Let the Matrimandir be the living symbol of Auroville’s aspiration for the Divine.

21 February 1971

The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville.

The sooner the soul is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians.

15 November 1970
A Dream

There should be somewhere on earth a place which no
nation could claim as its own, where all human beings of
goodwill who have a sincere aspiration could live freely as
citizens of the world and obey one single authority, that of the
supreme truth; a place of peace, concord and harmony where
all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively
to conquer the causes of his sufferings and miseries, to
surmount his weaknesses and ignorance, to triumph over his
limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the
spirit and the concern for progress would take precedence
over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the search for
pleasure and material enjoyment. In this place, children
would be able to grow and develop integrally
without losing contact with their souls; education
would be given not for passing examinations
or obtaining certificates and posts but to enrich
existing faculties and bring forth new ones. In
this place, titles and positions would be replaced
by opportunities to serve and organise; the bodily
needs of each one would be equally provided for,
and intellectual, moral and spiritual superiority
would be expressed in the general organisation not
by an increase in the pleasures and powers of life
but by increased duties and responsibilities. Beauty
in all its artistic forms, painting, sculpture, music,
literature, would be equally accessible to all; the
ability to share in the joy it brings would be limited
only by the capacities of each one and not by social
or financial position. For in this ideal place money
would no longer be the sovereign lord; individual
worth would have a far greater importance than
that of material wealth and social standing. There,
work would not be a way to earn one’s living
but a way to express oneself and to develop
one’s capacities and possibilities while being of
service to the community as a whole, which, for
its own part, would provide for each individual’s
subsistence and sphere of action. In short, it would
be a place where human relationships, which are
normally based almost exclusively on competition
and strife, would be replaced by relationships of
emulation in doing well, of collaboration and real
brotherhood.

And yet this dream is in the course of becoming a reality;
that is what we are striving for in Sri Aurobindo’s Ashram, on
a very small scale, in proportion to our limited means. The
realisation is certainly far from perfect, but it is progressive;
little by little we are advancing towards our goal which we
hope we may one day be able to present to the world as a
practical and effective way to emerge from the present chaos,
to be born into a new life that is more harmonious and true.

The Mother
Bulletin, August 1954
(CWM, Vol. 12, pp. 93-94)
**Editorial**

**Perpetual Gratitude and Infinite Grace**

The sweet month of February is upon us, this special month of birthdays with the Mother’s on the 21st and Auroville’s on the 28th. There is always anticipation, a quiet kind of waiting for something to be fulfilled and above all a wonderful sense of gratitude. It is without a doubt a period of Grace.

I recall seeing a video of a young woman lying down in her garden looking up at the sky. Gradually the camera rises higher and higher and you see her growing smaller and smaller, till she, a little speck, disappears from the green lawn in the front of her house in the middle of her neighbourhood, her town, her country, our planet earth, our solar system, the Milky Way, myriad other galaxies — the entire universe. And just as you are lost in the magnificence of this wonderful and seemingly limitless creation, the image starts zooming in on our galaxy, our solar system, our beautiful whirling blue and green earth, down ultimately to the young woman on the green lawn looking up at the sky. In the flash of a couple of minutes, you have been taken on a journey out into the universe and back and, just as you begin absorbing this wonderful experience the image continues to zoom into the very insides of the young woman, into her body, into the innermost parts of her physical self, right down almost to her very cells, and just as quickly returns to her on the green lawn. While one is left in awe of having witnessed the entire universe at one end, down to the minutest physical details of a human being at the other, I felt the missing part was left for each of us to discover on our own, our inner being and the wonderful, endless and magical journeys we can embark upon. The only feeling then is one of gratitude, for being a part of this here and now, of being given this humbling experience and of having been here, in the presence of the Mother, and experienced so much more but most of all her sweet smile. What else can all this be but a miracle? The Mother, when asked about miracles once, said:

> It is the ignorant, limited, egoistic consciousness which demands miracles. As soon as one is enlightened, one knows that everywhere and always there is miracle. And the more faith one has in this miracle and this Grace, the more capable one becomes of seeing it, or perceiving it constantly at every place where it is. It is ignorance and lack of faith, it is blind egoism which prevents one from seeing. (CWM, Vol 07, pp. 378-379)

We do live in Grace but don’t see it most of the time. Maybe this is the month to be once again aware of all the gifts that have been bestowed upon us, all the love that has come our way and most of all the presence of the Mother and Sri Aurobindo in which we live constantly, but sometimes forget. And when we do remember, there is only one thing to do, feel perpetual gratitude for Their infinite Grace.

The Mother has told us:

> To feel deeply, intensely and constantly a total gratitude towards the Divine is the best way to be happy and peaceful. (CWM, Vol. 16, Pg. 314)

And

> The best thing we can do to express our gratitude is to overcome all egoism in ourselves and make a constant effort towards this transformation. (Ibid. pg. 428)  

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**Matrimandir Moments**

“I felt like I had entered a space ship and it took me on an unforgettable journey which I will always remember as it has changed my life for ever”. These were the words I heard a young boy say. It was ten years ago. He and his companions had come to Auroville for a dance performance along with their teacher a famous dancer who had been training these young boys and girls, all street children from Delhi. The performance was memorable but more memorable were the words of this young boy, and the look in his eyes as he told us of his experience after a visit to the Matrimandir.

It is a happy moment that our Matrimandir special issue this month coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of the first foundation ceremony of the Matrimandir in February 1971. Going back in time I recalled welcoming the new millennium at midnight, in concentration in the inner chamber of the Matrimandir. I then recalled my very first Matrimandir moment, on August 14, 1970, as we gathered at the little pond next to the Banyan tree, for the dedication ceremony of the Matrimandir. I remember cycling, at the end of that year, to the Centre, early one Saturday evening. I had been invited by a friend to spend the night in her capsule, the typical palm leaf structures that dotted the Auroville landscape in those days. As I sat on the raised platform of the sleeping area, looking at the starry sky in that barren Auroville landscape I couldn’t have imagined what it would be like fifty years later. We were woken up early the next morning as the capsules were being brought down to clear the space for the digging of the foundation of the Matrimandir.

Early in the morning on the Mother’s birthday, in 1972, we were all gathered at the rim of this enormous crater watching the 12 people, hand picked by the Mother, walk down the steps, as the young boy, Aurofilio, placed the foundation stone given by the Mother. I don’t remember the details of that morning, but all I have to do is close my eyes to remember the atmosphere of that magical Matrimandir moment.

Sunaina Mandeen
As in a mystic and dynamic dance
A priestess of immaculate ecstasies
Inspired and ruled from Truth's revealing vault
Moves in some prophet cavern of the gods,
A heart of silence in the hands of joy
Inhabited with rich creative beats
A body like a parable of dawn
That seemed a niche for veiled divinity
Or golden temple-door to things beyond.

(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 15)

A conscious power has drawn the plan of life,
There is a meaning in each curve and line.
It is an architecture high and grand
By many named and nameless masons built
In which unseeing hands obey the Unseen,
And of its master-builders she is one.

(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 460)
Matrimandir

The Blossoming of the Heaven sent Lotus

Fifty years ago the Mother described her visions of the Inner Chamber of the Matrimandir.

A seed was planted, a Divine impetus was sent forth… The Lotus that is the Matrimandir would soon begin its slow emergence from the deep red earth of Auroville.

The emergence was inexorable. In spite of all difficulties, both material and human, the blossoming of the Lotus continued over five decades with unabated strength.

If it had been for us alone, the human instruments of its construction, the Matrimandir may not have emerged, or surely not so readily, from its deep crater in the soil of the land. It was the invisible Divine sunlight shining down from above that assured its steady blossoming.

Those who worked on the construction all attested to the energy supporting the work, to the Sunshine that they mostly could not see, but that they could feel. It supported them through all the obstacles, gave strength, gave solutions to seemingly unsolvable problems, and always brought that inner smile that sustains all progress.

The first phase of the blossoming was the emergence of the four great pillars that curved upwards to ultimately join in the ring of union at the top, cast on May 29th 1976.

Some 30 metres high, this stark concrete structure rose in complete contrast to the flat red land of the Auroville plain on which it stood. Only the first young growth of newly planted trees accompanied it on the wide open plateau. It was a bold Divine statement that could be seen from miles around, proclaiming the advent of the full Lotus which was to come.

Later in the same year the 24 metre wide floor of the future Inner Chamber was cast giving at once a clear impression of the dimension of the Space that was to come. The 12 Chamber walls were built next and then came the casting of the sections of the sloping roof of the Chamber. Finally, in early 1978 the concrete shell of the Chamber was done. More and more the Inner Chamber began to materialise itself.

Human times were difficult, but that Divine Sunshine sustained the growth of this lotus, which the Mother had referred to as the soul of Auroville.

Twin spiral ramps were built and lifted, section by section into place, joining the lower levels of the Matrimandir structure to the entrance doors of the Chamber, — pathways which future generations would ascend, climbing from the concrete base to reach the silence of the Inner Chamber.

The next phase of the blossoming of the Lotus took almost a decade… this was the time when the sphere of the building was created, giving Matrimandir its global shape; the body of the Lotus became more apparent in its outlines.

In these long quiet years the 1100 precast beams of the structure were prepared in the Matrimandir workshop, cured in a pool nearby, and then lifted one by one to be fixed precisely in place to create, layer by horizontal layer, the flattened sphere of Matrimandir.

All this time the Inner Chamber stood silent and apparently empty. As if, after it had materialised in 1978, the Chamber space needed time to integrate itself within our human world-frame. Or, perhaps it was the reverse, — that we needed this time to get ready to carry on the work within its walls to finalise this very special space.

Finally the time came, with the assembly of the outer sphere completed and the top cap concreted on 8 August 1988, to begin work on the materialisation of the details of the Inner Chamber.

The ceiling was given a coat of plaster of Paris, and then the walls were clad with the pristine slabs of white marble that had been brought carefully from Italy almost a decade earlier. The twelve columns were lifted up from the workshops below; one by one. Each was fixed in place with a pre-stressed cable running down its center to give stability.

From time to time one would pause, awed by the beauty, the enormity of the space that was being created here, high above the wide Auroville plain.

A marble floor was laid, and then the circular marble slab was carefully placed in the center of the room and etched with the Mother’s symbol. Soon would come the four Sri Aurobindo’s symbols and then, crowning all, the 70 centimeter optical glass globe, focal point of the room.

All the while the device to direct the Sun Ray was being tested and perfected, — to reflect that clear single ray of sun, down from the centre of the roof to strike the globe and then softly illumine the space of the Inner Chamber.

By 1994 the Inner Chamber was complete, virtually as we see it today, with its wide white carpet and silent air-conditioned space.
The completion of the Inner Chamber released a burst of activity to complete the sphere as a whole. The defining shape of the twelve petals surrounding the central bud of the Lotus appeared during the 1990’s. The solid outer skin was filled in to cover the bare spherical space frame of concrete beams. The final covering of shining golden discs was created and fixed, to give the Golden Lotus its happy visible response to the hidden Sunshine that had nurtured its growth for so many years.

In the most recent decade of its growth, the Matrimandir is being held, more and more, within a green and varied garden space. Pink and white lotuses bloom in its quiet pools, to accompany the Golden Lotus at the center.

There is still much to be done. The garden spaces continue to grow, to be developed. The water body, a lake, which the Mother envisioned as surrounding the whole oval of the Matrimandir gardens, has begun to manifest.

As the Lotus of the Matrimandir continues to grow and blossom it becomes more and more the symbol that the Mother had described: “the living symbol of Auroville’s aspiration for the Divine.” ... “the symbol of the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection.”

The thousands of people who have contributed to its growth, in myriad ways, can only be grateful, — grateful to the Sunshine that has sustained its growth over these 50 years, and grateful to have participated, in whichever way, in the growth of this very special gift from the Mother.

John Harper

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**The Golden Light**

Thy golden Light came down into my brain
   And the grey rooms of mind sun-touched became
A bright reply to Wisdom’s occult plane,
   A calm illumination and a flame.

Thy golden Light came down into my throat,
   And all my speech is now a tune divine,
A paean song of Thee my single note;
   My words are drunk with the Immortal’s wine.

Thy golden Light came down into my heart
   Smiting my life with Thy eternity;
Now has it grown a temple where Thou art
   And all its passions point towards only Thee.

Thy golden Light came down into my feet;
My earth is now Thy playfield and Thy seat.

Sri Aurobindo
(CWSA, Vol. 02, pg. 605)
The Golden Dome

The rest-house was on a high point of the hill. Down in the valley was the temple with the golden dome. The little town that had grown around it was illuminated with the street lights and house-lamps. Suddenly the electricity went off and the town was plunged into darkness. But the temple had a separate arrangement, an electricity generator of its own, and the golden dome continued to shine. The verandah where we were standing gave an undisturbed view of the place. The electricity was restored after a while, the town was illumined again, but during the night there were occasional failures of the town light.

Next morning the fog was quite heavy. The street lights were trying to break through the mist like dim lamps, but the golden dome continued to shine as the abode of Light.

The day set in; the brilliant sun was multiplying the brightness of the golden dome. The township was bustling with the activities of the daytime, schools, shops, offices, restaurants… But in the air floated the sound of the chanting of the hymns in the temple, carried far through the loudspeakers. The dome was like a dynamo charged for action.

There is a divine spark at the centre of our being — ever alive, inextinguishable. Whatever the outer circumstances, it is there, steady. It may be acknowledged, it may be ignored; it may be respected, it may be condemned; but it is always there. The dark covering of the world’s night cannot obscure it completely; the din and noise of the day cannot silence its sweet whisper; the proclaimed activities of the world cannot surpass the unproclaimed action-force emanating from this spark, our soul.

As for the individual, so it is for the group, the collectivity. There is a group-soul, a soul of the collectivity. If a collectivity is composed of awakened souls, of those individuals who are awakened to their souls, that collectivity’s soul will be an awakened soul, and that collectivity will fulfil the spiritual dharma or law of being, which will be indeed its own dharma or law of being.

It is particularly true of Auroville, for Auroville is a divine project. Divinity is the soul, the foundation and the goal of Auroville. The soul, therefore, has to be given its rightful seat as the leader of the journey. Each one of us in Auroville has to set himself to this task of the discovery, recognition and affirmation of the soul, the divine spark, the golden centre in us. The sincerity in this endeavour will itself lead to the birth and growth of the group-soul of Auroville.

When the Mother said that the Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville and the Divine’s answer to man’s aspiration for perfection, a ready means was given to man to achieve the realisation of the new city. The call is to first seat the soul and then to build the city around it. It is a reversal of the process to which man is accustomed; he makes the city, the frame first, and later looks for the soul and tries to find a place for it. Unfortunately the soul then does not find a room for itself.

It is not easy for man to respond to this call, which is a new call for him; new, because he has not listened to it before. It asks for the centering of our life around the divine spark, but it is a charming call, the call of the temple of the golden dome.

Shyam Sunder
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Dream</td>
<td>The Mother</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetual Gratitude and Infinite Grace</td>
<td>Sunaina Mandeen</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial with Quotes</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrimandir</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Blossoming of the Heaven sent Lotus</td>
<td>John Harper</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Golden Light</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Golden Dome</td>
<td>Shyam Sunder</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A God's Labour</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nightwatch at Matrimandir or How I Came to Auroville</td>
<td>Raud Lohman</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking Down the Old Scaffolding</td>
<td>Seyril</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrimandir: a unified aspiration of collaboration</td>
<td>Shyam Sunder</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Beginning and a Base</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Mother's Message</td>
<td>The Mother</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When Young India Awakes - 22</td>
<td>Beloo Mehra</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial with Quotes</td>
<td>Sri Aurobindo</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matrimandir University of Unity</td>
<td>Tim Wrey</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pictorial with Quotes</td>
<td>The Mother</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A God's Labour

... He who would bring the heavens here
Must descend himself into clay
And the burden of earthly nature bear
And tread the dolorous way.

Coercing my godhead I have come down
Here on the sordid earth,
Ignorant, labouring, human grown
Twixt the gates of death and birth.

I have been digging deep and long
Mid a horror of filth and mire
A bed for the golden river's song,
A home for the deathless fire....

(CWSA, Vol. 02, Pg. 534)

SRI AUROBINDO

The digging, done by hand, continued throughout the year of 1971.
In November the number of diggers reached its peak of 400.
Nightwatch at Matrimandir or How I Came to Auroville

A cosmic spectacle: the black expanse above, the big black crater of Matrimandir’s excavation carved deep into the soil. The four pillars—two of which are completed and the other two nearing completion—are four huge ships coming in from the four corners of our earth to meet at this propitious spot.

Vastness, silence, a sort of solemnity. Being alone for half the night with Matrimandir is like being a part of some occult worldwide initiation into things unknown. Matrimandir watches me rather than I watch her.

A part of the person may feel lost in this great world: coming from the other end of the globe and sitting now at the edge of a deep hole in the middle of nowhere, somewhere in South-India. Another, more subtle part of the person knows it has been chosen to live and work at the very centre of the new world that is being born—hidden still and almost invisible, but with a sure force and a definite direction. Matrimandir is nowhere, in a sense: far from everything and everywhere. But we know it for sure to be in the very heart of everything, at the centre of a cosmic play of forces recreating the universe towards the divine spirit which, almost palpably, seeks to manifest here and now.

So many visitors to Matrimandir are reminded (strange sort of ‘memory’) of the pyramids and other occult places. Behind the schoolbook kind of history of kings
and conquerors there is a history of souls seeking expression in art and architecture, but remaining hidden behind symbols for those to read who have the eyes to see. The Greeks had their Delphi, the place where the gods expressed their opinions and wishes through the oracles of the Pythia. Delphi was for them the centre of the universe, apparently of that world behind politics, arts and the ordinary movements which were embodied in Athens. They called Delphi the ‘omphalos’, the navel, of the earth, the occult centre where vapours emerged transmuting the ordinary into the sacred and super-natural. But, it is interesting to note, if Delphi was related to the navel, and the navel is the seat of the vital powers, were they not the vital gods and beings who expressed themselves in the vague and ambiguous oracles?

Matrimandir is related to a much higher principle, to the soul; of Auroville first, but undoubtedly to the universal soul as well. The Mother: “The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville. The sooner the soul is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for Aurovilians”.

Nightwatch at the soul of the new creation...

The black expanse above continues to be black, but a play of lightness and delight transforms at every moment this monument under construction into a mind-blowing centre of the three worlds. A single spot-light guides our worker from the neighbouring Tamil village, who is on night duty to keep the recently concreted part of the North-pillar moist. Hundreds of insects of all shapes and colours and levels of evolution are attracted by the light and they fly, jump and bump without any visible pattern against the glass of the spot-light. That’s how I came to Auroville: an insect from somewhere in the dark world, attracted by the one spot-light in the huge night, jumping and bumping around without an as yet visible pattern. The insect does not seek out the light; it is the light that draws the insect. After one and a half years in Auroville I still don’t know how and why I came. I did not choose to come here; rather I feel chosen. When I broke out from my past life I told my confrères of the religious order of which I was a member: “As soon as I know why I am going I may feel ready to come back”. Well, I don’t know yet, but the more I discover something of a reason the more sure I am that I will not go back.

The possibility hardly arises to feel proud of being an Aurovilian when one knows that we are not here on account of personal merits, but rather because of the difficulties each one of us represents so that they can be integrated and transformed in the evolutionary experiment of Auroville. We all bring with us a particular set of problems, forces and idiosyncracies as fuel for the cosmic fire. We also represent, each one of us, a particular aspect of the old world that must be new-made.

I may have been chosen partly because I represented a strong force of the past age: religion. For fifteen years I was a member of a religious order, the Franciscans, and for eight years a Roman Catholic priest. In 1968 my superiors sent me, partly as a sociologist, partly as a missionary, to Central India to set up an institute for community development. My old interest in yoga guided me towards a hatha-yoga centre, but while travelling
through India for the work of the institute I tried to come into contact with other brands of yoga as well. One day I found myself in Pondicherry and the next day in Auroville. That was it! I thought that I left again after a ten days’ visit, but I discovered more and more that it was just my body that left. After almost three years, the time I needed for the big step from religion to spirituality, I came back to Auroville and rejoined my soul. Simply, it had not left the place. It is not a nice experience to travel around in India, and, after my one year assignment was over, in Pakistan and then again in Holland, without a soul. One lives less than half a life; one is not there, one is not himself. That must be the reason why so many people feel as if they have come home as soon as they enter the Ashram or, if it is their destination, Auroville.

I did not know why I suddenly broke out of my order and church and intimate circle of confreriors who were real friends to me. I mentalised the reasons. The most comic one—though at that time I took my mind quite seriously—was to prepare a thesis on ‘Jesus and Sri Aurobindo’ or something like ‘The Yoga of Jesus’. I spent my first night at the beautiful ashram guest-house Golconde, the next morning I took the bus to Auroville, and it ‘happened to be the very day on which the excavation for Matrimandir started. I joined the thirty or so people who carried red earth away from the excavation in baskets on their heads and from that first moment I knew a lot of things.

I knew that the thesis would not be written because the dialogue between the Great cannot be understood mentally but only by a plunge into identification. Carrying the earth of Matrimandir promised to be a shortcut towards that. I also knew immediately that I would not go back to Holland; and before I knew—it was something else in me that knew, or it was Somebody else that knew for and in me—I had become an Aurovilian.

Auroville is far from being the perfect society yet, but being around here brings joy and peace on levels of existence which all the solemnities of my Order and all the ordinations and celebrations of my religious institution never managed to touch.

I was a theologian. Theologically, I have not nearly ‘solved’ many of the mental problems involved in my transition from Rome to Auroville, from religion to ‘no religions’, from Jesus and Saint Francis of Assisi to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. But my little victory over theology is that I hardly care anymore.

I had a restless nature: always searching, travelling, discovering, never settling anywhere, giving up things as soon as I thought I knew their secrets, not letting myself be tied to anything or anybody. And now I find myself in one place for a long time already and without any desire to leave or even to go anywhere else. It seems a common experience of most Aurovilians that they cannot live and breathe anymore in any other place. As soon as we set foot outside Auroville we feel a strong inclination to rush back. Some of us even feel ‘homesick’ for Matrimandir when we are in Pondicherry!

I don’t know how and why I am here, but I know that it is a joy and a blessing to be at the cradle of a new world and safely in the arms of the Divine Mother. And the amazing thing for me is this: the more I discover Sri Aurobindo, the Integral Yoga and Matrimandir, the more I feel I have not really broken with my past life as a member of a religious order and an official representative of religion, but I experience that I am only now slowly becoming what I then spiritually and occultly, was supposed to be.

RUUD LOHMAN
Auroville
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
Taking Down the Old Scaffolding

We sit together on planks at ground level, Indian and Western Aurovilians, scraping from bolts and nuts the cement from past concretions, wirebrushing, testing, oiling and restoring the clamps that are to hold together the scaffolding for the next phase of construction. Most exacting phase, it is to be the culmination and fulfilment of years of toil and dreams: the Interior of Matrimandir, gathering-centre of the spiritual energy poured into this field and House of the Infinite Mother.

Various names are given to this Interior or Inner Room for what is still unknown and perhaps un-nameable. Meditation Hall is one, although “it will be a place for concentration,” (3.1.70) a training in the process necessary for evolution of the new consciousness. Inner Chamber is another, for it is a chamber of the heart as well as the soul of Auroville. Sanctuary of Truth; and even at this point it is a refuge offering the peace and protection born of our aspiration towards the Truth. Shrine of the temple to the Supramental Sun, although it is unrelated to religious creeds, ancient or modern. “And let it not become a religion, for the love of Heaven!”, the Mother exclaimed during the first of the conversations (31.12.69) concerning the Interior, centre and soul of the City-to-be. “You see, this is what I have learned, the failure of the religions,” she was to say later on. “It is because they were divided. They wanted one to be religious to the exclusion of the other religions; and all their knowledge has failed because they were exclusive. And man has failed because he has been exclusive. And what the new consciousness wants (it is on this that it insists) is no more division. To be able to comprehend the spiritual extreme, the material extreme, and to find... the point of union, there where.. that becomes a real force.” (3.1.70)

Not therefore a temple in the ordinary sense—nothing about the Matrimandir can be grasped in the ordinary sense—its interior is to be the core of this point of union: transformation centre of the new Force, the Truth consciousness. Having seen it in a vision which came back to her repeatedly in January 1970, The Mother brought into the realm of possibility, in this sense, the instrument for collective as well as individual transformation. The outside she did not see at all; but the interior she saw “very, very clearly”.... “a form...like a tower...with twelve regular facets which represent the twelve months of the year.” Inside the tower-like twelve-faceted interior, “twelve columns; and right at the centre, the object of concentration... The sun should enter in a beam (not diffusely) ...so according to the hours of the day, and the months of the year, the ray will turn (there will be an arrangement above) and the beam will be directed onto the centre... In the middle, on the ground, my symbol.” On it, “in four parts like a square four symbols of Sri Aurobindo, upright,” supporting a translucent globe. “...The important thing is...the play of the sun on the centre. Because that becomes the symbol—the symbol of the future Realisation.” (3.1.70) Here then is to be the actual instrument for Sri Aurobindo’s and the Mother’s work for the supramental Yoga. As Sri Aurobindo described their aim,

“I want to divinise the human consciousness, to bring down the Supramental, the Truth consciousness, the Light, the Force into the physical to transform it... The Supramental is simply the Truth consciousness and what it brings in its descent is the full truth of Life, the full truth of consciousness in Matter.”

Years later, as Auroville’s Founder, the Mother was to tell Aurovilians, “One has to bring the higher Consciousness HERE...From a strictly material and physical point of view, man is not the last species. As after the animal came the man, so after the man there must come another being. And as there is only one Consciousness, it will be this same Consciousness Who, after having experienced the man, will experience the Superhuman Being.”

Perhaps that is another name of the unnameable: House of the New Experiencing. Of the New Being. Of the new Consciousness, the Truth consciousness which, brought down by the concentrated collective aspiration of the soul of a city at the service of Truth, can guide not only the city rising in India but the land of its birth—fulfilling Sri Aurobindo’s prophecy of India as guru of the nations.

We look up from the ground to the space above in which the un-nameable is to manifest ...where it already exists as the Mother saw it, on the eternal plane. Poised like space-dancers on ballet bars of the new world, Aurovilians are taking down all the old scaffolding that supported the construction of the four rib-pairs, basic structure of the House of the New Experiencing.

A strong wind is the space-dancers’ constant challenge and comrade, daring them to be stronger, to surpass themselves; “Earth is the chosen place of mightiest souls,” it seems to chant, “Earth is the heroic spirit’s battle-field.” Battle-comrade, the wind encourages and embraces them as they work under a sultry sun lifting the old scaffolding down, the iron pipes grown burning hot. The Aurovilians’ bodies lithe and beautiful with discipline are all shades of Indian earth, Mother earth, copper, bronze, golden, brown-black, terra
cotta glazed by sweat: who can tell their origin, whether from Eastern lands, Northern or Southern, now that they belong to the people of Sun?

Tourists, or visitors coming to give a hand with the work, peer up at the space-dancers, forerunners of the new Being-to-be, and ask “What is happening now in the construction?”

We at ground level look at one another and smile a little. How to explain?

“We are taking down the old scaffolding.”

It is what we do not say that is the story. As with everything happening at Matrimandir the work proceeds on different levels inner and outer, esoteric and exoteric, an expression of the invisible forces at work concretely in the visible. Evolution of Auroville’s psychic being expresses even as it determines and will govern that of Auroville itself, the process of growth of the city which, the Mother has explained, is “purely divine” in conception and “has preceded by many years its execution. Naturally in the details of the execution the human consciousness intervenes.” (17.4.69)

There have been many interventions by the human consciousness since. They are part of the secret story of the old scaffolding, the former supportive props that, becoming bars and barriers to progressive growth, must now be taken down. What has served in and for its time, retained beyond its time, can only stand in the way of the realisation. “Ego has been the helper; ego is the bar,” the wind whispers to us on the ground.

So too with others of our too-human conceptions or mis-conceptions used in building Auroville, old scaffolding once thought to be inherent in the structure, legal or otherwise, of a city which by its Founding Charter “belongs to humanity as a whole.” The old scaffolding of personal possession, the old power-structure is rigid with past cementings. What of the land of this project “purely divine” in conception, to whom does it belong? To whom its buildings and equipment? Its Founder has answered unequivocally to these questions, “To the Supreme Lord.”

But now with the “infinite love which gives itself and a serenity...which smiles,” the Master Builder takes out His flashing spanner, unstores the outworn clamps and bars, tossing them back to earth-level to be cleaned and restored for future use. Or, if too bent and twisted by the weight they bore or heights and storms they suffered, too corrupted by rust to be put aside in the storeroom of history... Some perhaps, like Peer Gynt the legendary egoist, cast into the fiery furnace to be melted down, remodelled and made new.

Who is taking down the old scaffolding! Who is to put up the new!

Many as have been the interventions of the human consciousness evidenced by crisis, conflict, turmoil and confusion, as many or more have been the quiet, sometimes almost unnoticeable miracles signalling intervention of the One Consciousness. The surface agitation can be seen, by That in us which sees, as “an indispensable act; for matter has to be vigorously churned if it is to become capable of manifesting entirely the divine light. Behind the troubled appearance, behind the struggle and anguish of the conflict, the consciousness remains firm at its post; observing all the movements of the outer being, it intervenes only to rectify
direction and position, so as not to allow the play to become too dramatic. This intervention is now firm and a little severe, now ironical, a call to order or a mockery, full always of a strong, gentle, peaceful and smiling benevolence...” (May 26, 1914) So does the Builder of our Interior oversee our being built.

Now something in the air makes us glance up from the ground. “Look! They’ve finished!” Putting down our tools we marvel. Space for the Inner Chamber cleared at last. In shape a tower as our Builder saw it on the Eternal plane. Its ring-beam entry open for the sun-ray symbol of the Supramental Truth, — the summit “Ring of Union” joining our Builder’s four Powers that lead the universe,—as workers from all four quarters of the globe had joined in its casting on Savitri Amavasya and completed it before dawn on 29th May, the morning of Savitri’s conquest over Death. There it is in all its vast serenity of promise: outline of Auroville’s soul.

“From this Centre, from this ardent hearth which is and shall be more and more wholly impregnated with Your light and love, Your forces will radiate over the entire earth, visibly and invisibly entering into its hearts and thoughts...

An immense wave of love descends upon all things and penetrates all... This human hour, this earthly hour is beautiful among all hours... Behold the splendour of the new word which comes:

’Me voilà’.  
’I am here.’  

(June 9, 1914)

It is dusk. The dark cloud that has obscured the setting sun till now and hung so heavily upon us—yet protectively too, shading the workers—is being surmounted, overcome by a crystal-clear stupendous light. It floods the sky and us with joy. Unheard except perhaps by our Builder, a song of gratitude rises from the ground and from the pans filled with the scattered parts being cleaned and assembled for her next phase of work. The interior space has been opened for us. The way is made clear.

Seyril

(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
“We want to construct the Matrimandir... everyone who will want to work there will be able to work there. And so it will be truly to work at the central idea... In fact, all should come to work there... it is the centre of the town, is it not?... it is the force, the central force of Auroville, the force of cohesion of Auroville... It is the Service which leads to the Transformation.”

The Mother, 7.7.70.
...in the hushed conscious Vast
As climbs a storeyed temple-tower to heaven
Built by aspiring soul of man to live
Near to his dream of the Invisible.
Infinity calls to it as it dreams and climbs;

One of us had asked the Mother about what we could do for the realisation of Auroville, for the venture is so big and high and our means so limited. “You build the Matrimandir, the rest I will do”, was Mother’s answer.

We do not know what was the exact question, nor the exact answer. But, given the fact that Matrimandir is the soul of Auroville, the substance of the answer is direct and touching. Perhaps that is why the Mother spoke more than once of building the Matrimandir first and the city following around it. That would mean the building of the collective organism, the city-body, around the Matrimandir-soul.

To build the Matrimandir is not at all an ordinary matter. Architecturally, it is a thing of joy and surprise; structurally, it is highly complicated; monetarily, it is very costly; physically, it is a hard toil. And, above all, there is the demand and basic call for the growth and heightening of the consciousness of the people constructing the Matrimandir. The Matrimandir has to be constructed in the right spirit, in the right way, with the right attitude. For here is the seat of the soul of a new collectivity, a new life; here we are endeavouring to execute the Divine Mother’s vision. Not that we can do it ourselves. When man has been asked to build the Matrimandir, it is an opportunity given us to open ourselves to the Divine Force, surrender our ego and build the Matrimandir as Her instruments.

SHYAM SUNDER
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
Our early approaches to the Infinite
Are sunrise splendours on a marvellous verge
While lingers yet unseen the glorious sun.
What now we see is a shadow of what must come.
The earth's uplook to a remote Unknown
Is a preface only of the epic climb
Of human soul from its flat earthly state
To the discovery of a greater self
And the far gleam of an eternal Light.
This world is a beginning and a base
Where Life and Mind erect their structured dreams;
An unborn Power must build reality.

(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg.46)
The Mother's Message of 16.2.71 went into effect.

Q: “For the construction of the Matrimandir will only Aurovilians do the work or will there also be hired workers and other people of good will ?”

The Mother: “It is preferable that the work be organised without paid labour so that it is sure to continue in all circumstances.”
The date was 28th April, 1819. John Smith, a British officer of the 28th Cavalry was out on a hunting trip in a wooded area near a minor river Waghur, about 60 kilometres from Jalgaon in present-day Maharashtra, when he discovered what looked to him like an entrance to a cave. He learned from a quick inquiry in a nearby village that the locals in the area were already familiar with the location of these caves. Gathering a group of villagers with a number of axes, spears, torches and drums, he reached the site and asked them to cut down the tangled jungle growth which was blocking the entrance to the cave.

Once the entrance was cleared and Smith entered into what is now known as Cave number 10 of the world-famous Ajanta Caves, the young officer must have been awestruck at what he saw — a large apsidal hall with a rounded stupa at its end, hundreds of faded and frayed remnants of frescoes on walls and pillars. Would he have understood that this was at one time a Buddhist chaitya-griha or a prayer-hall?

In his enthusiastic zeal, and in his ambition to mark his name for posterity, John Smith also scratched his name and date over the painting of a Bodhisattva. But thanks to the years of rubble that had collected in the cave, he did that while standing on a five-foot high pile; as a result, today that faint inscription is well above the eye level of most visitors.

This story of the rediscovery of the Ajanta Caves in 1819 was narrated with much glee by Ranganatha, the young and enthusiastic guide accompanying Yuvaan, Ishaan and Namrata on their walking tour of the caves. He added that within a few decades, these caves carved into a 75-metre wall of rock had become famous for their exotic setting, impressive architecture, breath-taking rock-cut sculptures, but mostly for their exceptional and unique paintings with their sensual forms, masterful line-work and use of natural colour pigments. Many artists also started coming to copy the paintings once the access became easier. And soon the Royal Asiatic Society took in charge the clearing of the site and made official detailed records of the most important rock-cut cave temples.
The oldest of the rock-cut caves (number 9, 10, 12, 13 and 15A) date back to 2nd century BCE, built primarily under the patronage of the Hindu Satavahana dynasty (230 BCE to circa 220 CE) who ruled the region. The bulk of the second phase of construction happened over a very brief period from 460 to 480 CE, during the reign of Hindu Emperor Harishena of the Vākāṭaka dynasty. Most important caves from an artistic point of view were built during this second phase, including cave numbers 1 to 8, 11, 14 to 29. Caves 19, 26, and 29 are chaitya-grihas while the rest are vihāras.

Yuvaan, Ishaan and Namrata were impressed by how well-read Ranganatha was on important details of the different architectural styles perfected at the time when these cave monasteries and worship-halls belonging to different Buddhist traditions were built. As a native of Jalgaon, he felt immensely proud that Ajanta paintings and rock-cut sculptures of several Buddhist deities are among the finest surviving examples of ancient Indian art. Caves 1, 2, 16, and 17 form the largest corpus of surviving ancient Indian murals and frescoes, Ranganatha informed the group. These paintings predominantly narrate the events included in Pali texts known as Jātakas, which describe the previous births of the Buddha and legends associated with them. Several other Buddhist Sanskrit texts have also informed the scenes depicted in the paintings seen in the Ajanta caves. Many paintings also depict the lives of people in those times. He reminded the trio that these painter-artists were able, with only primitive tools achieve the artistry of the sensual forms, and the harmony of the overall composition.

Yuvaan was awestruck by the majesty of the horseshoe layout of the whole site. All that Ranganatha had been sharing with them about the extensive excavation and construction plans, and the painstaking sculptural and elaborate wall-painting works which accompanied the architectural works was a quick education in Indian art history. He couldn’t help but quietly bow down in his mind, to express his silent reverence for the remarkable genius of his ancestors.

While he was appreciative of all that Ranganatha was sharing, after some time Yuvaan decided to break away and go on his exploration in silence. Something in him wanted to experience the majesty and beauty that lay before him in a deeper, quieter way. Telling the young couple that he would catch up with them a few hours later, Yuvaan walked toward cave number 1, which is built on the eastern end of the horseshoe-shaped cliff.

He was enchanted with the elaborate façade of this cave, carved with ornate relief sculptures. In addition to the scenes from the life of the Buddha, there were also a number of decorative motifs. He remembered Ranganatha telling him that most areas of the entrance porch of this cave were once covered with murals, but now only some fragments remain.
Yuvaan slowly entered into a square colonnade with twelve pillars that supported the ceiling and created spacious aisles along the walls. He was pleased to see that there were only two or three people in the cave, in addition to a guard from the Archaeological Survey of India. The silence was appealing and inviting. And soon his eyes were drawn to an impressive seated image of the Buddha, his hands in the *dharmachakrapravartana mudra* — this latter detail he remembered from his previous night’s reading on the Internet.

Yuvaan felt as if his feet were glued to the spot. Soon he would find this happening many times during the day, especially when he would see even bigger and grander sculptures of the Buddha in other caves.

“*The religious or hieratic side of Indian sculpture is intimately connected with the spiritual experiences of Indian meditation and adoration, ... soul realisation is its method of creation and soul realisation must be the way of our response and understanding. ... The figure of the Buddha achieves the expression of the infinite in a finite image, and that is surely no mean or barbaric achievement, to embody the illimitable calm of Nirvana in a human form and visage.*”

Moments passed, and Yuvaan was standing still. In awe. Suddenly, he felt a slight push from behind; a small group of boisterous college students on a field trip had almost filled

1CWSA, 20: 290-291
up the colonnade. Soon a slightly older woman — perhaps their teacher — walked in, indicating to the group with a finger that they should quieten down and asking them to not disturb the peaceful ambiance. Yuvaan was grateful for the reminder, but simultaneously a part of him also became keenly aware that such sensitivity which is essential to a deeper and inner appreciation of art and beauty has gone missing from the general Indian mentality.

Walking slightly away from the central shrine, Yuvaan recalled what Sri Aurobindo had written about the consequence of a soul-less education which had resulted in generations of Indians being cut off from the ancient roots of their aesthetic cultural traditions. It is unfortunate indeed that the modern tendency has been to depreciate the value of the beautiful and over-stress the value of the useful.

Yuvaan’s brief explorations into Sri Aurobindo’s essays on Indian culture and Indian art had helped him understand that some of the innate aspects of Indian temperament — spiritual sensitivity, emotional delicacy and creative imagination — which at one time were the reason for all the high aesthetic culture of our civilisation, had, for a variety of reasons, been submerged over the course of time. But they have not yet been fully destroyed, and he wondered if a thoughtfully revamped education can play an important role in facilitating their revitalisation. It is very important to revive this temperament which values the deeper beauty in all aspects of life.

But what is Beauty, Yuvaan’s mind posed this question.

Beauty indeed escapes all human definitions, another part of his mind promptly answered. It is in and of the form, but also and primarily beyond the form; it is in movement and also in stillness. Beauty is something to be experienced, though that experience may also be limited by the limitations of the experiencing heart and mind.

So, what does it mean to experience beauty, another question soon cropped up? But Yuvaan shook himself out of such mentalising and brought his attention back to the moment, back to the beauty that surrounded him. In a few seconds his eyes found That — that which silenced such questionings and actually gave him the experience.

He simply stood there, in awe. Simply unable to move his eyes away from the over-life-size Bodhisattva Padmapani painted on the wall on one side of the entrance to the main shrine. And in a few seconds, something happened — something that was unexpected for Yuvaan, since he had always considered himself as someone who couldn’t express his emotions easily.

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*Padmapani, Cave 1*
His tears were flowing. Tears that must flow when the heart is so full, so very full that it just doesn’t know what else to do. It melts through the eyes. These are the moments when the mind doesn’t know what is going on. The mind just goes out of the picture. Thankfully. And one is there simply in that moment of oneness with That. With the spirit of That which is in front of one’s eyes.

Later that night, Yuvaan would write in his diary about that extraordinary experience. His mind would recall that all those college students in the cave, admiring, whispering, talking, taking pictures, strolling about — all of them, all of the activity around him had simply disappeared in that moment. There he was, and his tears wouldn’t stop. What he felt was indescribable, he would say in his dairy. Indescribable because describing is the task of the mind. There was no mind involved in what he was experiencing. Or at least that’s how it felt to him.

After writing about his experience, Yuvaan would add on the next page a few quotes from Sri Aurobindo which he had highlighted just the night before.

“Painting is naturally the most sensuous of the arts, and the highest greatness open to the painter is to spiritualise this sensuous appeal by making the most vivid outward beauty a revelation of subtle spiritual emotion …

... the unique character of Indian painting, the peculiar appeal of the art of Ajanta springs from the remarkably inward, spiritual and psychic turn which was given to the artistic conception and method by the pervading genius of Indian culture. ...

Indian painting like Indian architecture and sculpture appeals through the physical and psychical to another spiritual vision from which the artist worked and it is only when this is no less awakened in us than the aesthetic sense that it can be appreciated in all the depth of its significance.”

One word that kept coming to Yuvaan’s mind as he was writing in his dairy later that night was — gratitude: gratitude for that experience, for that moment, for those artists who have given us such works of art.

But this was not the only special experience Yuvaan had that day. Walking from one cave to the next Yuvaan was overwhelmed with a constantly renewing sense of awe, wonder and a quiet appreciation of all the divine beauty that was unfolding in front of his eyes. However, there were two specific works which moved him as deeply as the lotus-bearer
Padmapani Bodhisatva, the Avalokiteshvara with meditative eyes, of Cave 1 had done.

One of these was the massive sculpture on one of the walls of Cave 26 of Mahaparinirvana of Buddha, famously known as reclining Buddha. The deep calm on the face of the Buddha was spell-binding, to say the least. Standing there in silence, a strong sense of peace and stillness seemed to fill his entire being, Yuvaan would later write in his dairy.

He would also copy a passage from one of Sri Aurobindo’s essays on Indian art because he felt no other words could have described so deeply the inner dimensions of the kind of art which lay hidden in those caves, which he was blessed to witness that day.

“A seeing in the self ...becomes the characteristic method of the Indian artist and it is directly enjoined on him by the canon. He has to see first in his spiritual being the truth of the thing he must express and to create its form in his intuitive mind; he is not bound to look out first on outward life and Nature for his model, his authority, his rule, his teacher or his fountain of suggestions. Why should he when it is something quite inward he has to bring out into expression? It is not an idea in the intellect, a mental imagination, an outward emotion on which he has to depend for his stimulants, but an idea, image, emotion of the spirit, and the mental equivalents are subordinate things for help in the transmission and give only a part of the colouring and the shape. A material form, colour, line and design are his physical means of the expression, but in using them he is not bound to an imitation of Nature, but has to make the form and all else significant of his vision, and if that can only be done or can best be done by some modification, some pose, some touch or symbolic variation which is not found in physical Nature, he is at perfect liberty to use it, since truth to his vision, the unity of the thing he is seeing and expressing is his only business. The line, colour and the rest are not his first, but his last preoccupation, because they have to carry on them a world of things which have already taken spiritual form in his mind. He has not for instance to re-create for us the human face and body of the Buddha or some one passion or incident of his life, but to reveal the calm of Nirvana through a figure of the Buddha, and every detail and accessory must be turned into a means or an aid of his purpose. And even when it is some human passion or incident he has to portray, it is not usually that alone, but also or more something else in the soul to which it points or from which it starts or some power behind the action that has to enter into the spirit of his design and is often really the main thing. And through the eye that looks on his work he has to appeal not merely to an excitement of the outward soul, but to the inner self, antarātman. One may well say that beyond the ordinary cultivation of the aesthetic instinct necessary to all artistic appreciation there is a spiritual insight or culture needed if we are to enter into the whole meaning of Indian artistic creation, otherwise we get only at the surface external things or at the most at things only just below the surface. It is an intuitive and spiritual art and must be seen with the intuitive and spiritual eye.”

Yuvaan’s brief web-research from the previous night into some of the important sculptures and paintings at Ajanta caves was helpful, and so was the fact that he had seen virtual images of many of these sculptures and paintings. But nothing comes close to the real experience of standing in front of these beauties, Yuvaan was now certain of this.

Another deeply moving work for Yuvaan was the mural he saw on the wall of the antechamber of cave number 17. Only a few days earlier he had read about it in one of Sri Aurobindo’s essays and, after looking at some pictures of it on the Internet, he had wondered if he would be able to see it
in reality. And today was that day. He was immensely grateful for this opportunity.

This famous mural of Buddha, Yashodhara and Rahul, painted on the left of the shrine is based on a popular legend from a Buddhist Sanskrit-Pali hybrid text known as Mahāvastu Avadāna. According to the story, King Suddhodhana had decreed that anyone disclosing the identity of the Buddha to Rahul would be put to death. Once when Buddha came in front of young Rahul and his shadow fell on the child, Rahul, overcome by the deep feeling of tranquility which washed over him, asked his mother Yashodhara if this enlightened being was his relative. Moved by such innocence, Yashodhara revealed that he indeed was Rahul’s father. Overwhelmed at this knowledge, Rahul grasped tightly a corner of Buddha’s garb and said, “If he is my father then I shall follow the path of my father.” This delicate and deeply moving moment has been captured perfectly and masterfully in this painting.

Yuvaan recalled that Ranganatha had mentioned that a sculpture in cave number 19 also depicted this story. But it was this painting in cave number 17 — which had been reasonably preserved and sufficiently restored, as much as possible — that Yuvaan found to be more special.

Yuvaan was spellbound at the calm, meditative beauty captured in this painting which shows Buddha as a much larger figure than those of Yashodhara and Rahul, perhaps to reveal his higher and vaster state of consciousness resulting from his spiritual realisation. Recalling that Sri Aurobindo had presented a delightful reading into the inner beauty of this particular painting, he pulled out the relevant passage on his mobile and standing there in front of the mural itself slowly re-read it.

“...to appreciate the technique and the fervour of religious feeling is not sufficient; the spiritual intention served by the technique, the psychic significance of line and colour, the greater thing of which the religious emotion is the result has to be felt if we would identify ourself with the whole purpose of the artist. If we look long, for an example, at the adoration group of the mother and child before the Buddha, one of the most profound, tender and noble of the Ajanta masterpieces, we shall find that the impression of intense religious feeling of adoration there is only the most outward general touch in the ensemble of the emotion. That which it deepens to is the turning of the soul of humanity in love to the benignant and calm Ineffable which has made itself sensible and human to us in the universal compassion of the Buddha, and the motive of the soul moment the painting interprets is the dedication of the awakening mind of the child, the coming younger humanity, to that in which already the soul of the mother has learned to find and fix its spiritual joy. The eyes, brows, lips, face, poise of the head of the woman are filled with this spiritual emotion which is a continued memory and possession of the psychical release, the steady settled calm of the heart’s experience filled with an ineffable tenderness, the familiar depths which are yet moved with the wonder and always farther appeal of something that is infinite, the body and other limbs are grave masses of this emotion and in their poise a basic embodiment of it, while the hands prolong it in the dedicative putting forward of her child to meet the Eternal. This contact of the human and eternal is repeated in the smaller figure with a subtly and strongly indicated variation, the glad and childlike smile of awakening which promises but not yet possesses the depths that are to come, the hands disposed to receive and keep, the body in its looser curves and waves harmonising with that significance. The two have forgotten themselves and seem almost to forget or confound each other in that which they adore and contemplate, and yet the dedicating
hands unite mother and child in the common act and feeling by their simultaneous gesture of maternal possession and spiritual giving. The two figures have at each point the same rhythm, but with a significant difference. The simplicity in the greatness and power, the fullness of expression gained by reserve and suppression and concentration which we find here is the perfect method of the classical art of India. And by this perfection Buddhist art became not merely an illustration of the religion and an expression of its thought and its religious feeling, history and legend, but a revealing interpretation of the spiritual sense of Buddhism and its profounder meaning to the soul of India.”

As Yuvaan kept walking in and out of different caves, admiring the sculptures, stupas and paintings, one recurring thought, or rather a question, kept him company — what might have inspired the sculptors and painters to create such beauty, hidden so far away in dark caves?

Later that evening, when he was catching up with Ishaan and Namrata over tea at a food-joint near the main entrance gate, the conversation steered itself to the purpose of art. And he suddenly recalled something he had read in Sri Aurobindo’s essay titled ‘National Value of Art.’ Pulling up the essay quickly on his mobile, he read out the paragraph for Namrata and Ishaan.

“The first and lowest use of Art is the purely aesthetic, the second is the intellectual or educative, the third and highest the spiritual. By speaking of the aesthetic use as the lowest, we do not wish to imply that it is not of immense value to humanity, but simply to assign to it its comparative value in relation to the higher uses. The aesthetic is of immense importance and until it has done its work, mankind is not really fitted to make full use of Art on the higher planes of human development.”

“Wow! These words speak of a profoundly high and deep vision for art and the artist,” said Namrata as she sipped her second cup of chai.

“I know! You must read this full series; it is quite an eye-opener. And it is really full of such profound ideas on the deeper value of art,” Yuvaan said excitedly.

“You have made me curious now. What do you think he means when he speaks of the role of art in human development?” This was Ishaan who had just a few minutes back admitted that he had no adjectives in his vocabulary to describe the kind of overwhelming beauty he had witnessed in those caves.

“Yeah, that is the crux of this series, and hence the title — National Value of Art. I had read this essay a few days back, but I will send you the URL right away. I remember that he speaks about how aesthetic sense facilitates human development by raising and purifying conduct, by facilitating an ethical-moral development, by purifying emotions and by training the imaginative and creative sides of intellectual capacity. But he says that above and beyond these purposes, there is a still higher purpose of Art, which is to serve the growth of spirituality in humanity.”

“I will definitely read the essay, it sounds so remarkable,” added Namrata.

But after a momentary pause, she continued: “You know, based on what little I read last night and what we are just discussing, but primarily because of what we just experienced here in these caves, I have another question. You see, if an

4CWSA, 20: 309-311

5CWSA, Vol. 1, p. 439
artist’s highest purpose is to express and reveal the Spirit through his or her art, do we, as viewers also share with the artist this purpose of seeking the Spirit through beauty?’’

“Hmm…so what you are asking is — how do we develop a sense of perception or vision so that we can access or relate to or somehow connect with the sense of divinity that the artist is trying to reveal or attempting to discover through her or his work?”

“Yes, exactly.”

“But I have an even more immediate question,” interrupted Ishaan. “Who do you think painted those amazing murals? I just couldn’t believe how rich and beautiful some of these were.”

“Oh, where were you when Ranganatha — bless his mind, he was so well-informed — told us about it. He said that while many people believe that it was Buddhist monks or householders who made the paintings, some art historians suggest that most of these were actually painted by guilds of painters from Maharashtra, especially Aurangabad region. And he also added that these guilds included people of various religions — Buddhists, Hindus and Jains — isn’t that interesting? Buddhist monks would give some sort of a general guidance, for example, which specific Jataka tale to be painted etc., but the artists themselves were free to paint according to their artistic vision and style.”

“Wonderful. I also missed this part, and yes I think Ranganatha is a great guide,” added Yuvaan.

“I have his number. Maybe we can ask him if he would also accompany us to Ellora tomorrow afternoon. Or he can put us in touch with someone else he knows there.”

“Yeah, but I think I will be back here tomorrow morning for some time, I would like to go back to at least a few of these caves again,” Namrata chimed in.

“Oh, I would gladly join you,” said Yuvaan.

“You two can do that, but I am beat…it was a lot of walking today. I would like to sleep in and rest,” laughed Ishaan as the trio got up to walk back to the parking lot.

Beloo Mehra
In the passion of its solitary dream
It lay like a closed soundless oratory
Where sleeps a consecrated argent floor
Lit by a single untrembling ray
And an invisible Presence kneels in prayer.
On some deep breast of liberating peace ...  
(CWSA, Vol. 33-34, pg. 332)
I worked on the Matrimandir before, in a humble way, when I helped pass cheddies full of concrete up into one of the support towers being built early in 1973. It was an enjoyable experience and the beginning of an opening within me to the power and significance of the Matrimandir. But this time I had come seeking a more meaningful contribution: I felt that somewhere there was a major task to be undertaken — something personally satisfying which would also make a real difference to the progress and physical manifestation of the building.

The 2 1/2 years since I had worked there had brought remarkable changes. The growing beauty and power of the building struck me immediately. At the site itself, finding no one at ground level I climbed up into the scaffolding to ask what needed to be done. No one was directing the work or was able to point out a job, though eventually a Frenchman suggested I could rub down plywood shuttering in preparation for the next concreting. I joined an American woman in the work and found a satisfaction in completing the task, though I felt it wasn’t the sort of ‘meaningful contribution’ I sought.

In fact, looking around I couldn’t see anything special happening anywhere on the site. Some people were dismantling the shuttering around a recent concreting, others were extracting and collecting nails from miscellaneous pieces of wood, or sorting nuts and bolts, or cleaning washers and scaffolding joints, or simply sweeping down the planks which formed the high level working platforms. Nowhere could I see anything of major importance happening. I finally descended — puzzled, but strangely contented with the little I had been able to do for the time being.

The next day there was a concreting in the afternoon. When I arrived I found an atmosphere of quietly dedicated activity in all directions. Men and women of all nationalities and all ages were involved in shovelling sand, washing and shovelling stones, emptying cement sacks, manning the concrete mixer, pushing trolleys of concrete mix and attaching them to hoists. They communicated in a variety of languages, or in silence, their smiles and integrated action often being all that was required to carry the work forward stage by stage. Everywhere there was a radiance and sense of common purpose. I worked until blisters made my unaccustomed hands too painful, then turned to the guest community for a shower.

The third day found me again up amid the scaffolding, cleaning and oiling bolts. Around me another mix of Aurovilians was involved in the same range of simple tasks that I’d previously observed. I still couldn’t identify any major work and began to wonder at the extraordinary simplicity of what everyone seemed to be doing. Nobody to my knowledge was doing anything exceptionally skilled or special, yet the Matrimandir was clearly progressing: a lot had been achieved in those two days and the project was clearly that little bit nearer completion. I pondered, then suddenly I understood. The truth burst upon me in all its beauty and simplicity, as I realised that there could be no such thing as a ‘significant contribution’, except in the context of my own ego. Every single task, no matter how simple or menial, was as significant as the rest, because it was only by the execution of them all that the project was progressing. If you removed any one of them the whole work would be halted. Only by everyone working together and each contributing his humble part to the whole, and doing it to the highest standards, could the Matrimandir be built. It progressed through unity, and so to work on it was to learn the lesson of unity.

My mind went back to early 1973 and the very first words I ever heard spoken about Auroville: “It’s not so much that we’re building Auroville, as Auroville is building us”.

Truly the Matrimandir is a university of unity, but the learning process doesn’t stop there. The schools extend throughout Auroville, every community, every building, every task being a source of additional learning. So often it is only our ego which says we do or don’t want to work on a particular project; we rely too much on our mind to decide whether it is important and consequently are too inclined to decide on the basis of a job’s importance to us, instead of its importance to the whole of Auroville, and so to mankind. Each job, whether it be planting a seedling, cleaning a toilet or drilling a borewell, is as significant and as important as any other, providing it is truly needed, because without its execution the whole cannot be achieved.

When one understands this one can begin to set real priorities for Auroville — priorities beyond any personal or group need or desire. And with the identification of such priorities will surely come increasing harmony and unity.

Tim Wrey
(Reprinted from an earlier issue)
Concreting of the 22 centimetres high tie-slab, connecting the four pillar footings, began on 3rd May 1972.

It went on for 26 hours. The Mother had sent the message:

3.5.1972

Let us all work with a growing sincerity for the manifestation of the Divine Truth.

With my blessings.