

# Completion of the Unity Island

## Proposed scope of works and decisions to be taken

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### **A) Some of the Mother's words pertaining to the Matrimandir, its Gardens and Island:**

- *The Matrimandir will be the soul of Auroville. The sooner it is there, the better it will be for everybody and especially for the Aurovilians.*
- *The gardens are as important as the Matrimandir itself.*
- *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.*
- *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.*

### **B) Step by step completion of the 'Peace Area'.**

The 'Peace Area' consists of 1) the Unity Island (with the Matrimandir, its 12 Gardens, etc.), 2) the Lake and 3) the area between the Lake and the first row of buildings around it.

- 28.2.68: Laying of Auroville's foundation stone (samples of the world's earth in the Urn).
- 21.2.71: Laying of Matrimandir's foundation stone. Excavation work started soon after.
- 21.2.72: Beginning of the actual construction of the Matrimandir.
- ??4.91: Installation of the crystal globe – the Inner Chamber becomes operational.
- 21.2.08: Completion of the Matrimandir and of its immediate surroundings.
- 28.2.18: Provided the collective will expresses itself in time: Completion of the Unity Island along with some kind of first "isolating zone" around it, a ditch (hopefully wide).
- Then, a team other than that of 'Matrimandir' will create the Lake, section after section, and landscape the area adjacent to each one of these sections.

The following facilities will also need to be created outside the Unity Island in order for it and all its features to be fully operational:

- MM Viewing Point (probably a small hill in its W-SW sector).<sup>1</sup>
- MM Reception Pavilion (planned on the Lake's outer bank in line with its West radial).<sup>2</sup>
- MM Maintenance facilities (planned near the Lake's outer bank in its E-NE sector).<sup>3</sup>
- Means of crossing the lake on its west and east sides (bridge or shuttle).

The completion of the Island and the creation of a (hopefully wide) ditch around it will require demolishing more temporary ancillary facilities. Anyway, as several of them are too close to the Island and thus too visible, they should be demolished soon. Hence some of the permanent ancillary facilities will need to be at least started during this period.

Note that, as the Lake will be part of a comprehensive collection/storage/treatment system of surface water, its feeding system will need to be created along with some of its sections.

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<sup>1</sup> Who should finance/create Viewing Point, permanent pathway/road (and/or a rail-link) and shuttles linking it to the Visitors' Centre? Probably Matrimandir, L'Avenir and Visitors' Centre respectively.

<sup>2</sup> L'Avenir will have to finance/create a permanent pathway/road (and/or a rail-link) to link it to the Visitors' Centre. 'Matrimandir' may have to finance and operate these shuttles.

<sup>3</sup> Should MM Nursery and the MM Viewing Point remain under 'Matrimandir' management and MM Solar PV Power Plant and MM diesel generators remain where they are presently or be shifted to the MM Maintenance Compound? The answer to these two questions will determine the extent of the area under 'Matrimandir' management besides the Unity Island, MM Maintenance Compound, MM Reception Pavilion and the bridges and/or shuttles linking them.

### **C) Proposed scope of works to be completed prior to Auroville's Golden Jubilee:**

From the above quotes, it should be obvious to all that completing the Unity Island and creating some kind of preliminary “*isolating zone*” around it should be among our top priorities.

Our community needs to unite and start putting its house in order because it needs to find some clarity and a renewed dynamism and also to present itself in a good light at the time of its Golden Jubilee (28.2.18) and to seize this opportunity to open a new chapter in its history.

#### **Minimum requirements for the Unity Island to be ‘complete’:**

1. The Twelve Gardens (representing the twelve Powers of the Mother) should be complete with the understanding that 1) they will evolve along the years, along with the consciousness of the Aurovilians and 2) our community has to be able to maintain them and the entire Island despite the fact that its human and material resources are still very limited.
2. All works requiring large gangs of workers and many movements of heavy machinery (dumpers, excavators and cranes) on the island should be over so that the Island's atmosphere isn't disturbed anymore by such activities.
3. A 2m-deep ditch (if possible some 30m wide) should be created around the Island as a first step towards the creation of a lake and as a first kind of “*isolating zone*”.
4. The following 5 different categories of people should be accessing the Island from the entry points assigned to them respectively for good (and park their vehicles there)<sup>4</sup>.
  - Holders of a ‘Visitor Pass’ visiting the Island during ‘Visitors’ time’. (West axis)
  - Holders of a ‘Staff Pass’ (Aurovilians, volunteers and employees with their tools and other things) working on the Island during working hours. (Most probably East axis).
  - Holders of an ‘Aurovilian Pass’ visiting the Island at ‘Aurovilians’ time’. (E. or W.?)
  - Large crowds attending a major function at the Amphitheatre (bonfire or other).
  - VVIPs with a very large party and escort. (i.e.: President or Vice-President of India)

#### **Meeting this 2<sup>nd</sup> requirement implies:**

- Completing the Lake's bank and its parapet (if any).
- Completing the (1km long) oval road.
- Landscaping and planting the remaining parts of the Island (incl. providing benches).
- Completing the Island's infrastructure and in particular its lighting system, irrigation system, surveillance system, communication system and wastewater system (for toilets).
- Doing the needful so that water falling on the Amphitheatre gets pumped into the Lake.
- Building at least the main structures which will be required on the island by then.

#### **Meeting this 3<sup>rd</sup> requirement implies:**

- Removing all temporary ancillary buildings within 30m from the Island (at least) – which means starting to build permanent facilities to replace them (if required).
- Finding and agreeing upon dumping sites, transport routes and timings for transport.

#### **Note on the Lake:**

The Lake has been a very controversial topic from the outset for some very valid reasons which need to be addressed properly in due time. The idea here is to progress step by step and by consensus. This should not be too difficult for the first step proposed here.

Provided dumping sites, and routes to them, can be found and approved, earth would be excavated and transported to create a first *isolating zone* (a ditch which would have to look beautiful because it would remain without water for many years – at least in some sections).

In order not to be bogged down by one section of our community or another, it is indispensable to leave as many options as reasonably possible open at each step and allow opinions to evolve. Hence, the Island's bank should be conceived in such a way that they are suitable for lakes of various depths and widths, as well as for a lake with a uniform level or several levels and also for no lake (in some sectors there won't be any lake for many years to come).

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<sup>4</sup> This even if parking lots and gates are at first closer from the Island than they will eventually be.

**D) On the different types of decisions to be taken and possible ways to go about them:**

When our community will have decided on the scope of works to be completed prior to 28.2.18, and appointed a new team of executives to lead the team that will carry out these works, this new team (assisted by people of their choice) will prepare a planning which will show not only when each work should be executed but also when designs will need to be submitted and when designs decisions will need to be taken. Interested parties will need to give their opinion in due time, or accept that a decision has been taken without their involvement.

It should be possible for anybody to submit a proposal but people submitting their ideas need to realise that their proposal needs to be in harmony with the whole and that teamwork is a must at Matrimandir; hence they will need to either join an existing team or form a new team together with like-minded designers.

Designers need to receive feedbacks during their design process and not just after months of work. Much more weight should be given to the opinion of people who have followed the design process and tried to find some harmony than to people who, at the end, voice an opinion.

**a) Deciding on the design of the twelve gardens and other planted areas:**

Proposals for the next 3 gardens (Light, Life, Power), which are very small, need to be invited at the earliest as they need to be presented soon and a decision taken. By whom? How?

Hopefully, we will learn from the experience of each new phase of work and try to improve both designs and decision-making process.

**b) Deciding on the fate of the benches and paved pathways below the Banyan Tree:**

- Some are likely to want the new team of executives to remove them right away BUT it is always better not to demolish/remove something without having something better to replace it with immediately – especially in such a high-visibility spot.
- One could ask all designers submitting designs for the gardens of *Life* and *Power* (which are also under the Banyan Tree) to include the entire Banyan area in their design BUT it would be loading heavily their proposals (one way for some, another way for others).
- At this point in time, it may be better to let things be for a little longer and invite alternative proposals as soon as the designs of these two gardens are selected/approved. The existing would then be one of the options proposed. Who should decide? How?

**c) Deciding on who is to decide how the Banyan Tree is to be pruned.**

At times some branches are in such a state that they need to be removed so that they don't risk falling and hurting people below. The growth of some aerial roots needs to be stimulated while some others should be removed. The designers of the gardens which are partly below it and near it need to know whether the Banyan will be allowed to grow unhindered or whether it will be pruned regularly so that it doesn't grow beyond a given perimeter. Will one person or a small team be put in charge of its pruning, or will there be endless discussions now and then?

**d) Deciding on whether to display on the Island some of the Mother's messages. If so, which one(s), in which languages, where and how.**

- "*Auroville, the city at the service of Truth.*" (Because it was given in February 1968 for Auroville's Inauguration Ceremony, to be inscribed around the Banyan Tree. Why in Tamil and French only?)<sup>5</sup>
- The Charter. (Because the original, was placed in the Urn on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1968)<sup>6</sup>.
- "*The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Divine's answer to man's aspiration for perfection. Union with the Divine manifesting in a progressive human unity.*" (Because

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<sup>5</sup> Some want to keep it permanently around the Banyan Tree. Others say it should be displayed elsewhere – if at all.

<sup>6</sup> Roger thought of displaying it on the sliding doors giving access to the room below the Amphitheatre on the East side.

it was given in August 1970 for a Matrimandir Dedication Ceremony, to be inscribed by a (now demolished) pond near the Banyan Tree.)<sup>7</sup>

- The following two other messages. (Because they too explain what Matrimandir is and complement the previous one.)
  - *“Let the Matrimandir be the living symbol of Auroville’s aspiration for the Divine.”*<sup>8</sup>
  - *“The Matrimandir wants to be the symbol of the Universal Mother according to Sri Aurobindo’s teaching.”*<sup>9</sup>

**e) Completing the pond (with cascade and fountain) facing the mini-amphitheatre:**

Jacqueline and Jean should probably carry on and complete this ongoing work.

**f) Deciding on the lighting of the entire Island** (main structures, pathways and gardens).

As it is imperative to speak with one voice here, the scope for community participation in this particular decision can only be limited but efforts should nevertheless be made in this direction. A small team (of like-minded competent Aurovilians) needs to be appointed to deal with outside consultants and manufacturers of lighting fixtures.

Some Aurovilians may be convinced to team up together and take up this work but, who should chose the team that will be given the responsibility of this work?

**g) Deciding on the place from which different categories of people will access the Island and park their vehicles.** (How they will cross the lake being another question.)

This decision could be left to the new team of executives, the outgoing team of executives, Jacqueline and some other Aurovilians of their choice.

In my view the choice would be far easier, even obvious, if, within a year, the ‘Office Gate’ would be closed for good and all holders of a ‘Visitor Pass’ would enter the compound from the ‘West Gate’ as this would make us all realise the implications of this change. For it to be possible, the road should be shifted further away, the compound slightly extended in this area and there has to be a small Access Office and some toilets. Both could be either temporary (in the area earmarked for the future lake) or be permanent (on the Island).

**h) Deciding on technical matters.** (Such as doing what is necessary for rainwater falling over the Amphitheatre to be pumped into the Lake.) Such decisions could be left to the new team of executives assisted by engineers of their choice.

**i) Deciding whether some additional structures will be required on the Island.**

Note that, eventually, there could be several hundreds of people on the Island at the same time: staff, Aurovilians and visitors, not to speak of the time when major events will take place in the Amphitheatre. Note also that the Unity Island is very large (360m x 290m) and that Roger’s Lake is very wide (90-150m). Possible need of additional structures:

- Workshops, stock-rooms, store rooms and garages: Better dispense with them on the Island and use only the space below the east side of the Amphitheatre for this – if at all.
- Toilets for the staff, Aurovilians and visitors: Please not below the Amphitheatre – except maybe during large functions there.
- Space where to keep people’s belongings (cell phones, bags).
- Control Room with CCTV, phone and controls/repeaters of some systems.
- Covered spaces: Several are required for the staff, Aurovilians and visitors to take cover in case of a short rain without having to cross the lake, or go below the Matrimandir. The staff would also have its tea there. Elderly people could also rest there before carrying on with their visit. Persons who have a malaise or have been wounded could lay down there while waiting for an ambulance. Persons on duty day and night (employees or Aurovilians) could sit there and be protected from rains and the sun.

<sup>7</sup> If the message displayed around the Banyan is to be kept there, why not keep this one also? For the same reasons.

<sup>8</sup> Message given for Matrimandir’s Foundation Stone Ceremony.

<sup>9</sup> Message probably given in September 1970. The occasion is not known.

In my view, the need for these structures will become obvious to all as soon as the different categories of people will be entering from their respective permanent entry points and when people will realise how far away the ancillary facilities outside the Island will eventually be. Note that all these facilities won't necessarily need to be created within the next 4½ years, but their likely location needs to be identified so that the infrastructure can be laid now and one won't have to mess up things too much later.

Who will decide on which facilities will be required? Where they should be located and who is to write a brief for the architects interested in designing them?

**j) Deciding on the design of these additional structures (if any).**

Design proposals should be invited and a panel of architects could be asked to select the best one. Who is to appoint it?

**k) Deciding on how the Lake will be crossed in the places where it is to be crossed.**

As said, the two options are bridges or shuttles.

- Bridges may be horizontal and heavy-duty (useable by fully loaded trucks) or arched footbridges (below which small boats, including maintenance catamarans, could pass).
- Shuttles should probably be cable-pulled and may be either floating (ferryboats) or be platforms on stilts supported by a rail carriage rolling on submerged horizontal rails (rolling bridges)<sup>10</sup>. These could also be either light or heavy-duty (that is, capable of supporting a fully loaded truck or a bus on tires or rails).

On the west side: there could be either a bridge or a shuttle. (If a shuttle, it should be capable of carrying either 50 passengers or a fully loaded bus on tires or rails.)

On the east side: As fully loaded trucks and tractor-trailer need to be able to cross there and as the staff needs to be able to cross at will on some bridge, there should be either a heavy-duty horizontal bridge, or a footbridge and a heavy-duty shuttle near it.

The question of where and how VVIPs (i.e.: President of India) and their party will park and cross has to be decided upon. Same question for large crowds going to the Amphitheatre.

All these questions need to be answered within the next 3 years because they will affect the design of landings on the Island and possibly also the need for additional structures.

**l) Deciding on the width of the Oval Road and the exact location of the Island's bank:**

This is the drawing Roger attached to his final Brief, dated 11.10.05, for a 16.2 ha lake. It shows that he thought of breaking the monotony of the pure oval shape<sup>11</sup> in some places.

Let us note that, as the Island is already very large (9ha), it would be better not to enlarge it.

Width of the (1km long) Oval Road:

If my memory is correct, Roger's drawings show a 3.2m width. Did it include gutters and parapet? As tractors and people will be circulating on this road, is 3.2m sufficiently wide?

Tractors-trailers and dumpers need to be able to do a U-turn in at least 6 places along its 1km. It should also be possible to leave a trailer in several earmarked places without it blocking the way of heavy vehicles.



<sup>10</sup> A rolling bridge is more stable than a ferry-boat. Its landing remains always at the same height whatever the lake's water level may be. It is easier to build on the spot and also to take out of water for maintenance operations (one dismantles it). It is likely to be cheaper to build and maintain. Its rails could be laid on submerged dikes 2m below the highest permissible water level.

<sup>11</sup> It is 10 times Matrimandir's vertical section.

Location of the Island's bank: It is conditioned by:

- The width of the Oval Road, including gutter(s) and parapet (if any).
- The design of the landings of bridges and/or shuttles.
- The need to make some temporary partitions easy to connect and waterproof.
- The need to widen the Oval Road locally (see above) but this could be done inwards.
- Possibly the presence of some additional structures between Oval Road and Lake.
- The wish to retain some existing trees.

Designs could be invited but who is to write the Brief and then select the best proposal?

**m) Deciding on the paving of the Oval Road and a possible parapet.**

The sub-structure of this road is a technical matter to be studied along with the structure of the Lake's bank. The drainage (and possible filtering) of all surface water originating from the Island and flowing into the Lake is also a technical matter.

Designs could be invited but who is to write the Brief and then select the best proposal?

**n) Deciding on how to build the Lake's bank:**

Clay or bentonite mats or some other technique will be used below 2.5m below the level of the Oval Road; this even at a gentle slope and if the maximum depth would be 10m.

We are speaking here of the upper part of the Lake's bank which, when the Lake will be complete, will emerge in case of a severe drought and will thus be visible. Because of that, it cannot be waterproofed in the same way as if it would always be immersed and would be only flat or gently sloped.

There are several options and different ones could be adopted in different areas. It could be steep or even vertical. It could have between 1 and 10 steps. It could be gently sloped in some areas and planted or covered with a layer of sand.

Conceiving it will require integrating inputs from people concerned with:

- Aesthetics: For this reason Roger wanted the Lake's water level to fluctuate only between - 0.25m and - 1.0m below Oval Road. In fact, at least for many years after the first section will be complete, at times its level will be going down to - 2.0m.
- Waterproofing: This is the most difficult problem because this bank won't be submerged for many years and even when it will be, it will at times emerge. The following points will also need to be addressed: expansion joints, waterproof joint with the waterproofing material used for the bottom of the lake and also with temporary partitions (probably pilewalls<sup>12</sup>) as the Lake will need to be built by sections. It will have to be possible to improve the bank's waterproofing after some years without too much of a problem (i.e.: applying a coat of some waterproofing material on some RCC structure).
- Structural stability: It is crucial because the quality of the waterproofing will depend partly on it. It could be linked structurally to the road's sub-structure.
- Function and safety: Measures need to be taken to minimise the risk of drowning. Should the bank be such that animals swimming across the lake cannot enter the Island? Should part of this bank be treated as ghats and be used as such?
- Lake ecology: In some places it may be good to have some beaches with plants, or breeding areas for fishes and water birds. Should this be done or should such things be floating so that the water level in relation to it remains always the same? How best to do this without making waterproofing even more difficult to realise/maintain?

**o) Deciding on the shape of the excavation next to the lake's bank.**

This question will arise only if and when dumping sites can be found and agreed upon. As this excavation will anyway be widened/deepened in the future, its design should not be too

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<sup>12</sup> 'Palplanches' en français.

much of an issue. Yet, some sections of the Lake won't be created before many years and this excavation should nevertheless look good and should not be too difficult to maintain.

**p) Deciding on the location and design of the permanent MM Viewing Point.**

The present Viewing Point provides a very good view but is too close to the Unity Island and thus needs to be replaced by a permanent Viewing Point.

Note that if tourists were not satisfied with the view from there, many of them would go around the MM compound until they find a nice view, which they would find one at the Town Hall... Hence the MM Viewing Point should not be too far away from the Matrimandir and should be sufficiently high. The further away it will be from the Visitors Centre the more deeply the massive flow of tourists will penetrate inside the city...

A serious problem lies in the fact that it should be close to the Matrimandir and hence to the Lake's outer bank. But, when will we know for sure how wide the lake will eventually be in this sector and at what level its outer bank will be there?

The MM Viewing Point's location, height, access and the facilities attached to it (toilets) should be decided upon together with L'Avenir and after making some scaffolding towers to enable the decision-makers to assess the quality of the view at the various possible sites. Note that some trees may have to be removed in order to provide an unobstructed view.

**q) Deciding on the architecture of the MM Reception Pavilion and Maintenance facilities**

As these two buildings are far away from each other, they won't need the same architect.

Not knowing how wide the Lake will eventually be in these two sectors creates here also a serious problem because these two facilities need to be close to its outer bank.

The question of how these buildings will be accessed and the size of their respective parking lots will need to be decided upon.

Briefs will have to be prepared (by whom?), proposals invited and the best concept selected (by whom?).

**r) Deciding on the extent of the area under 'Matrimandir' management.**

At present 'Matrimandir' manages the entire area within the MM compound and the MM Nursery. Eventually it will be managing the Unity Island, MM Maintenance Compound, MM Reception Pavilion and the bridges and/or shuttles linking them. The area surrounding these spaces (and the fence of the MM compound) will then be managed by the 'MM Lake Team', whoever that is. Eventually:

- The management of the 'MM Nursery' should probably be transferred from 'Matrimandir' to either 'AV Parks & Gardens Service' or 'AV Botanical Garden'.<sup>13</sup>
- When 'Matrimandir' will hand over the management of the area around the Unity Island to another team, the compound where the MM Solar PV Plant and MM diesel generators are presently located won't be connected anymore to the area under 'Matrimandir' management. At some point in time it would probably be better to shift these pieces of equipments to the MM Maintenance facilities.  
Note that one of the possible sites for the MM Viewing Point is the area where the MM Solar PV Plant presently is.
- Though the permanent MM Viewing Point should probably be financed/created by 'Matrimandir', its upkeep and that of the pathway and shuttles connecting it to the 'Visitors' Centre' should probably become the responsibility of the 'Visitors' Centre'. Note that it won't be connected anymore physically to another area managed by 'MM'.
- Prior to 28.2.18, L'Avenir should not give any permission to carry out any work (i.e.: test ponds) within the Matrimandir Compound to some other team without first coming to an agreement on this with the new team of executives.

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<sup>13</sup> Matrimandir donors have been paying for the development and upkeep of the MM Nursery for 4 decades. It has been of great benefit to Auroville as a whole but of little benefit to the gardens on the Unity Island.