

## **PONDICHERY HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2018 – A BRIEF REPORT**

### **CONCEPT OF THE PONDICHERY HERITAGE FESTIVAL:**

Popular destinations across the world such as New York, Berlin, Paris and Sydney continue to attract a wide audience from all spheres of life and are a melting pot for cross-cultural exchanges. Pondicherry also has this element of bringing together a diverse population of tourists and travellers looking for something to coax them into a new, exciting, passionate and yet peaceful lifestyle and environment. There is an unseen touch in how Pondicherry invites people of all cultures and yet retains its own, which expands beyond the exotic charm of its beautiful architectural heritage and sandy beaches.

Magical yet ordinary to the casual eye, the city harbours a deeper meaning and connection to the intangible realms of beauty, wisdom, tranquillity and harmony. This has led Pondicherry to become a universal platform for positive inner change and has inspired an inclusive, collective and inspiring evolution towards a future, long foreseen by the sages of Yore. The marriage of spirituality and material research is a trademark of Pondicherry's excellence and uniqueness.

On November 29<sup>th</sup> 2014, the collapse of the Marie building (Town Hall) of Pondicherry, which was built in 1870 to accommodate the offices for the Mayor of Pondicherry, led to the realization that the need to conserve and celebrate the heritage of Pondicherry is immense. A group thus emerged from the civil society called "People for Pondicherry's Heritage" (PPH) and conceived the idea of the Pondicherry heritage festival, first of which was held in 2015 and became an annual event. The Pondicherry heritage festival is being organised by People for Pondicherry's heritage (PPH), INTACH Pondicherry and PondyCAN.

### **The main objectives for the Pondicherry heritage festival are:**

- a) **To create and strengthen this distinct identity of belonging and being Pondicherian for all its residents**
- b) **To show its unique character in all its variety to visitors who come from all over the country and the world attracted by the idea of "Pondicherry"**
- c) **To create a platform for experts, Historians and old residents to meet and discuss what is special about Pondicherry and how we can preserve our town.**

The charm and beauty of Pondicherry presents a unique challenge to the government and civil society organizations interested in protecting and restoring its built heritage. Unlike the monuments and National Parks under the purview of the Archaeological Survey of India, the architectural heritage of Pondicherry is a melange of private and government buildings.

Pondicherry has two distinct parts namely, the French and Tamil quarters. The French quarter has structures built in the European classical style whereas those in Tamil quarter are built in the vernacular style of Tamil Nadu. The two construction methods have influenced one another resulting in a harmonious blend of the both styles in many buildings. Pondicherry's unique architectural style is an inheritance of which we are but today's

custodians. It is our responsibility to preserve the essence of this built heritage for the future generations. It is with this wide vision that the Pondicherry Heritage Festival sought to explore the various facets of the town's culture, spiritual heritage, contributions to the world of art, literature, folk and classical music and dance, traditional and contemporary crafts and the work done by many organizations, institutions and individuals towards understanding and preserving the heritage of the town.

#### **EVOLUTION OF PONDICHERRY HERITAGE FESTIVAL:**

Now in its fourth year, the Pondicherry Heritage Festival continues to celebrate the singular character of this extraordinary town and its environs. In the first year, 2015, attention was drawn to Pondicherry's outstanding architectural legacy, its spiritual heritage and intangible heritage. The following year, 2016, the festival celebrated Pondicherry's natural heritage, explored its heritage through the written word, visual arts and performing arts. In 2017, besides celebrating architectural, intangible and natural heritage, the festival focused on one of Pondicherry most ancient heritage, at Bahour. In 2018, the festival focused on the streetscape of Pondicherry and expanded to explore another ancient heritage of Pondicherry, at Madagadipedu, Thirubhuvanai and Thiruvandar kovil. The festival expanded in this year with several local organisations and individuals actively involved & organising events, under the Pondicherry Heritage Festival banner. This overwhelming response made the heritage festival again a month long event from 18<sup>th</sup> January to 18<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

#### **“Coming together to celebrate Pondicherry's rich & diverse heritage”**

The success of the Pondicherry heritage festival is due to the active participation of our festival partners and new participants.

#### **Some of our important events this year**

1. Festival Opening at Gandhi Tidal: Public awareness - Painting together for Pondicherry's Heritage by INTACH
2. DISCUSSION: A Pondicherrians' Forum at Dune Mansion, Calve on Vysial: West of the Grand Canal: how to Save Our Streetscapes and Buildings?
3. EXCURSION: Exploring Thirubhuvanai, Madagadipetu and Thiruvandar Kovil (ancient heritage temple, a ASI sites)
4. EXCURSION: Bird Watching at Oussudu Lake (natural heritage)
5. EXCURSION: Sacred Grove Walk | Keezhpathupettu Aiyyanar Temple By AURA, a part Sri Aurobindo Ashram Society
6. EXCURSION & FILM: India's Disappearing Beaches by Pondy CAN at Storyteller's Bar at Promenade Hotel
7. EXCURSION: Exploring Bahour
8. SHADOW PUPPETRY: Scenes from the Ramayana at Apres School

9. DANCE: Kuchipudi and Bharatanatyam Performance by Nandhini & her students at Cluny Embroidery
10. DANCE: Ghungroo Tales – Kathak Dance by Jasmin Sarkar at Gratitude - A Heritage House
11. DANCE: Odissi Performance by Aneesh Raghavan at French Consulate
12. DANCE: Garba Folk Dancing by Rangleela group at Hotel De L'Orient
13. MUSIC CONCERT: Welcoming the Spring at Alliance Francaise
14. Heritage Walks
  - a. Heritage Trail by INTACH
  - b. PONDY cultural Trail – a walking tour of the tamil quarter by Soulful Travels Services
15. CHILDREN'S EVENT: Colouring Book Launch at Consulat Général de France à Pondichéry
  - a. Launch of Heritage Colouring book published by INTACH
16. Traces in Time : Pondichéry/Indochine : Reminiscences Croisées" - an Exhibition Highlighting Art, Culture and Cuisine of the Indochinese community in Pondicherry at Kusum Mehta's house
17. "Made In Pondy" A craft Bazaar expo of nationally and internationally known largely hand crafted products by local artisans and creative entrepreneurs from the Pondicherry region.
18. CONCERT & TALK: Songs of Poet Subramania Bharati by Students of Shoba Ragavan at Bharathiar Museum
19. STUDENT COMPETITION: The Pondicherry Heritage Quiz at Alliance française at INTACH
20. Spiritual: Vedic Chanting & Koranic-Recitation at Ecole Francaise d'Extreme Orient
21. Lecture and Dance Demonstration: Venkalac Cilai – Innovation as Tradition at French Institute
22. Book Launch and Readings by Pondicherry Authors at Hotel Palais de Mahe
23. PHOTO CONTEST & EXHIBITION: Streetscapes of Pondicherry By Ladies Circle of Pondicherry at INTACH Heritage Centre

## **FESTIVAL OPENING: Public Awareness - Painting Together for Pondicherry's Heritage**

On 18<sup>th</sup> of January 2018 evening, the event was held at the Gandhi Thidal, Goubert Avenue. This year, the festival replaced a formal grand inauguration with a community building exercise that let Pondicherrians showcase their love for the city by painting together.

The registered participants for this event were mainly from Architecture colleges, local Government and private schools and individual residents of Pondicherry. We also had a young participant at the age of 5 in one of the team.

INTACH Pondicherry organised this event by providing each team a white painted Bison board as canvas, paint brushes and water paints.

The participants were asked to paint in the theme of Pondicherry's rich and diverse architectural heritage and streetscapes, folk art forms, games and literature. The programme commenced at 5pm, the atmosphere was enthusiastic and with overwhelming participation with over 100 members and 10 teams.

In the late evening the MLA LakshmiNarayanan, participated to encourage the organisers and the participants. By the time, some participants have already completed their painting. The outcome of the event was so beautiful and colourful. Each team's panel was not just an explosion of colours reflecting Pondicherry's vibrant hues but also reflected its diverse built heritage.





## **STUDENT COMPETITION: The Pondicherry Heritage Quiz at Alliance française de Pondichéry**

On the February the 1<sup>st</sup> of February, a whole day event was organised by Dr. Kanan and heritage festival organisers.

Heritage Quiz was held in the Alliance Francaise Campus, Pondicherry with the support of Education Department, Pondicherry. The Education Department, Pondicherry had requested all the schools of Pondicherry area to take part in the program.

There were about 48 schools with 500 children taking part which included Government and Private Matriculation and CBSE Schools. There were also schools from Cuddalore and Pondicherry. Heritage festival team coordinated the registration details. Mr.Muthukumar the Quiz master from Pondicherry conducted the preliminary written quiz for all the students in both levels - Junior and Senior Levels. Then the Quiz was held in both levels as finals and the winning and runner up teams of both levels were felicitated by the Alliance Francaise officials - President Monsieur and AF Directeur Monsieur Gerard along with the members of INTACH and Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2018. The program was coordinated by Monsieur Saikat and Madame Marie Joelle of Alliance Francaise and Dr.Raje of PHF and Mr.Arul and Das from INTACH Pondicherry.





## **SPRITUAL: Vedic Chanting Ecole francaise d'Extreme-Orient**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February, evening, students from the local gurukulam from Pondicherry recited Vedas and old chanting in Sanskrit.

This event was organised by PECO – Pondicherry Educational Collaboration organisation.

Pondicherry is also known as “Vedapuri”, pre-colonial name. During the period of Chola there used to be university to train students. The location is in Bahour region, Pondicherry.

It is also surprise to many, in this modern era, to even recognise that there is a fully functional vedapatsala existing in Pondicherry, which currently hosts over 80 young promising kids.

EFEO (Ecole Francasie d'Extreme-Orient) do extensive research work on the indological studies. This event was enthusiastically attended by the scholars and the residents of Puducherry.





## **EXCURSION & FILM: India's Disappearing Beaches at Storyteller's Bar, Promenade Hotel**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February morning, a group Pondicherry's residents gathered in front of the Chief secretariat office, on the beach, to understand and curious on how the Pondicherry's beach is being restored. This event was organised by PONDYCAN!

Aurofilio, one of the co-founder of PONDYCAN!, elaborated on the current work done so far and how the dredging activity is done and progress to happen.

The same evening, at the storyteller's bar, Promande hotel, a short documentary on "India's disappearing beaches" was played in the evening for the audience, followed by a question and answer session.



## **CHILDREN'S EVENT: Colouring Book Launch at Consulate Général de France à Pondichéry**

a. Launch of Heritage Colouring book “Color Pondy’s Beauty – for Children and adults in love with Pondicherry’s Heritage” published by INTACH

Heritage coloring book “Color Pondy’s Beauty – for Children and adults in love with Pondicherry’s Heritage” was launched by the French Consul of Pondicherry.

On the 13th february 2018, evening, Around 80 school children were invited to French Consulate lawn for the launch of the Heritage colour book “Color Pondy’s Beauty – for Children and adults in love with Pondicherry’s Heritage” .

During the evening the French council distributed the book to School Children along with colouring pencil and other required stationary for children. The kids were excited to color the images from the book. The outcome of the event was a pleasant and breezy just at the lovely weather of Pondicherry.



## **SHADOW PUPPET SHOW: A demonstration of “Raja Magal”- King’s daughter at Apres School**

On 15<sup>th</sup> of February, evening, Mr. Kuppuswamy put on a shadow puppet show for the students of Apres school and the visitors from Pondicherry. This event was organised by INTACH and Dr. Kanan.

Initially, this event was supposed to be conducted at one Thirubhuvanai temple on the 20<sup>th</sup> January. The event was cancelled due to ASI Chennai circle’s bureaucracy and incompetency of prioritising the paper work, even though the permission from the HRI was fully extended.

R.Kuppusamy, a 9th generation puppeteer and son of Kalaimamani Rajappa, has been carrying forward the legacy of puppetry from Thanjavur and intends to pass on this traditional knowledge to future generations through Kalaimamani Rajappa Bommalattakuzhu.

