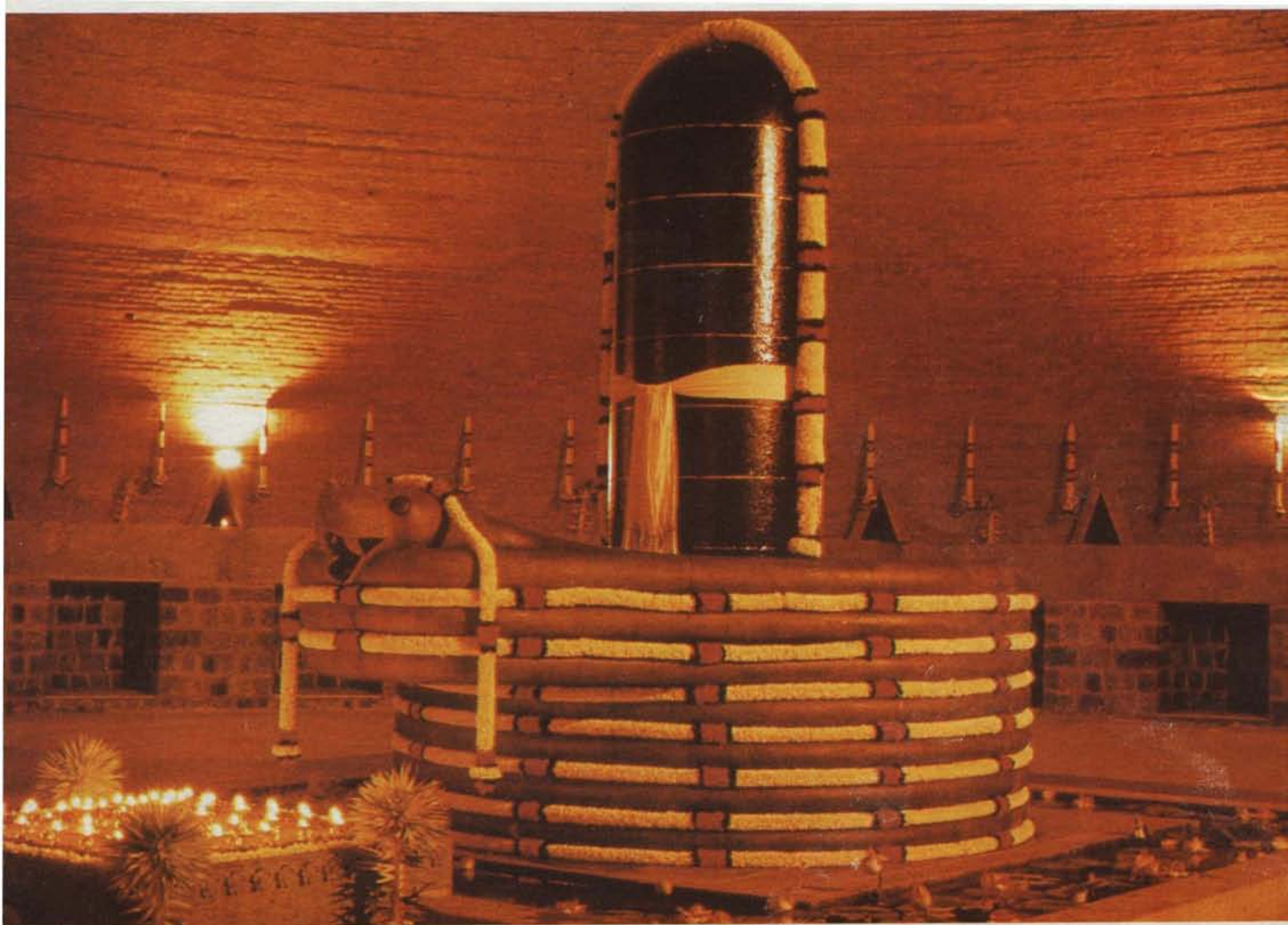




**AN ARCHITECTURAL
MAGNIFICENCE**



Tucked away in the foothills of the verdant Velliangiri hills,
at Poondi, near Coimbatore
is the multi-religious Dhyanalingam temple,
with its awesome earthen brick dome,
silhouetted in regal splendour against the lush green hills
and the azure sky above.

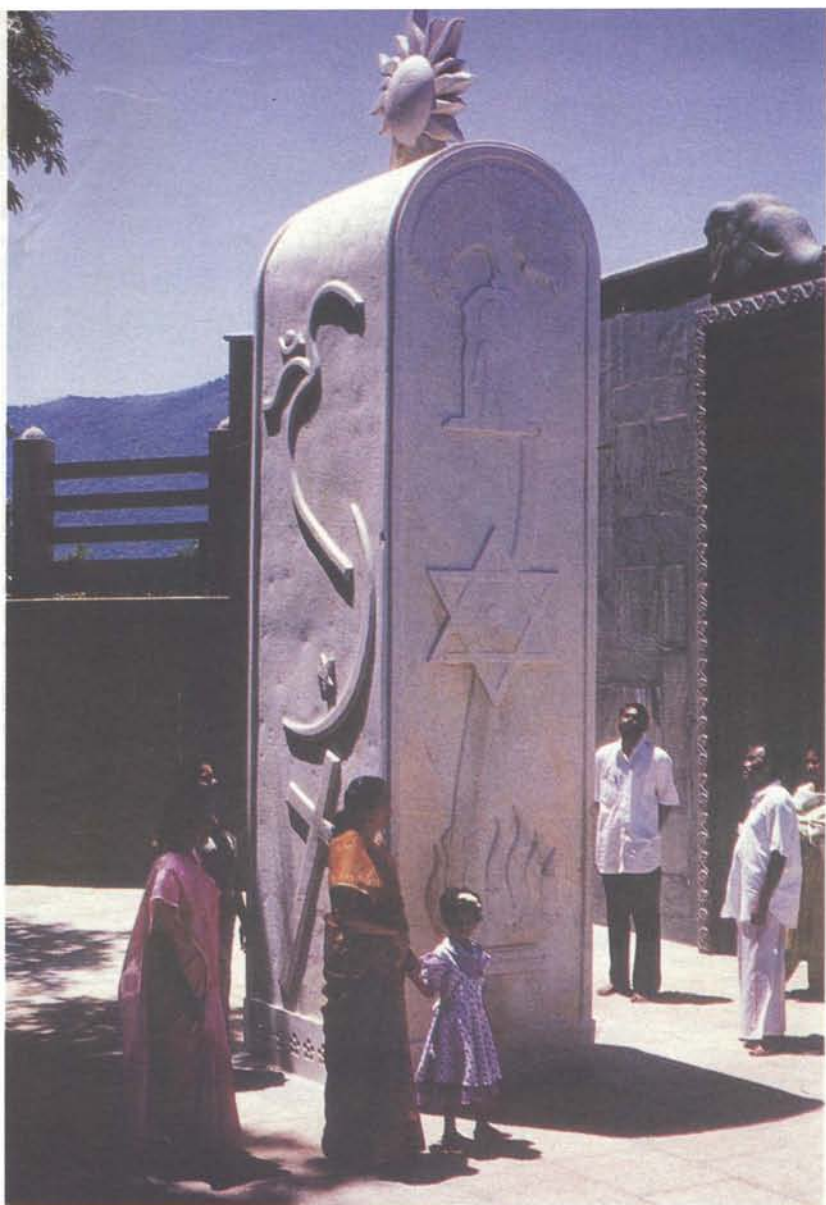


PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT: The inside of the brick dome, with the Dhyanalingam and 'Avudaiyar' below. The lingam-shaped copper dome lined with gold foil, covering the central opening, hangs above the Dhyanalingam.

PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT: Sculptured panels depicting mythological tales from the Shiva Purana.

ABOVE: The Dhyanalingam, surrounded by the jalaseema lit by oil lamps. The triangular ventilators also emit light at daytime.

OPPOSITE: The Sarvadhama sthamba, in white granite, with sculptured inscriptions of all the world's religions on it. The rare white granite is from Edapaddy near Erode.



The multi-religious Dhyanalingam temple, designed as a place for meditation, was conceived by Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev, founder of the Isha Yoga Center as a tribute to the Masters of the Yoga tradition. Brahmachari engineers and dedicated volunteers offered their services and skills freely in the building of this temple.

Architect Karthikeyan of the architectural firm, Karthik and Karthik built the foundation walls (the peripheral dimension of the structure is 212 ft x 8 ft), and worked out other intricate details

of the art work. Since this was to be a place for meditation and not religious rituals, 'Only the essence of Hindu architecture was drawn upon,' explains Karthikeyan. 'For instance, the traditional "dhwaja sthamba" of a Hindu temple, was converted into a "sarva dharma sthamba", with symbols of all the major religions of the world, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism and Buddhism, inscribed on its three sides. In white granite, this massive monolith is placed in the unusual, sunken reception. The stone entrance gateway or the thorana is based on traditional Indian architecture with a 11-foot, high wood panelled door, which acts as the main entry.

An open to sky, central pathway which visually links the entrance to the mud brick dome, is approached by climbing three 'rudraksha' steps, (pebbles cut in rudraksha shapes). This has been done to give the effect of acupressure for activating the nerve centres of the body, to prepare it for meditation. The pathway is flanked by covered aisles on either side, housing shrines and sculptured panels. The aisles are covered with a simple roof structure of hollow terracotta tiles which is supported by granite pillars and stone beams commissioned from Mahabalipuram.

The open pathway ends at a vaulted tunnel, leading to the dome. Built with wedge-shaped granite blocks spanning eight feet, the vault serves as the gateway to the Dhyanalingam, and also, structurally supports the brick dome. The stone threshold of the vault is carved with the figures of two snakes. Explaining the Sadhguru's philosophy,





OPPOSITE: The stone threshold of the vault with pillars on either side and a five-headed snake sculpture crowning the vault. The tunnel effect of the vault can be seen as the Dhyanalngam is visible at the further end of the tunnel.

ABOVE: The central pathway with covered aisles on both sides. In front of the wooden trellis on either side are the shrines to Vanishree and Patanjali.

Karthikeyan says, 'The five-headed snake sculpture crowning the vault is symbolic of the five senses that act as the gateway to the mind, which uses them to acquire knowledge and wisdom, and thus, to liberate itself.'

The free standing, mud brick dome, with no metal supports or scaffolding, was designed by French architect, Satprem Maini of the Auroville Building Center. He personally supervised the entire execution of the dome step by step, employing over 300 workers, including 25 masons.

The basic design of the dome is based on ancient Nubian

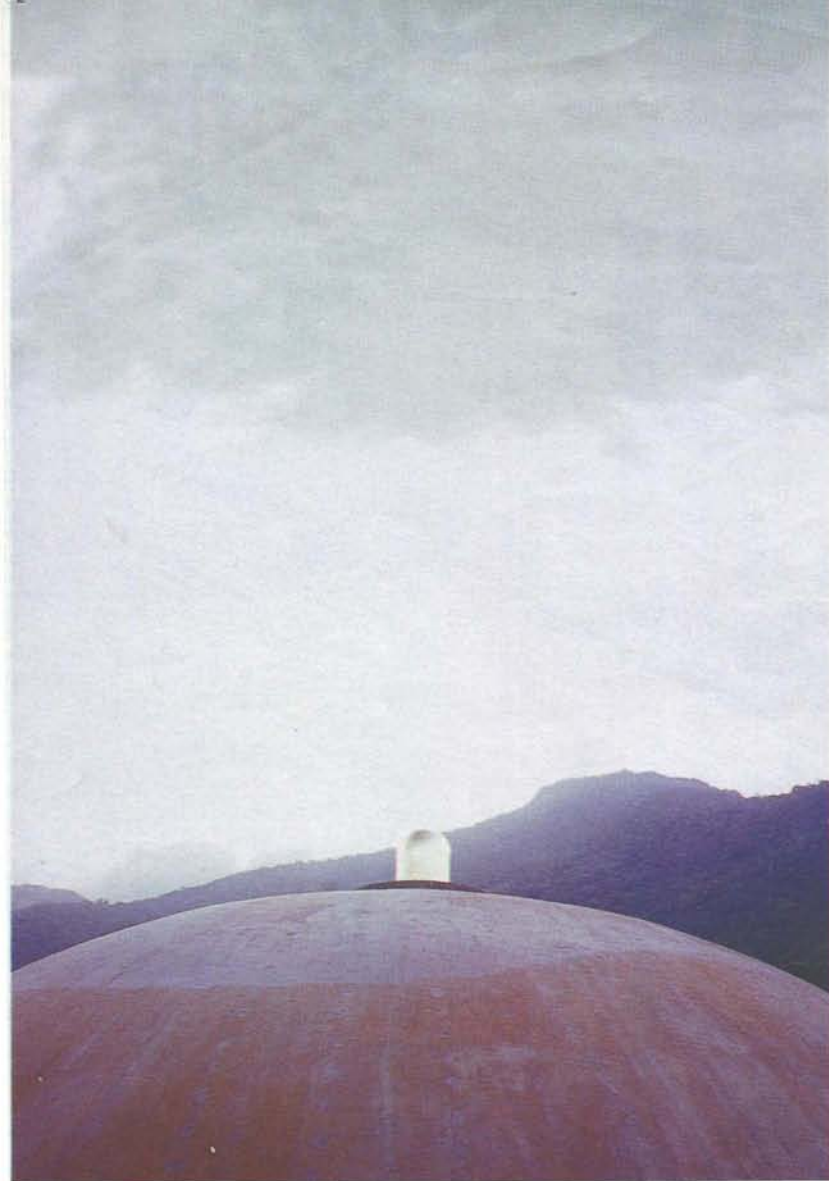
technology of Egyptian origin, dating back 2000 to 3000 years.

Explains Satprem Maini, 'The dome, is a segmental ellipse with the thickness of the dome varying from the base to the apex. Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev had set a deadline for the completion of the dome, and so we could not use compressed earth blocks as the time required for their production, curing and drying would have been too long.' So they opted for fired, wire-cut bricks, laid one over the other, to make use of the capillary action of water over the brick. Mud plaster was used for the



ABOVE: A fisheye view of the interior of the Dhyanalagam with the brick dome above and the granite flooring below.

ABOVE: The summit with the metal covering in the centre and the Velliangiri hills in the background.



initial fixing, and it was stabilised with lime and cement mortar. The first layer of brick starts at a 13° angle of 21" width and the last ends at an almost vertical angle of 82° of 8" thickness, culminating at the roof, with a 6-ft wide opening at the top.

Since the lingam was placed inside before the construction of the dome, Satprem Maini designed an elliptical dome. The entire dome was constructed without using any frame work or scaffolding, ring beam, steel or concrete. 2,50,000 bricks were used, each measured to the millimeter. The cutting was finished

with great precision, in spite of primitive instruments such as knotted rope. The dome finally weighed approximately 700 tons.

The dome rests on an 8-ft wide and 6-ft high, circular stone masonry wall, including a ring of 2-ft wide granite lintels. In the niches of the wall are 28, small 'aura' cells for one to sit in and meditate. Each cell faces the Dhyanalngam.

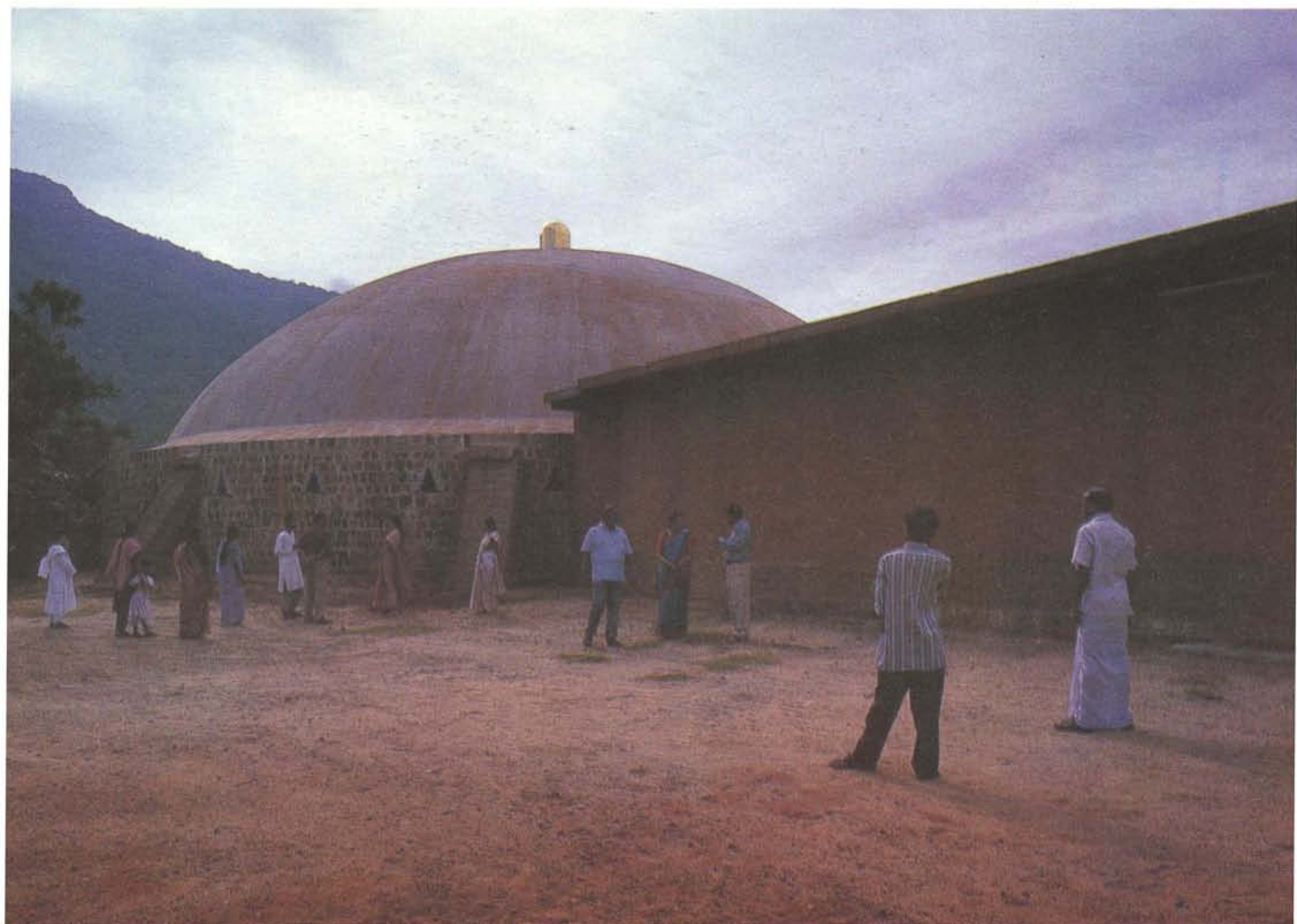
28 triangular stone ventilators on top of the lintel beams provide light and ventilation. The central opening of the dome is covered by a lingam-shaped copper structure, which blocks direct light but acts as a ventilator on top. This metal cover heats up in the day and sucks out the hot air inside the dome, while cool air comes in through the vault and the ventilators. The natural draught of cool air, the dark interiors, choice of natural materials, and granite floors, make the interior of the dome a cool and tranquil place for meditation.

For acoustics, Satprem explains, 'Single resonator absorbers (Helmholtz resonators) were installed in three layers, so as to absorb 12 frequencies, between 120 Hz and 1.50 KHz of sound energy.' The result is a dome without any echo inside, but with a certain reverberation, which is normal considering its volume. Now, especially when chanting, the divine OM or some musical instruments are played, the reverberations acquire an almost celestial overtone.

On the exterior of the dome, Karthikeyan has used buttresses branching off from the support masonry walls at regular intervals, for additional support to the walls.

The lingam is made of jet black, polished granite and rests





on a wide granite base. The 'Avudaiyar', designed in the form of a coiled snake, rises from the granite base. The lingam and the 'Avudaiyar' combined approximately weigh 25 tons and are surrounded by a shallow water body — jalaseema which creates an image of the idol floating on water. Water drips from a copper hemisphere layered with gold foil, which suspended from the opening of the dome, hangs above the lingam. The gentle cascading sound of water over the lingam, the resplendent reflections of the oil lamps on the golden dome, the glowing

splendour lighting up the massive dome, and the all pervading silence, give an ethereal magic to the whole structure.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev planned this multi-religious, Dhyanalingam temple for the enlightenment of mankind, and when it was completed he dedicated the temple to the world.

The two architects Satprem and Karthikeyan admirably succeeded in translating Sadhguru's vision of constructing a unique and strong structure by using only traditional building materials which will inspire people in the years to come. ❶

OPPOSITE: A part of the granite masonry wall on which the dome rests. The buttressed walls support the main masonry walls and also help to drain rain-water.

ABOVE: An exterior view of the temple with the dome and supporting wall. To the right is the outer granite wall of the covered aisles.