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Nothing stands as powerful a testament to the soulful force of Sri Aurobindo--and his collaborator, the Mother--than Matrimandir, the awesome 100' high orb (right, still unfinished) at the center of Auroville, in Pondicherry. This mammoth globe breaking out of the earth symbolizes the birth of a new consciousness on the earth. The four massive pillars sup-porting the structure are named after aspects of the Mother of the Universe--Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi and Mahasaraswati. The world's largest man-made crystal (27" in diameter) is enshrined in an upper chamber. "I saw [in vision] very clearly the interior of this place," said the Mother in 1969. "No windows. The sun ought to strike the globe [crystal]." So a heliostat has been mounted on top of the sphere to reflect a beam of sunlight onto the clear crystal. The Aurobindo vision

organically unfolded into two communities--the original Ashram, begun by Sri Aurobindo (2,000 members, mostly Indian) and the Auroville Community begun in 1968 by the Mother (800 residents, two-thirds of non-Indian origin). The Ashram is considered the "guide, the inspirer" and Auroville is unquestionably the "experiment," a trailblazing "attempt for collective realization."

Photos, clockwise: Matrimandir today with inset drawing of the gold-petaled exterior shell (not added yet); Auroville meditator; group sunrise meditation; cross-section of Matrimandir; Ashram dining hall; international children of Auroville; two residences, typical of Auroville's creative architecture; the sacred banyan tree; and Matrimandir's sacred crystal.