into the room beneath. We would like to keep this ball suspended and immobile in the air by means of a magnetic field."

Journal of the Indian Institute of Architects, springtime 1971

As for the inner meaning of Matrimandir, here are excerpts from the interview with Roger:

"... the earth opens as if it were under the pressure of an irresistible force. And the golden sphere of

consciousness comes out of the depths. The spiritual meaning is obvious. It shows how out of the evolution of earth shall come the new age promised by all traditions.

Q. If I understand correctly, this is a religious building?

R.A. No. If it were, I would have designed a cathedral or a temple. The meaning of the Matrimandir is above all religions. It expresses the spiritual endeavour, itself the rebirth of man into a new consciousness – ‘Realisation’ as it is called in India. ...

We started with many models that were shown to the Mother and She chose this one. As you see, the general shape is nearly spherical. Observe that I say nearly spherical: it is the exact projection into space of an old tantric symbol concerning Creation and Unity. When looked at from above, the building is circular and when viewed from the side, it is slightly oval. From whatever side, it keeps the same aspect. ... A last word: the road which surrounds the garden of the periphery has exactly the same shape as the Matrimandir, that is the tantric shape we spoke about earlier. The area encircled by the road is exactly 10 times bigger than the Matrimandir’s outline. Interesting... It happened without conscious intention. Puzzled I asked the Mother about the occult signification of the number 10. She answered that 10 is the figure of accomplishment!”

Ibid.

The fundraising brochure blessed by the Mother

In 1971 a large, most beautiful brochure on Matrimandir was published for the purpose of fundraising, the goal being to complete Matrimandir at the earliest with the help of a large contractor. After carefully going through it, the Mother signed with a full page sized “*Blessings*” the back cover of one specimen. Reprinted over and again, for the next seventeen years this remained the one Matrimandir brochure. The following is part of a note written by the Aurovilian (then a member of the Sri Aurobindo Society) who had submitted to the Mother for approval that first specimen.

“Having come to the Mother in 1968 I have been working for Auroville since its inception and have been associated with Matrimandir from the time it started. I was asked by the Mother to raise funds for it so in its initial stages I was closely involved in discussions about its design, shape, etc. alongwith Roger Anger who prepared three designs out of which the Mother chose the present one. I was in fact outside her room when she made the final choice. So the first point is clear that the present design of Matrimandir is the one that She Chose.

In 1970 or 71 the Mother called me one day and said she wanted me to devote all my time and energy to raise funds for the construction of the Matrimandir. For this purpose we decided to produce a brochure which would introduce Matrimandir to the people. This brochure gave a lot of details and I had the opportunity alongwith Roger to see the Mother a couple of times to explain these to her. She looked at all the drawings carefully and asked detailed questions about the various dimensions etc. ...”

Auroville Archives

Besides the photograph of the final layout of the town, the ‘galaxy’, the brochure featured two impressive drawings (four-pages wide, folded in two), depicting a section of the structure along with that of the Chamber. Mentioning the future gardens on the oval island the brochure presented close-ups from the rosewood model:

“Flowers give an extremely colourful look to the place. They are displayed in twelve gardens surrounding Matrimandir and chosen in accordance to their real significance, to the state of consciousness which they express. Around the banyan tree, the Garden of Unity allows for the coming together of all floral hues. Three roads lead to the area. An information centre surrounded by greenery will be placed at the southern entrance. When Auroville is built, a lake will transform the complex into an island.”

Whereas the states of consciousness symbolized by the flowers of the Garden of Unity were listed, throughout the entire brochure there was no mention of any outer garden or park, or of a silence-zone either; whereas it was stated that the lake would materialize along with the town. The description stops

here, as far as the gardens are concerned. In spite of a chronic lack of funds those same gardens were about to be commenced, with Mother's consent, on November 24th (Sri Aurobindo's siddhi day). The last picture in the brochure was the heart of a flower, magnified, with these words by Sri Aurobindo:

"To know the Highest Truth and to be in harmony with it is the condition of right being, to express it in all that we are, experience and do is the condition of right living."

Here are some of the most relevant data featured in the brochure:

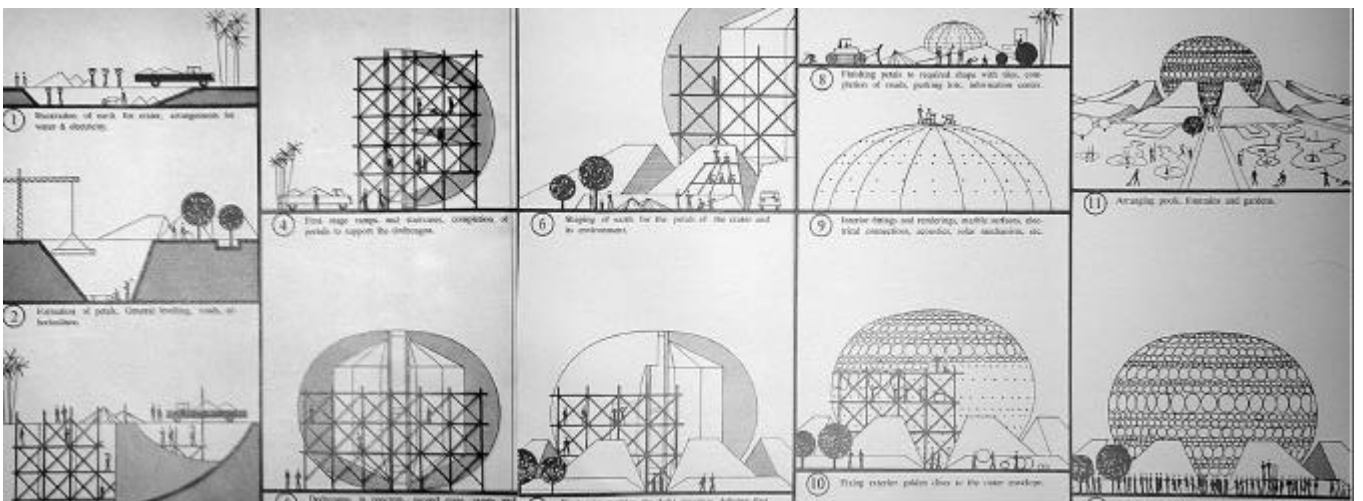
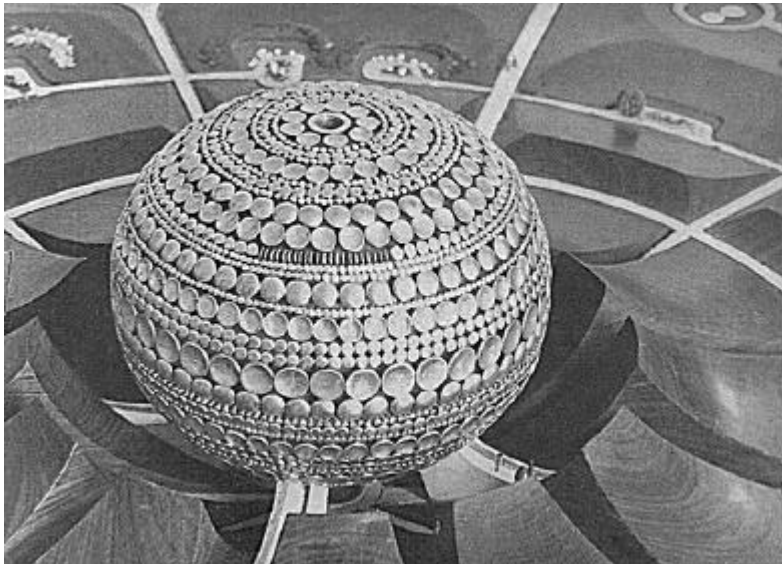
1. The inner structure was to be completed in 12 months.
2. The light envelope structure was to be placed in 2 months.
3. The formation of petals, general leveling, roads, arboriculture would have taken 2 months
4. The completion of the petals (tiling), that of the roads, parking lots and the information centre, 3 months.
5. The interior fittings (besides the electrical connections, acoustics, solar mechanisms etc.), 6 months.
6. The fixing of the polyester discs, 2 months.
7. The pools, fountains and gardens, 2 months.
8. The interior decoration and furnishing, 1 month

Because of the urgency of the matter there was no time to come up with 100% exact calculations. The fundraising brochure, though, is the 'historical' proof of the final concept of Matrimandir and the surrounding area, as it has been approved and blessed by the Mother, who called for its immediate execution. Had the required amount been available, the model would have been executed by EEC and, ideally, completed by February 21, 1978 at the latest: Mother's Birthday Centenary Day. With the passing of the Mother the most outstanding building in "*the town of the future*", too revolutionary to be understood yet, underwent endless modifications. But the truth of its essence, and its secret, remain.

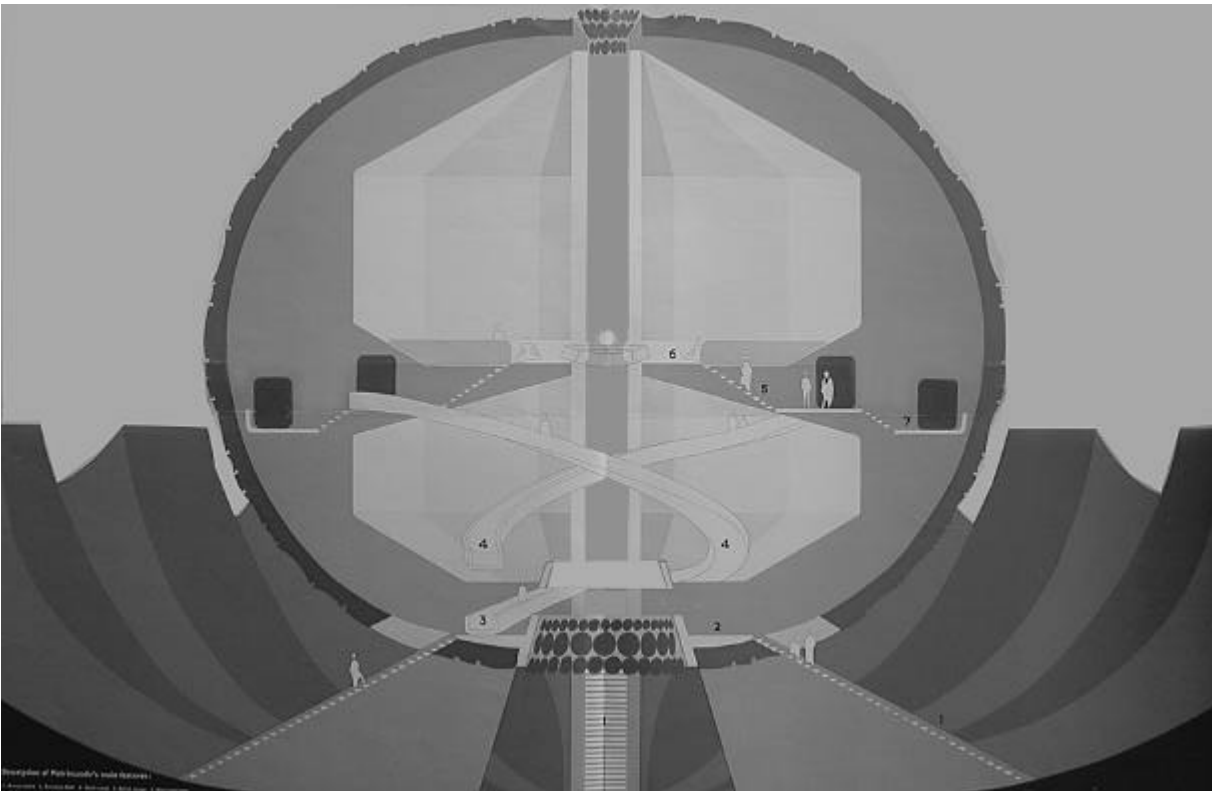


THE FUNDRAISING BROCHURE, 1971

blessed by the Mother



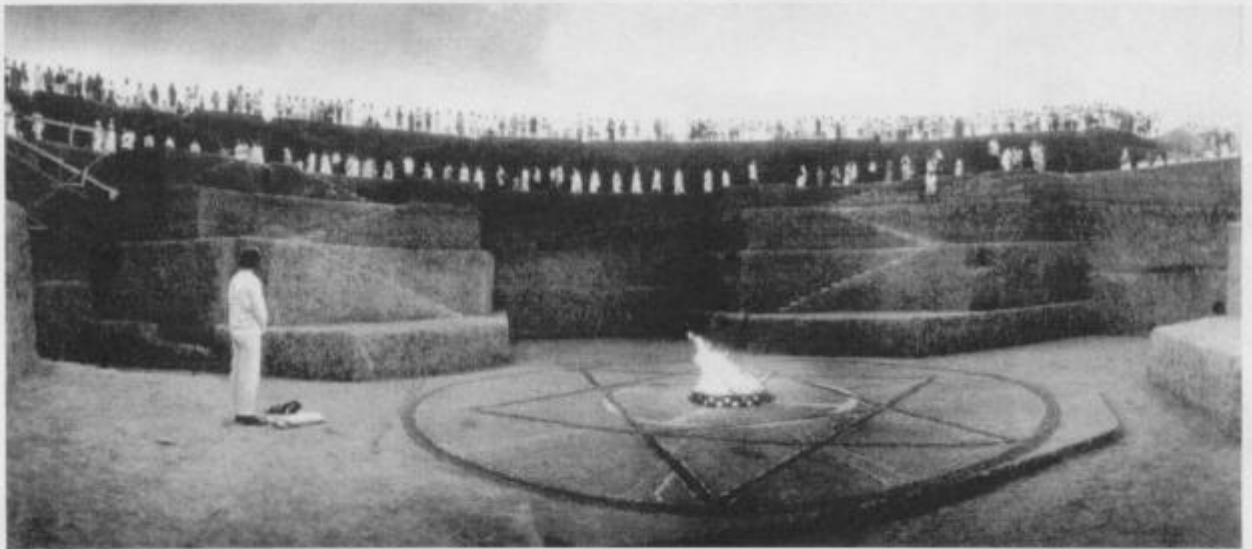
completion time four years



Blessings

FOUNDATION STONE CEREMONY

21.2.1972



WORK FOR THE GARDENS WAS ABOUT TO COMMENCE WITH MOTHER'S APPROVAL

‘Seeing the Matrimandir without anything to distract the eye’

In a note written on July 28, 1978 Piero stressed the similarity between the Matrimandir gardens as outlined in the two sketches the Mother gave to Huta – and the ‘present’ ones. Those were the years at war with the Sri Aurobindo Society. There was no money, a lake seemed a vain chimera; hence the plantation of trees at the place of the lake. If passed today, Piero’s insights would be in harmony with the latest concept; after Harald Kraft came up with a solution that in harmony with Mother’s steady assertion of a lake encircling the Matrimandir island would assure at the same time water to the town of 50.000 inhabitants. A hypothesis already foreseen in the conversation in the Agenda on 31.12.69.

Referring to the four conversations in the Agenda between 31.12.69 and 17.1.70, Piero went straight to the point. While assessing the existence of the island, the lake and the twelve gardens, Piero did not mention any outer garden or park. This is consistent with the Mother’s drawings, where there is none.

“In these conversations Mother is mainly concerned with the vision of the interior Matrimandir and only occasionally She speaks about the location of the gardens. For the gardens She refers to the former idea of the island and lake and to 12 symbolic gardens. ...”

Auroville Archives, reproduced by Gilles in Aspiring for Perfection, p.196

Besides, Piero pointed out that, as recorded in those four conversations, the design had been substantially modified, giving “much flexibility to the architects and the layout”. In Piero’s statement lies the crux of the present diatribe: the Mother had given to her architect the freedom to evolve a structure to be further enhanced by the surroundings. In architecture an essential tenet, when applied to Matrimandir this takes a special force.

“An interesting series of information about the gardens and the evolution of the project came also in 1974 with the publication of the booklet of Huta. But it was clear that the later Conversations with Satprem were substantially modifying the design and giving much flexibility to the architects and the layout.

... However the two sketches are unique and showing in detail basic elements that we found surprisingly similar to the layout of today. ... One sketch shows the island surrounded by water in a circular or oval form. On one side of the lake is collected the excavated earth in a sort of hill or symbolic mountain. The entrance to the island is a bridge and near it is the house or the place for the person controlling the entrance. In the island, but considerably shifted from the centre, the Matrimandir is drawn with a double circle, the house of Huta¹ near it with another small circle, connected by a road or bridge. The gardens are defined by other lines, maybe paths or water. No clear geographical orientation is given in that plan.”

Ibid.

The main reason for Piero writing that two-page long note was to show that the Mother “never stressed in a particular way” the geographical orientation of Matrimandir. In this context Narad’s letter on December 17, 1977, replying to Roger, is also to be considered. In spite of the financial (and political) difficulties, Narad stressed the existence of the lake. Besides, in Narad’s perception the presence of tall trees should not distract from “the full experience of the Matrimandir.” Aware of “the importance of the impression of first seeing the Matrimandir without anything to distract the eye”, Narad had proposed shifting the location of the hillock:

¹Regarding Huta’s house, the guardian, it should be noted that on May 11, 1973 the Mother had accepted Huta’s resignation, commenting with her assistant Vasudha, “I know this. Tell her that it is better like that.” Huta kept the secret for more than twenty years.

“The ‘mountain’ which is NW is to be built from the excavation of the lake. ... I have always felt mountain in the north although as I told you this is just a feeling which I believe is also in harmony with the landscape. Now your letter comes bringing much the same feeling with your idea that the mountain should not compete with the Matrimandir. There is also another point, that the mountain if placed in the north, would not be at the entrance before coming to the Matrimandir, but after one had received the full experience of the Matrimandir.” [Expounding the reasons to locate the mountain in the southeast, as some people wished, Narad concluded,] “They are good reasons but I feel not sufficiently strong enough to counter the importance of the impression of first seeing the Matrimandir without anything to distract the eye.”

Auroville Archives, reproduced by Gilles in Aspiring for perfection, p. 193

The Mother’s symbol: twelve gardens designed like ‘opened lotus petals’

Besides the description of the gardens in the 1971 fundraising brochure, here is how Roger saw them:

“First of all we come to a circular area composed of 12 gardens designed like opened lotus petals. None of these gardens is similar to the others. And yet they make up an overall design. They are separated by streams that originate at the four points of the compass. These streams delineate the shape of the 12 gardens. All together they reproduce the symbol of the Mother. Separately now, they express each of the aspects of the Mother through a floral decoration that may be changed according to the artistic will of the gardeners. The flowers are placed in removable vats. After passing these gardens, we continue on one of the paths leading to the building. There are 12 paths altogether going through a landscape of pyramid-like masses of dense earth, delineated by the streams that unite the ponds of the gardens.”

Interview for the Indian Institute of Architects, springtime 1971

Many elements come together. The “12 gardens designed like opened lotus petals” evoke an earlier concept of Matrimandir. The “... streams that originate at the four points of the compass” are reminiscent of another sketch by the Mother: the four-petal town, reproduced in *Mother’s Agenda* in a stylized version. Another feature is that while the twelve gardens, together, reproduce the symbol of the Mother – and, separately, each aspect –, the demarcation by those four streams would have created four areas that could be interpreted as Mother’s four powers. This would have been in full agreement with Huta’s records, “The Park of Unity will be divided into twelve gardens, which will represent the Twelve Attributes of the Supreme Mother”, to which she added in her second book, “and her Four Powers.” Henceforth Mother’s four powers would not be represented by areas external to the lake, as Narad had suggested in his reading of the Mother’s sketch – but as the four distinct sections within the twelve gardens on the oval island. As for the ever-changing floral decoration, this is the system in display at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, thanks to which there is a permanent exhibition of blossoming flowers and shrubs.

A Japanese Pavilion, a Japanese Garden...

On October 29, 1972, the following entry appears in Shyam Sunder’s notes:

“Mother approved of Prabhat, M.J. Patel, Howard, Frederick and Tim to form a group to coordinate the Japanese Pavilion and cultural participation in Auroville.

Mother wanted to know what is happening about the Japanese Pavilion.

Shyam Sunder informed her.”

Shyam Sunder, Down the Memory Lane, p.241

On November 14, 1972 Mary Helen (Narad's second wife) wrote to the Mother:

"Divine Mother,

In the Matrimandir Garden Nursery I am now working in a small area as an experiment in Japanese landscaping using mainly ferns, begonias and orchids. For the future gardens of Auroville will a careful study of Japanese garden design be useful?

Should the Japanese style be kept pure and traditional? Or should their basic rules of harmony and balance be studied and applied in new ways to achieve the subtle beauty and unity and timelessness?"

Auroville Archives, reproduced by Gilles, Aspiring for Perfection, p.139

Shyam Sunder noted down on that letter (kept at the Auroville Archives) Mother's reply:

It is to be naturally in the Japanese way."

On December 22, 1972, in his notes, Shyam Sunder wrote about the same topic:

"In reply to Mary Helen's query about the Japanese Garden, Mother said:

It is to be naturally in the Japanese way."

Shyam Sunder, Down the Memory Lane, p. 255

Huta and others have interpreted the entry in Shyam Sunder's journal (reproduced without Mary Helen's letter) as relating to some Japanese garden in the Matrimandir's premises. However Shyam Sunder, the one who had read that letter to the Mother, kept denying. Mary Helen's letter, recently found in the Auroville Archives, dismisses the assumption by all such people. In this regard several issues arise:

1. Was it a coincidence that Mary Helen wrote this letter just two weeks after the entry in Shyam Sunder's notes about the Japanese Pavilion, on 29.10.72?
2. The sentence "For the future gardens of Auroville will a careful study of Japanese garden design be useful?" refers to future hypothetical gardens in Auroville. This is what Shyam Sunder read to the Mother, and to which she replied. Matrimandir is not mentioned.
3. The fact that Mary Helen asks the Mother whether such study would be useful rules out that the implementation of eventual Japanese gardens had been decided.
4. The Mother had already approved the execution of the real Matrimandir gardens, and had even fixed a date to commence them: November 24 – ten days after Mary Helen wrote that letter. The pattern those gardens would have followed is known, and agrees with the work on flowers that Richard, a British ashramite, carried on with the Mother between 1970 and 1972.
5. Did the Mother meet Narad again, after the conversation on 18.12.69? Huta mentioned to the Mother Narad's name a few times, because of the slide-show on Savitri and related matters; also, to convey Narad's wish (then Richard Eggenberger) to be called 'Narad'.
6. After the Mother had the final vision of the Chamber and approved of a plan that agreed with it, the concept of the gardens necessarily changed as well, to harmonize with the overall concept. Narad seemed ill at ease with the new formula, as the two messages he wrote to the Mother (on 17.8.72 and on 12.2.73), and the reply he got from her, show.
7. Among the hibiscuses Narad sent to the Mother, she chose seventeen hibiscuses with the name of Auroville or related to it. One is among the ten hibiscuses that the Mother chose as the twelve main flowers for the Matrimandir garden. However, it is with the ashramite Richard that the Mother kept classifying the flowers, choosing those for the twelve Matrimandir gardens.

The Mother chose to commence the Matrimandir gardens on November 24, 1972 – Sri Aurobindo's siddhi day, the descent of the Overmind in the physical

On the Matrimandir Foundation Day, February 21, 1971, the Mother had given the instruction to exhibit under the banyan tree the rosewood model of Matrimandir. This included the gardens; close-ups had been published in the fundraising brochure. What about their implementation? On August 17, 1972 Shyam Sunder wrote in his notes:

“Narad has written to Mother about the smallness of the size of the Matrimandir gardens fixed by Roger. [She replied:]

I have never told Narad that it should be very big... Roger is the best judge.”

Shyam Sunder, Down Memory Lane, p.21

These excerpts depict Mother's second attempt – after that in 1969 – to commence those gardens, in spite of the terrible shortage of funds. On October 20, 1972 Shyam Sunder wrote in his notes:

“... Day before yesterday when Shyam Sunder went to Matrimandir, there came the idea of starting the work of construction of the twelve meditation rooms and the Matrimandir gardens (Mother was happy). On the other hand we have no money. There is no money to pay the land already bought, several construction works have stopped, even for the Matrimandir work already done we have borrowed a lakh of Rupees. In spite of this difficulty the idea persists. I want to know what Mother sees about it.

There is no money at all?

No, Mother.

I see a pressure in the atmosphere... but what to do?

I have spoken to the people at Matrimandir, Piero, Alain. There is the difficulty of money. They have asked me to ask Mother if she says 'yes'. At present, even if one begins, one can begin only slowly.

Are materials necessary?

In the beginning, no, it does not cost much. But towards the end, it will cost a good deal. (Mother gave her approval for commencing.)

Shyam Sunder: Do I say to the people at Matrimandir that Mother has said Yes?

Yes.

Ibid., p.237

On October 24, 1972 (four days later) Shyam Sunder raised again with the Mother the issue of starting the gardens' work. He informed her about Piero's disagreement:

“A few days ago, Shyam Sunder had spoken about the extension of the areas of work of the Matrimandir construction and Mother had approved of it.

She confirmed, “Yes.”

But Piero does not agree to it.

Why?

(Shyam Sunder read out the letter written by Piero to him and Mother wrote a message:)

The true spirit of Auroville is Collaboration and must be more and more so. True collaborations paves the way to Divinity. Blessings."

Ibid., p. 239

Two more conversation followed, the next two days, on 'finding a meeting point, a common base for the work to be done' with Piero. It was finally agreed, between Shyam Sunder, Piero and the workers, to "first finish the necessary studies in detail and then start the new areas of work in a few weeks." Shyam Sunder commented, "Mother was pleased to know of it." (*ibid.*, p. 134)

On November 4, 1972 the four pillars of Matrimandir had been completed up to the level necessary to support the ground floor foundation. Those were the times when all had in mind to complete Matrimandir by Mother's Centenary Day, February 21, 1978 – along with the twelve meditation rooms in the petals and the twelve gardens of the oval. In view of this, the gardens' layouts had been finalized – and the contours, carefully outlined and marked. November 24, 1972 – the descent of the Overmind in the physical – was the day the Mother chose to start the gardens, at 6:15 in the morning. Led by Shyam Sunder, on Darshan day over hundred Aurovilians walked on the contour. The design was same as in the rosewood model and the fundraising brochure; the oval would be covered by Agra's red stones. From a note written by Alain Grandcolas (an early Aurovilian who, together with Ruud Lohman, was to look after the materialization of the gardens according to plan), with the help of Ruud' Lohman's diary:

"Detailed drawings had been prepared by 'Papa' Richardet. Under Piero's guidance Alain had built an experimental canal 'for determining the best method of making the decorative water channels and monsoons drains.' (1.1.72), and to determine the minimum slope also. Alain had gone with Ruud to Madras to some factory, which could manufacture these tiles. (18.12.72). They had also studied with Coco Garden [an Ashram department] how they could be manufactured in Auroville. Twenty-five new workers had been invited to come the next day to continue the road-clearing and then start the leveling work' (3.12.72) ... Later on, I remember to have met some Madras guy who was proposing some binding, with a tar-like but biological material, which would be mixed with the Auroville red soil and would replace the layer of concrete to be overlaid with tiles which would disappear. The process had been approved by Roger: it was much less costly, easier for maintenance (no risk of fungus) and the look was quite similar to our red earth."

Gilles, Aspiring for Perfection, p.137

Uprooting orthodoxy, had not the Mother chosen an avant-garde architect? The gardens in the oval, located inside predefined geographical areas, would have followed a pattern at that time unusual. Sand, stones, trees could be brought and removed or displaced. Would the lawn be brought on square patches and removed at will, as it happens now in golf fields and unconventional set-ups? As for the flowers, they were in wooden or pottery beds, assembled like puzzles. They would change every quarter/year "according to the consciousness of the Aurovilians".¹

Working at those gardens was prevented at the last minute by Piero's suggestion to wait for a bulldozer; instead, the construction of the amphitheatre was picked up. Mother's decision to commence the gardens was postponed for the second time; finally, it never happened.

¹ On March 15, 1974, Vikas wrote to Huta: "Roger came, and has accepted the proposal to plant groundcover and grasses instead of concrete and clay tiles in the Matrimandir area. This is a real step forward." (*The Spirit of Auroville*, p. 180). Four days later Narad wrote to Huta on the same subject: "In a long meeting with Roger and Piero and Shyam Sunder, Roger agreed that the 'Petals' of the Matrimandir could be done in a grass or green ground-cover if we can do it. Huta, it will be done by Mother's grace." (*Ibid.*)

Mother's last words on the gardens: 'the execution of the Matrimandir Gardens has been already told in detail to Roger. That is what has to be done.'

On January 19, 1973, to Huta asking whether Matrimandir would be built according to Mother's vision, the Mother replied: "Yes". (*The Spirit of Auroville*, p. 154)

On February 12, 1973 Narad wrote a letter to the Mother about the gardens:

"Roger wants me to begin this work soon... I am empty of all ideas... I humbly wish to serve Thee in the new way... but I cannot proceed in the old manner..."

Mother said that the execution of the Matrimandir Gardens has been already told in detail to Roger. That is what has to be done."

Shyam Sunder, Down Memory Lane, p.273

The next day, February 13, Shyam Sunder wrote in his notes, *ibid*:

"Mother approves of Shyam Sunder's draft reply to Narad.

Huta has reproduced Shyam Sunder's letter in *The Spirit of Auroville*, p. 155:

"Narad,

I have read your letter of 10th to the Mother. Mother says that the Matrimandir Gardens' execution has already been told in detail to Roger. That is what has to be done."



Allegory of the seven stages of transformation, *Summum bonum*, 1629

OCTOBER 15, 1987: THE 'FINAL' MATRIMANDIR MEETING

[epilogue]

The Mother had just departed; a first alternative 'Matrimandir' materialized as a miracle. It was 1974. Huta's first book, *Matrimandir – The Mother's Truth and Love* was published that same year too, asserting that the 'nebula' (the first layout of the city, 1966) and Mother's early concept of Matrimandir (a Mogul miniature, interpreted as Kyoto's Golden Pavilion, 1965) were, respectively, the final concept for the town and that for Matrimandir. Another controversy was that ignited by Patrizia Norelli-Bachelet; backed by the ashramite Udar, the Italian astrologer rejected the dimensions of the Chamber and other features too (see Appendix, Satprem's reply to Divakar). The post-Mother era had begun.

In June 1978, Professor J. Cook, College of Architecture Arizona State University, commenting on the proposal by Aurofuture for High Tech options such as a weathered steel tubular structure, a Teflon membrane and aluminium alloy discs, wrote:

"The vision of the outer skin covered with 'golden discs, of various diameters both concave and convex, set in a beautiful pattern and gently moving in the wind, giving a sense of breathing and life to the structure', is an attractive and poetic concept. ... The triangular grid frame of tubes which intersect at 60 degrees is at once the most substantial and elegant geometry for a frame. It can be highly efficient. ... The choice of weathering steel does indeed respond to the needs of climate and maintenance. ... But if the Matrimandir requires a steel frame, then weathering steel must be the prime choice. ... The self-protection of the weathering steel is a quality not matched by any other material. ... Teflon is surely among the most dependable of plastics. Its 15 year life expectancies can be verified. But the term 'self-cleaning' must be examined. The use of plasticized fabrics for large temporary structures is by now a fairly well developed practice."

Auroville Archives

Regarding the alternative of a 'bald shell, surrounded by a continuous crater' (both of them in solid concrete) proposed by Piero, here are some other comments by Professor Cook:

"It is true that the recent proposed study to use a regular triangulation of precast concrete members bears no relationship to the proposed pattern of mounted gold-covered discs. ... It is also true that the recent study proposal of a 'bald shell, surrounded by a continuous crater' may, in fact, visually cut the Matrimandir in half. Indeed, it may 'seem to sink into the ground rather than rise out of it.' ... However, we must all agree that a solid concrete outer shell will make the interior dark. Whether it is claustrophobic would depend on the conditions of lighting and furnishing as well as the conditioning of the observer."

Ibid.

There were Aurovilians ready to go ahead with the shell in solid concrete proposed by Piero, whose model was permanently installed in the Matrimandir workshop; ten years later, it was still there. For this reason, around 1975-76 the original rosewood model, found with great difficulty in a Pondy garage, was once more displayed under the banyan tree, along with the small model of the golden-disc Matrimandir that the Mother had kept for a long time in her hands. The Aurovilians passed in concentrated silence under the tree, a sunray was hitting the rosewood model. And the decision was taken: surrender to the Mother.

Years of steady efforts to overthrow the chief architect have deeply marked the history of Auroville. Aurofuture (then the planning office) was in difficulties; as the situation kept deteriorating, Roger was unwilling to continue. The crisis reached its peak in August 1978, when because of the fight with the Sri Aurobindo Society even getting something to eat could be a challenge. A meeting by Aurovilians in the amphitheatre dismissed the original plan of the Matrimandir approved by the Mother as too grand. Roger quit, and Piero went ahead with the massive triangulation in concrete, meant to support the bald shell, this

too in concrete. It would take eight years to build the over-weight triangulation – instead of the two months foreseen for the light-weight tubular structure, approved by the Mother in 1971.

In the early eighties the Government of India stepped in, thus putting an end to the SAS war. In April 1986 Roger returned on an exploratory visit. In the fall of the same year SAIER and the Auroville Development Scheme sponsored a series of compilations, distributed free to the Aurovilians, to reintroduce the town and the Matrimandir as the Mother had approved of them. Two exhibitions displaying Auroville's evolving layouts, mandala-like, stirred the community. As the concept of the town resurfaced, Roger came back. Had the time come for a permanent solution to the Matrimandir riddle?

Preparations went on for six months to allow all parties the possibility to present adequately documented material. There are no words to express the joy and enthusiasm of so many Aurovilians, working until late in the night with Roger to prepare models, plans, pictorial exhibitions.

The seven-hour, non-stop meeting was held on October 15, 1987 in the premises of what is now Aurofuture. Attended by 250 Aurovilians, the discussion commenced at 3 p.m. and continued without break until 10 p.m. Before commencing the debate, all had agreed that whatever the outcome might be, the minority would surrender to the will of the majority ? and the matter would be settled for good and never discussed again.

In the entrance hall (now giving access to the offices of the Auroville Foundation) a new exhibition presented the various phases of the Matrimandir concept as it had evolved under Mother's direct guidance. The rosewood model, by Mother's will exhibited under the banyan tree on the occasion of the Matrimandir foundation ceremony, was also displayed. Another exhibit item was the brass pot that on March 24, 1970 the Mother had kept in her hands in silent concentration, choosing it out of five models. The most touching exhibit, however, was a photocopy of Mother's full-page sized "*Blessings*" that she wrote on the specimen of the large 1971 brochure, signing it. All were welcomed to see the original brochure, with Mother's handwritten "*Blessings*", in the house of the Aurovilian who had personally submitted it to the Mother.

The purpose of that historical meeting was to choose between two models: Roger's latest version of the building (the present one) – and that proposed by Paolo Tomasi, covered with white marble triangles, gold-bound. Some people saw the two models as the 'sun' and the 'moon'. The overwhelming majority of the Aurovilians, though, bowed to the full-page sized '*Blessings*' the Mother had written on that brochure. Aurovilians who had been steadily denying the role of Roger surrendered, commenting, 'We have been cheated all these years.' One added, 'What are we doing here? Let's go home. It is not for us to decide, She did it!' Anger and revolt reached a climax when it was unveiled that the triangular cement structure had been designed in such a way that to fix the original discs would take ages, if it was at all feasible. Quite a few Aurovilians wanted to tear that structure down.

Roger's latest model, much less striking than the original one, was the only chance to easily fit in the discs, which had to be compulsorily modified. The call for peace came from Roger who, pleading to preserve Piero's structure, offered to modify the discs so as to easily insert them on the massive structure. To sooth certain people, Roger offered to lower the petals one metre and cover them partially with grass. The outcome of that marathon meeting was to reconfirm Roger as the chief architect whom the Mother had entrusted with the responsibility of building Matrimandir and the Peace area, along guidelines worked out directly with her.

On his own initiative, Roger made everybody accept that Piero would complete the Chamber. As for himself, he would take care of all that was outside it (entrance, ramps, outer skin, petals, disks, gardens etc.) For the first six months, all respected the agreement. Then the fight started all over again.

CONCLUSION

A futuristic vision calling for a futuristic architecture

The more the positivist, rationalist, pan-scientific thought of the modern era pushes in one direction, the more the inward depths of the individual and collective psyche compensate in the opposite direction. Heralding the spiritual age that is the next stage of evolution a new consciousness, encompassing the most varied domains of research and disciplines, secretly labors. A field where this is especially evident is that of architecture. On one side, displaying on a gigantic scale the many failures, and the successes too, of an era fast exhausting itself. On the other pushing utopia to its utmost limits and making it real.

Forerunner of the new world and society that are the heart of Sri Aurobindo's teaching, the Mother founded Auroville. Was it by chance that it was an avant-garde architect, who had realized spectacular projects, whom the Mother asked to build the town and its soul-centre? The whole concept of Matrimandir, radiating from the Chamber, revolves around the quest for the Sacred. The building; the urn and the amphitheatre; the gardens and their topography; the very concept of 'lake' – all of these are to discover that other dimension, beyond the play of forms. Two aspects made Roger the man of the moment: his futuristic vision of architecture – and his mediumistic capacity to channel the inner vision into architectural forms. Both are a prominent feature of the great architecture of our times.

Roger, too, was caught by the mainstream of contemporary architecture and design, raising the impermanent and the trivial to pure art – a tangible expression of the crossroad that humanity has reached, at the threshold of a new culture and civilization. Whereas the search for the monumental, the long lasting, reflects an attitude turned towards the past, reluctant to face a crisis that is global and universal and calls for an entirely new order. ¹These two antithetic movements – one projected towards the future, the other echoing bygone splendours – are at the core of the battle hampering Matrimandir from the beginning, questioning the Mother's vision and choices, engulfing all: the building, its outer structure/skin/cladding, continuing into the gardens, stretching up to the town and the very notion of town planning and the relation between social living and habitat.

Hence the clash between the suspended Plexiglas ball and the Murano crystal. Between the lightweight steel structure to be completed in two months – and the one in concrete that took over eight years to be built. A cocoon or Teflon membrane – versus a bald shell in massive concrete. Aluminium discs moving in the wind – versus the dead weight of the bronze ones Piero suggested, or the white marble cladding proposed by Paolo, with Piero's support. The earth petals covered with Agra red stones and grass – versus the continuous cement ring proposed by Piero. And finally, the gardens. What is really at stake, beyond these two seemingly opposite universes? Is there a meeting point, in the dialectic of opposites?

Matrimandir: the fourth dimension

As expounded by the psychologist of the depths C.G. Jung, the ideal city is one symbol of the archetypal mother. Whereas the quest for it belongs to the realm of eternal Utopia, Humanism in particular dreamed of a radial city from whose centre would stream as sunrays the various streets, enshrined within a regular polyhedron or a circle. This was the pattern of the first layout for the town that the Mother approved of.

¹ Not by chance Roger hails from France, whose national genius in architecture is expressed today by the aerial architecture of Jean Nouvel, endlessly playing with light and shadow. Paolo and Piero, on the other hand, hail from Italy, sunk into the splendor of past glories and unable to renew itself, with the sole exception of Renzo Piano, whose work is cosmopolitan and eclectic, true to our age.

Roger acted as a kind of medium, a blank canvas on which she could endlessly draw formations, doing and undoing them, ever changing, plastic and supple like Roger's very notion of architecture.

Great contemporary architects, from Le Corbusier to Alvar Alto, to Tadao Ando, have ventured into the Sacred. The leading figures of contemporary architecture surround themselves by a team of most qualified engineers and technicians, whose task is to materialize a phantasmagoric wealth of images at the border line between subliminal and superconscious – where the artist, or the genius, or the yogi has access – translating into astounding forms. For archetypes and symbols, sacred geometry and numerology stream from realms where reason, aesthetic sense, conventional 'wisdom', belonging to the purely mental plane, have no access. When architects are not just architects, but painters too, sculptors, musicians, poets – mystics and revolutionaries – to enter those realms is a customary feat.

Matrimandir is in the fourth dimension. The task of the architect was to express those inner contents while enhancing beauty and novelty of forms, along with research of new materials and technologies. Paolo Tomasi too had caught something of those realms. The archetypal Brahman egg, a Matrimandir half white and half black with dark underground passages, point to a wealth of numinous imageries stored in the subliminal. But this was untrammelled with the mental, and ultimately the Mother dismissed it. She chose instead the symbolism of the 'golden sphere of consciousness' that, descending into the play of manifestation, emerges out of the earth crater. This tremendous centre of Force called for a futuristic architecture in futuristic surroundings. The gardens were to enhance the supramental sun of Matrimandir harboring the crystal: the philosophical stone or *lapis* sought along the ages, the alchemical golden-flower out of which radiated initiatory gardens.

“The Mother's symbol ... a kind of seal which is integrated into the whole project”

If we delve into the great architecture of the past, a striking element calls for attention: sacred geometry. This again resurfaces in great creations of our age. Emerging from the utmost recesses of contemporary beings overpowered by symbols and archetypes, even today sacred geometry play an essential role. This is one way to look at the plans that, on Mother's request, Roger made for the city, mandala-like – and for Matrimandir. And while according to Jung four is the Self, according to the Mother twelve is double perfection. In the course of the 1971 interview Roger had said:

“Speaking of symbols, you have noticed 2 figures: 4 and 12, which come frequently in this composition. Have a look at the model. You see the shape of the Mother's symbol. It is a kind of seal which is integrated into the whole project.”

This is the underlying oneness within the various elements of the final concept of Matrimandir: the Mother's symbol. There are momentous differences between the Mogul miniature (with a roof-terrace and a dome resting on tiny columns, surrounded by enchanting gardens) of Mother's early vision – and the flamboyant Matrimandir on pillars representing the four Powers of the Mother. Not only did the Mother approve of the golden-disc Matrimandir, surrounded by the twelve meditation rooms in the 'petals' expressing different states of consciousness. She had approved as well of the twelve unconventional gardens on the oval, and even set a most auspicious date to commence them: November 24, 1972 – the 46th anniversary of the Overmind descending in the Physical. As for the lake, this would have manifested along with the town. There are not two visions though, not two concepts mutually exclusive: one evolves out of the other as a child is being formed within the mother's womb. The underlying oneness beneath phase one and phase two of the Matrimandir's conception is especially evident concerning the gardens.

Objective -- or subjective consciousness?

The Matrimandir gardens kept being shifted from the outer bank to the oval and vice versa. Similarly, the town's edge kept changing too; buildings stretched up to the lake and even sat in it - and receded as well. Gardens, trees and water bodies meandered down within the town itself and even between the very buildings: a favorite concept of Roger. Like passing clouds, where only the sky is real and anything else transient, the vision of both the Mother and her architect, intertwined, kept mutating, yet always retaining its essence. The only certainty is that the Mother approved the overall concept featured in the fundraising brochure; had the money come, the Matrimandir and the surrounding area would have been completed in their entirety by February 21, 1978, within the framework of the concept worked out with the Mother, along the guidelines she had defined, and with the help of the same contractor already hired for the construction of Bharat Nivas. The approved concept underwent many changes, though; as this is not just Roger's nature and an intrinsic law of a dynamic vision of architecture, perpetually evolving, but the way the Mother proceeded too. Can a shooting star be defined in space and time?

Asked to define the ultimate reality, Buddha silently pointed to a flower. It is a great mistake to look at the gardens for Matrimandir while searching for mental (or emotional) wonder. Why should those gardens be big, scenic, spectacular? In Sri Aurobindo's language, wouldn't this represent the objective attitude, clinging to preconceived canons of aesthetics that are as varied as the human types, searching for satisfaction in outer forms and intricacies of external details? In contradiction with the intrinsic meaning of Matrimandir: an initiatory journey, of which the gardens too are so much part, diving within? Didn't the Mother write to Narad (questioning "the smallness of the size of the gardens fixed by Roger"), on 17.8.72, "*I have never told Narad that it should be very big... Roger is the best judge*"?

Japanese gardens: the soul of one single nation – or humanity as a single soul?

There are people advocating a Japanese garden around Matrimandir, claiming this is Mother's wish. Is the claim substantiated? A first observation is that the wonderful park the Mother saw when a child was in France – not in Japan. A second observation is that a Japanese park is mostly made of pines (a sacred species, artfully trimmed) and perennial trees; there are deciduous trees as well, which at fall turn yellow and red. None of such species grows here; as for another foremost component, moss – so typical of Kyoto's Zen gardens – can this thrive in an arid area such as Auroville's? Flowers are scanty, in a Japanese park; often there is none. The main exception being azaleas (and these seldom too) or water lilies (open only a few hours a day). Having put so much emphasis on flowers, which for the gardens of Matrimandir she chose one by one – each of them, symbolizing a specific state of consciousness - how could the Mother wish to have a Japanese garden around Matrimandir?

Nor is this all. Hosting around fifty active volcanoes, 75% of Japan's territory is mountainous. Whereas volcanic mountains constitute its spine, abrupt cliffs tower over the sea. The remnant landscape is made of valleys - plus the costal planes. It is the morphology of a country endowed with such a difficult endeavor that has molded the Japanese society and all aspects of life, in true symbiosis with nature of which the gardens are a striking archetypal image. If from the natural point of view it is absurd to conceive of a lush green Japanese park (thriving on a moist climate and fertile soil, with an abundance of ponds and waterfalls) around Matrimandir, other major considerations overrule this hypothesis. Originally born out of the influence, in the sixth or seventh century A.D., of Chinese and Korean masters whose civilization was more advanced than Japan's, these gardens also streamed from Shinto's animistic tradition, autochthonous, and finally evolved as an exquisite expression of the soul of Japan, its genius and spiritual insight. Can this be borrowed?

Does the predominance of the landscaping art of a single country fit within a concept that is universal, above nation and creed? Japanese gardens are the expression of the genius of one single nation. As such they cannot encompass the ethnographic, cultural, and spiritual unity in diversity that is the very

substratum of Auroville. Moreover, those gardens are traditionally linked to a social reality that has no relationship with that out of which the experiment of Auroville should evolve, its group-soul; the dry-gardens of the Zen temples, which only sometimes are accessible to the public, being the alternative.

Mother's reply to Mary Helen, asking whether "for the future gardens of Auroville will a careful study of Japanese garden design be useful? Should the Japanese style be kept pure and traditional? Or should their basic rules of harmony and balance be studied and applied in new ways to achieve the subtle beauty and unity and timelessness?" is significant, *"It is to be naturally in the Japanese way."* Such reply seems pointing to the specificity of the Japanese Pavilion, which those days was in the air - rather than to gardens expressing the aspiration and longing of the entire human kind.

The ultimate reality of a flower

The 1971 fundraising brochure depicted Matrimandir's as an initiatory journey; the gardens were to further enhance the allegory. The entire Matrimandir area is over charged with the numinous power of archetypal symbols and sacred geometry, universal and eternal; in sheer contrast, a peculiarity of the Japanese gardens is asymmetry, along with the absence of any pre-ordered centre and geometric pattern orderly revolving around it. Furthermore, to confine within the pattern of a single ethnical group – be this Japanese or Mogul; French, Italian, British and so forth – the quest of which Matrimandir is the most astounding symbol would clash with the very ideal Auroville stands for. Significantly, commenting about the Garden of Unity, "around and stretching out beyond the banyan tree"¹, the ashramite Richard² Pearson wrote, "One of the purposes of this garden is to display the flora of different parts of the world, and it is hoped that a very wide selection is possible."³ And, "It is the individual psychological aspect of self-exceeding and its universal appeal that has inspired us to choose flowers from different climes, not only flowers that grow only in Auroville."

Gilles, Annexure 7, pp.15 and 22

Because of the still unforeseen dimensions of the lake even today the outer bank cannot be defined as yet. But the size of the oval island has been set since Mother's times, and so was the size and shape of the gardens about to be started. Not only that: the gardens' content too had been specified by none else than the Mother, who had given guidelines for the floral display. In the course of three interviews at the end of 1971/beginning of 1972 with that ashramite, and with his input, the Mother chose the main flowers of each one of the twelve gardens; those flowers were meant to stay there permanently. In addition, all of these would be accompanied by other flowers (Mother was happy with a draft submitted by Richard) relating to the theme of that garden, thus complementing the central flower. Ten of them were hibiscuses⁴; another garden comprised all types of 'psychological perfections'; and a last one, of water lilies and cactuses⁵. These additional flowers, coming in rotation so as to assure a permanent display of flowers in harmony with the blossoming season, while expressing at the same time the aspiration of the moment, were in pots, vats, larger containers, eventually on shelves etc. Thus following the floral pattern the Mother had chosen for the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, but on a wider scale.

¹ In a footnote Richard wrote, "I now feel that all the hibiscus flowers named by Mother for the gardens of Matrimandir could be placed here."

² Not to be confused with Narad. To avoid misunderstandings in the present research-paper that Aurovilian appears as Narad.

³ In the same document, p. 14, Richard wrote: "Garden of Unity. When I was thinking of the Garden of Unity around the banyan tree, an idea was floating around that a wide selection would be possible of the flora of different parts of the world considering the climatic, soil and other conditions. I was unaware at that time that The Mother had already said to others that the Garden of Unity would be a repetition of the twelve Gardens. Personally, I was completely satisfied with the unique symbolism that the Banyan tree, with its ever-increasing trunks and intertwining and blending roots, spoke to us of an ever widening unity. Looking at it now, I also see that there is a quite limited space."

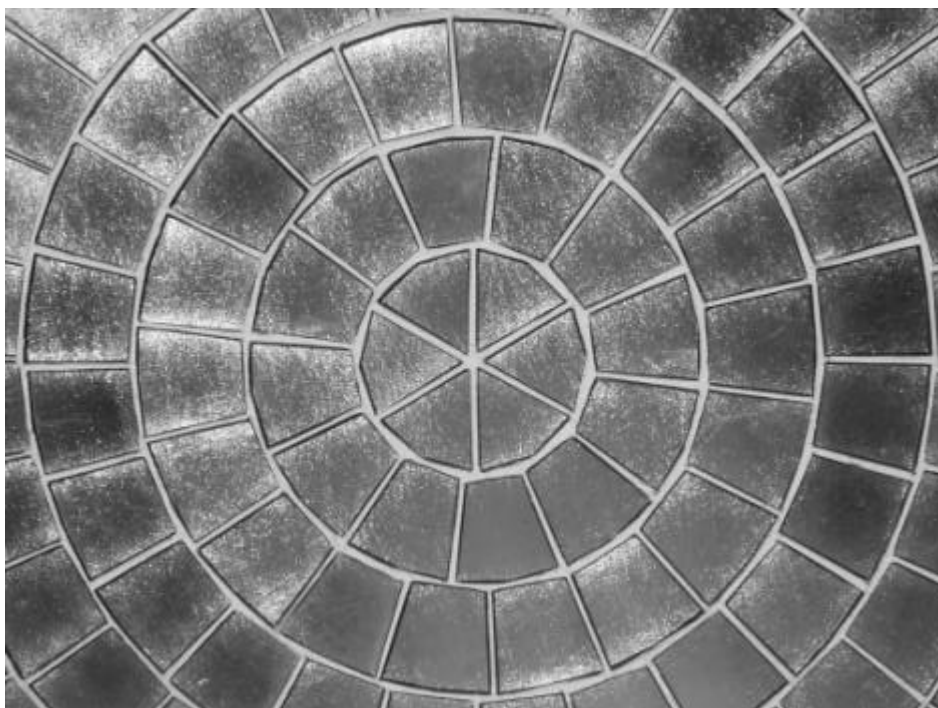
⁴ Of these, one belonged to the group of seventeen hibiscuses the Mother chose for Auroville, and which were sent to her by Narad. The Mother had requested Richard and Narad to send her as many varieties of hibiscuses as possible.

⁵ In French 'Wealth' and 'Riches' cannot be translated into two different words. Henceforth both species had to be displayed, in order to convey the full spiritual meaning.

Shifting the gardens back to the oval island where the Matrimandir stood, surrounded by the ‘petals’ - along with the amphitheatre and its urn, and an ever-expanding banyan tree - necessarily meant the reduction in size of those same gardens. Was it a mere coincidence that the Mother started revising the flower book¹ and went along with her work with Richard, while at the same time Roger was designing the layout of the twelve gardens on the oval island? Is this – the Matrimandir initiatory journey, to be further enhanced by the sadhana of flowers – the missing link in the jigsaw puzzle?

Richard’s records of his work with the Mother are in harmony with those of Alain Grandcolas who, together with the late Ruud Lohman, on Mother’s instruction was about to commence the Matrimandir gardens on 24.11.72. Besides, such records are in harmony with the 1971 brochure, emphasizing “the coming together of all floral hues”, which in Mother’s yoga of the flowers symbolize various states of consciousness to be achieved or attitudes to be sought. Richard’s records also shed light on Roger’s interview in the springtime of 1971, when Mother’s work with Richard was in progress. Talking about the twelve gardens whose shape would be delineated by the four streams and fountains surrounding Matrimandir at the four points of the compass, Roger had said about those gardens “...Separately now, they express each of the aspects of the Mother through a floral decoration that may be changed according to the artistic will of the gardeners. The flowers are placed in removable vats. ...”

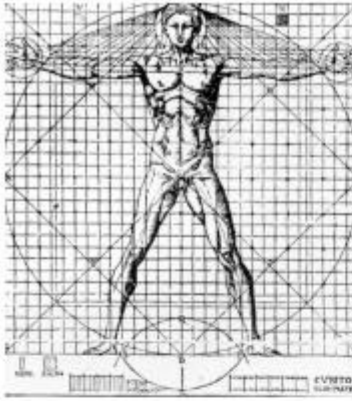
It is therefore along these lines that we should proceed, to manifest the vision that Mother has unveiled to us in all details, precise down to the intimate play of flowers which, like all true path of Yoga, is to lead to the realization of the supreme unity in diversity: the One who is All.



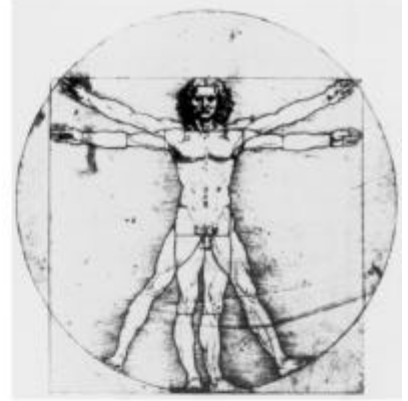
¹ Mother started playing ‘flower games’ with some disciples as far as 1929 – and, later on, with children too. In 1953 Lizelle Raymond published a first booklet on the spiritual meaning the Mother gave to 656 flowers. In August 1973 a second book was issued, the outcome of Mother’s work of flowers’ classification, where the main interlocutor was Richard Pearson.

THE QUEST

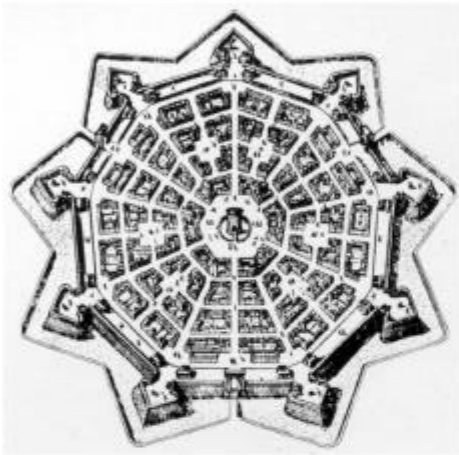
Through the ages



Vitruvius Pollio



Leonardo da Vinci



Palmanova, Renaissance citadel



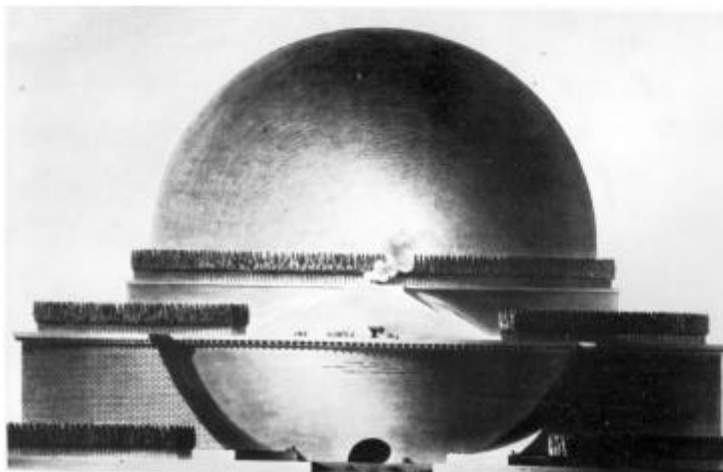
Saint Augustine, The City of God



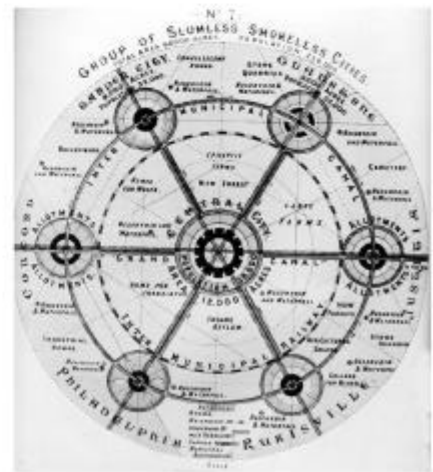
Ledoux, the ideal city of Chaux



Ledoux, shelter for rural guards



E.L. Boullée, Newton Cenotaph



E. Howard, 'garden city' and surroundings

AN INITIATORY JOURNEY?

[addendum]

“In principle not for visitors, reserved for Aurovilians, but not everyone will be admitted.”

Mother's vision since a young age of an ideal city and society was the starting point. Its soul-centre (the Pavilion of Love, of Truth, of the Mother - the name kept changing, for names are mere conventions) was surrounded by a most beautiful 'park', similar to the one the Mother saw in France when a child, true to children's sense of magic and wonder. Like 'the city of God', 'the garden of delights' too is a most powerful symbol in all traditions. In Jungian psychology, the city relates to the archetypal Mother; the garden, to the process of individuation leading to the archetypal Self. Mother's recurring vision of those gardens was that of a *temenos*¹, a sacred precinct², delimited at first by a circular road; two days later, by an isolating zone being provided by the lake. Mother's vision of a lake delimiting the extent of the precinct (whose shape and size had been determined: exactly ten times the Matrimandir's outline) keeps appearing throughout all the successive records, from that first conversation with Huta on June 25, 1965 onwards.

Encircled by walls and thoroughly protected from outward influences, the radial city where in the thirties Sri Aurobindo would have lived at the centre was a *temenos*. And so was the galaxy-town, for the true green belt had been conceived to fulfil an isolating function akin to that of those early walls. It should be also stressed that, in the thirties, to hasten the work of transformation the admissions to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram had been closed, whereas visitors were rarely allowed. All of these considerations are essential to come to terms with Mother's instructions limiting the access to Matrimandir. To Roger asking "Will the Force more specially be concentrated in Matrimandir?", on June 1971 the Mother replied:

The new Force works everywhere, especially in this room. You feel it, don't you? There is here a density capable of performing miracles, but few are able to feel it, to perceive it.

Sri Aurobindo and I have concentrated this Force on the whole town; it is palpable, perceptible as a very concrete perfume which penetrates, but one must be able to feel it, to receive it. But no miracles as people would like to see; for them to believe, they need material proofs without which they deny.

Build Matrimandir, put in place my symbol and Sri Aurobindo's and the suspended ball. I take it upon myself to make it into a very strong centre. Only those who are capable will perceive it."

Auroville Archives, reproduced by Gilles, Aspiring for Perfection, p.106

Great yogis transmit their powers to sacred locations and objects, charging them with a tremendous force. Nevertheless special conditions have to be fulfilled so as to preserve that force. If the *sancta sanctorum* of many Indian temples is open to Hindus only, this is not just to feed communal and racial discrimination, but to preserve sacredness from unwanted tourism. Regarding the access to Matrimandir the Mother told Satprem:

But then, people will not come for 'regular meditations' or anything of the kind (the internal organization will be taken care of later): it will be a place for concentration. Not everyone will be allowed in; there will be a time of the week or the day (I don't know) when visitors will be allowed³, but anyway without mixture. There will be a fixed hour or day to show the visitors, and the rest of the time only for those who are... serious -- serious, sincere, who truly want to learn to concentrate...

¹ C.G.Jung defines the *temenos* as "a taboo area", "a piece of land, often a grove, set apart and dedicated to a god."

² Enclosed area, especially around a cathedral.

³ It should be remembered that Mother's concept was that of a township without any polluting or speed traffic. Only electrical cars, with a maximum speed of 15 Km. by the hour were admitted – and bicycles. All outer traffic had to stop at the green belt's boundary. Internally, a monorail was foreseen, as well electronically driven capsules underground.

Then people will be let in in order to concentrate - (laughing) to learn to concentrate! No fixed meditations, nothing of the sort, but they will have to stay there in silence - silence and concentration.

Mother's Agenda, 3.1.70

Access to the Chamber was restricted, by Mother's will. In August 1972 Roger noted down what the Mother told him on the same subject:

In principle not for visitors, reserved for Aurovilians, but not everyone will be admitted. The first condition for those who want to go there is to ask. Those who have contributed to the construction will be admitted in the first place. If there are doubtful cases, they should be referred to me. All those who have a doubtful presence should not go. If there is the slightest doubt, the case should be presented to me. People must be known for their qualifications.

Auroville Archives, reproduced by Gilles, Aspiring for Perfection, p.127

Is Matrimandir an initiatory journey? To answer this question is of paramount importance, not only to assess the clashing views on tourists visiting Matrimandir, but also vis-a-vis the attitude of the Aurovilians. Besides, it qualifies Mother's choice of the architect along with that of an overall concept, minutely worked out between the two of them.

“A symbol of the inner pilgrimage that each Aurovilian must make in order to find his own soul”

Details had been planned that were all conducive to the symbolism of an inner journey, without external attractions or distractions, diving within. The Mother had told Satprem about the crystal (which she had described at first as a “*plastic ball*”), “*That is what is needed, something, a symbol – we'll find what is needed, we'll see – of course, like an altar, but...*” Talking to Satprem about an enclosure, encircling walls and so forth – a real *temenos* - the Mother used adjectives such as ‘symbolic’ and ‘initiatory’:

Then, no doors, but... after going deep down one comes back up into the temple; one goes under the wall and comes back up inside – it's again a symbol. Everything is symbolic.

(...)

That underground passageway into the room... People will enter some thirty feet away from the wall, at the foot of the urn. The urn will mark the starting point of the descent. I'll have to choose the exact direction... Then, later on, the urn might very well be INSIDE rather than outside the enclosure. So perhaps we could simply have a big wall all around, and then gardens. Between the surrounding wall and the building to be constructed, we can have gardens and the urn. And that wall will have an entrance (one or several ordinary gates), so that people will be able to move around in the garden.

Then there will be certain conditions to be met before one is allowed to descend into the underground passage and emerge into the temple... It will have to be a bit initiatory: not quite ‘like that’, not just anyhow.

Mother's Agenda, 10.1.1970

That Matrimandir is an initiatory journey is expounded throughout the 1971 brochure, which the Mother had examined with the utmost attention, twice, before writing her “*Blessings*” on it. The hieratic landscape of the rosewood model, reproduced in it, further enhanced the quest. As the scope of the brochure was fundraising, the text is even more astounding. It commences so:

“At the centre of Auroville there will be a complex of three elements, all placed within a shape symbolizing the fundamental unity of creation. These three elements are Matrimandir, the Garden of Unity with the banyan tree, and the white marble lotus-shaped vase which contains handfuls of soil from many nations of the world.”

The shape referred to is the oval island: the replica of the Matrimandir outline, ten times larger, which Roger drew without being the least aware of. Roger had recognized in a book on Tantra a form similar to that of Matrimandir and its oval island; yet these can also be seen as the *uroborus*, the alchemical serpent-dragon eating its tail. Even more significantly, Sri Aurobindo's symbol can be inscribed within both the outline of Matrimandir and that of the oval island.

At the centre of 'the garden of delights' – a precinct or *temenos* – is often 'the fountain of life', 'the fountain of youth'. In the original plan of Matrimandir four streams originated from four fountains, whose waters merged into the crater beneath Matrimandir. Overcharged with alchemical references¹, the symbolism of running water, which the Mother had stressed with Satprem (and Roger had enthusiastically transferred to the lake itself) is of a particular significance in the light of the supramental yoga, encompassing the physical transformation of the body and immortality. Besides, there are other powerful symbols such as the two concentric rings and twelve directions etc., leading to the crown underlying the whole, Mother's symbol:

"The general composition is the result of a delineation of masses of earth by streams coming out of four fountains situated at the point of the compass. These streams design two concentric rings and twelve directions. All radiate towards Matrimandir. Thus, the symbol of the Mother becomes the basic design of the entire complex. It stamps the general zoning of Auroville in its central area."

Next comes a preliminary description of the Garden of Unity around the banyan tree. The lake is also announced:

"Flowers give an extremely colorful look to the place. They are displayed in twelve gardens surrounding Matrimandir and chosen in accordance to their real significance, to the state of consciousness which they express. Around the banyan tree, the Garden of Unity allows for the coming together of all floral hues. ... When Auroville is built, a lake will transform the complex into an island."

The presence of another element adds to the sacredness of the *temenos*: the banyan tree². In India a sacred arboreal species, the particular configuration of this tree, with its aerial roots reverting into the earth, gives it the appearance of a grove, thus enhancing one aspect of the *temenos*. Is this 'the tree of life' of universal symbolism, which is the only one? All the above but leads to the essence, "a symbol of the inner pilgrimage":

"The centre of Auroville, centre of Force, Matrimandir embodies the spirit of Auroville. It is a symbol of the inner pilgrimage that each Aurovilian must make in order to find his own soul. It is a symbol of the ideal of beauty and harmony that has to dominate the collective life of all those who wish to participate in the adventure towards a new consciousness that Auroville signifies."

Architecture but enhances the symbolism of Matrimandir, diving into its secret:

"The architectural conception of Matrimandir further enhances its symbolic significance. It shows the emergence of the golden sphere of consciousness out of the earth crater. It tells the story of life, of its multiple changing aspects, of its innumerable facets always in movement, through the similar movement of the golden discs that constitute Matrimandir's most outer appearance. ... To discover the secret of Matrimandir one should not remain satisfied with the outer look. There are ways to its more intimate life. These take you through high pyramid-like masses of dense earth that make the marble path leading to the structure look all the more narrow. They take you way down below the sphere, very near to the open crater

¹ *Fons primigenia, fons mercurialis, elixir vitae, aqua permanens etc.*

² When choosing on a map the final location of the town, the Mother put her finger on a spot saying that this would be the geographical centre. There stood aloof the Matrimandir's banyan tree, still in its teens... On Auroville Foundation Day a ring had been put around it, with Mother's handwritten words engraved on it, "Auroville the city at the service of Truth".

where streams let their waters disappear. They compel you to ascend slowly by steep inclines towards the sphere of light.”

The symbolism of an initiatory journey of which the entire Matrimandir complex is the visualization in the physical is manifest: the gradual ascent of the human species to its final destination. Narrowing paths lead down, underneath the sphere, where the four streams disappear into the circular crater. By a steep slope the ascent begins, via tunnels, in a spiraled path – the representation in matter of an initiatory journey:

“Inside the sphere where one has now arrived, there are tunnels through which the pilgrim goes in his new ascent. He threads a spiraled path leading him towards an elevated inner chamber. Baffled, he is likely to be when he first comes to this dazzling place.

It is a twelve-sided hall, divided into four meditation areas just as there were four paths leading to the Matrimandir. Each opens onto a most luminous ball in which all the sun’s light is being concentrated by a mechanism at an opening in the top layer of Matrimandir.

At rest now in front of his most intimate heart, the pilgrim discovers the secret of the transmutation of his energies. Down below, the waters go on flowing into the crater. They are lighted by the light that comes from above: a second opening at the bottom of Matrimandir, symmetrical with the first one, allows the light of the irradiant globe to illuminate the depths.”

The pilgrim – the Aurovilian – has thus entered the “dazzling place” where “a most luminous ball” dwells. Reminiscent of the finding of the Holy Grail and of myths of all ages, the allegory is clear. A living being, the crystal is the *lapis philosophorum*, the crown of humanity’s age-long quest to transform the quintessence of human *nigredo* into pure gold. Then the twelve aspects of the Mother represented by the Garden of Unity are described, and the urn, and what is expected from us Aurovilians:

“When he goes out of Matrimandir after this light bath within his own self, the pilgrim finds eight ways out. Two of them are most interesting. One leads directly to the Garden of Unity with its own centre, the banyan tree, surrounded by all the flowers of Matrimandir’s twelve gardens. In the Garden of Unity, they form a rich blending of all their hues and symbolize the integration of the twelve aspects of the Mother: Existence, Consciousness, Bliss, Light, Life, Power, Prosperity, Usefulness, Progress, Youth, Harmony and Perfection. The second way leads to the lotus-shaped vase that contains the soil of many nations of the earth. A direct link road joins the lotus and the banyan.

When the Aurovilian contemplates the Matrimandir’s complex he will know what is expected of his search. He may renew each day his Matrimandir meditation and progress in the discovery of his own light so that he becomes fit for the world action: an action leading man, now rising to its true stature, towards human unity.”



The soul as guide showing the way
(watercolour by W. Blake)

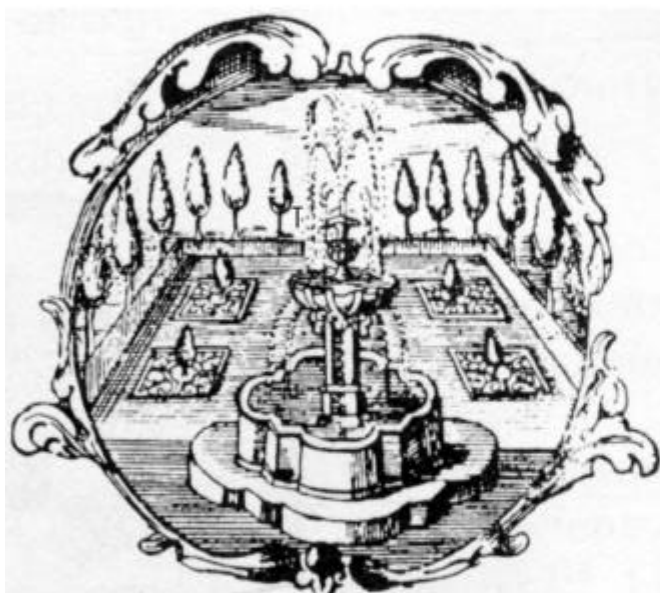
SYMBOLS OF TRANSFORMATION



Philosophers egg



The fountain of life



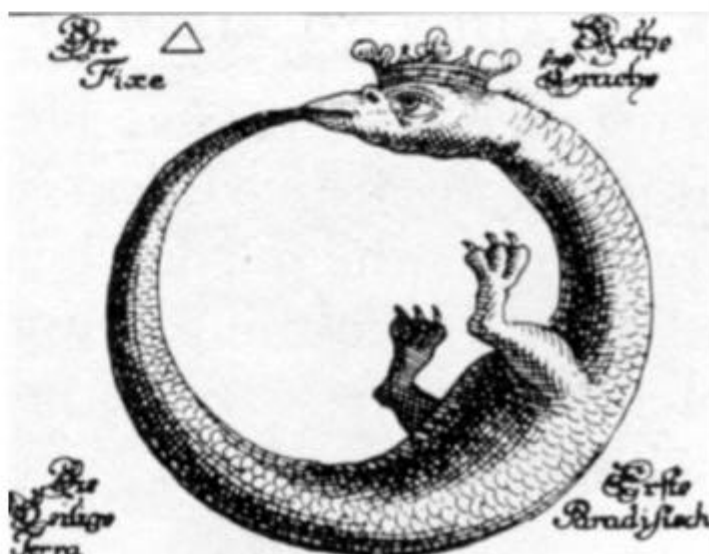
The walled fountain



The walled city



Eight-petalled flower



The crowned uroborus

