Coming together to celebrate Pondicherry’s rich & diverse heritage

5th to 26th February 2017

Architecture, Culture, History, Traditions,
Art in all its forms, Nature & Spirituality.

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Organised by
INTACH
PEOPLE FOR PONDICHERRY'S HERITAGE
PondyCAN!
Pondy Citizens’ Action Network

Supported by
The Government of Puducherry
Department of Tourism
Department of Art & Culture
CONCEPT OF THE PONDICHERRY 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 29th 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 it’s 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 style 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 third year, the Pondicherry Heritage Festival continues to celebrate the singular character of this extraordinary town and its environs. In the first year, 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. There was also an expansion of the festival this year with several local organisations and individuals actively involved & organizing events, under the Pondicherry Heritage Festival banner. This overwhelming response made the heritage festival a month long event from 5th to 26th February 2017.

“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. Bahour:
   a. A dance drama at the temple
   b. A morning in Bahour
2. A Dance drama at Ashram library
3. Shadow puppet show at Lycee Français
4. Video projection and Exhibition of INTACH works at INTACH Heritage Centre
5. A Roundtable with experts on the importance of heritage in city’s planning and development, at the French Institute of Pondicherry
6. Exhibition of “Archive of Tamil Agrarian History 1650- 1950”
7. Open house at important heritage buildings/ institutions during the festival
8. Heritage walks
   a. A walk through the French Quarter by INTACH
   b. Pondicherry Cultural Trail - a walking tour of the Tamil Quarter by Soulful-Pondy
c. French Connections Trail by Story trails

d. Revisit Pondicherry – a Jane Jacobs inspired photo walk by UDC

9. Public awareness - Kids on roller skates and Zumba Flash mob

10. “A million Sitas” – An performance offered by Anita Ratnam

11. A Magic show – connecting India and France, Organised by the Alliance Francaise

12. Mahakavi Subramania Bharati’s composition on Manakula vinayagar sung by Dr. Arimalam Padmanabham, at Manakula Vinayagar Temple

13. Celebrating Pondicherry’s Intangible Heritage with Poetess Meenakshi’s Poem, Music performance and 3 classical dance forms set to M.S. Subbulakshmi’s compositions

14. Folk dance by Mohanam cultural center and Adavu Kalai Kuzhu

15. Launch of the Listing and Mapping of Intangible Heritage in Pondicherry through Pondy Post and PondyMap.

16. Photo Exhibition – local life and architecture “10 years in Pondicherry”

17. Children’s performance by SITA cultural centre, French songs by Domus Dei Choir and Contemporary music by H2O.

18. “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.

This year’s festival was focused on Bahour, one of Pondicherry’s most ancient areas, dating to the Chola period. The festival was inaugurated at Thiru Moolanatha Swami temple, Bahour, Pondicherry with a dance drama, portraying the legend of the two sisters who funded the construction of the Bahour canal and created the lake. The temple is under the purview of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The entire final morning of the festival was spent in Bahour, taking in the remains of a heritage dating back over a thousand years.

The Pondicherry Heritage Festival is trying to throw light on this historic, heritage area while exploring with its residents, avenues to develop it as a potential natural, health and eco tourism destination.

ABOUT BAHOUR:

Known in history as Vahoor, Vakur or Azhagiya Chola Chathurvedimangalam, Bahour is a region between the then Ponnaiyar and the Malattar rivers and has a rich history and heritage. It is also known for its meticulous governance system under the Chola, followed by the Pallava, Rashtrakuda and the Vijayanagar kingdoms. Bahour also used to be the capital of 16 Mandalams and at one point of time even had a large dairy farm at Irai Punasseri (currently known as Pinnachikuppam) where thousands of cows were maintained and milk used to be supplied to all the 16 mandalams. Bahour has the historical Thiru Moolanatha Swami temple built by the Paranthaka Chola much before the famous Brihadeeswara
Temple of Thanjavur was built. Around this temple, there flourished a green, prosperous town which also had one of the most prestigious Sanskrit Universities of the time. The students who were educated here were looked upon favourably in Kancheepuram and as far as Varanasi due to the rigorous standards of Vedic learning. The presence of this University also gave the name Chaturvedi Mangalam to Bahour. The temple also has the deity of Vedambigai, making Bahour a centre of learning and knowledge.

Another notable landmark of Bahour is the Bahour tank, the oldest in Pondicherry (and second largest after Ouussudu which was built much later), for which an elaborate operation and maintenance system existed from the Chola period (as proven by stone inscriptions). During a period of famine in Bahour's history, two aristocratic, unmarried, young sisters who lived on the South Boulevard of Bahour - Bangari and Singari - donated their wealth for the deepening of the Bahour tank, strengthening of the tank bund and the digging of a feeder canal from the then Thenpennai River to the Bahour tank. This later became the famous Bangaru Channel, the lifeline for Bahour. Bahour still has one of the few operational irrigation systems developed by the Cholas, consisting of a cascade/chain of tanks wherein about 27 tanks are linked through three main channels which irrigate the land. The region also possesses an extensive drainage system which protects the area from flooding even in times of extreme rain.

Bahour is rightly called the Neer Kalanjiyam (Rice Granary) of Pondicherry. It is also a bird sanctuary, where birds of more than 100 species have been spotted and is already on the e-bird map of India.

THE BEGINNING, A DANCE DRAMA – “THE LEGEND OF BANGARI AND SINGARI”

On the 5th of February, people from Bahour and Pondicherry were eagerly waiting for the first event of the Heritage Festival, “The legend of Bangari and Singari” – A Bharatnatyam dance drama by Jayashree Narayanan's Salangai Cultural Academy, inside the Thiru Moolanatha Swami Temple, Bahour.

Our guests of honour for the evening were Thiru Lakshminarayanan MLA, Raj Bhavan and Parliamentary secretary to CM and Thiru Danavelou MLA, Bahour. The event commenced with festival co-organiser, Sunaina Mandeen elaborating on the objectives of the festival, Thiru Lakshminarayanan emphasising on the significance of “water” and Thiru Danavelou mentioning the beauty of Bahour and his future agenda.

The 22 dancers of Salangai Cultural Academy then stole the hearts of the audience with their riveting performance.
They re-enacted the story of Bangari and Singari who were instrumental in diverting water from the Thenpennai River to the Bahour Lake when the region was reeling in water shortage. The siblings, who were devoted to the Thiru Moolanatha Swami Temple, funded the construction of the ‘Bangari canal’ that brought water from Thenpennai to irrigate the land in and around Bahour.

Most of the spectators being unaware of the story of the legendary sisters “Bangari – Singari” were happy to learn more about their local history and spend an enchanting evening in the temple watching this story unfold thorough dance set to wonderful accompanying music (recorded) composed especially for this dance drama.

The evening came to a close with the screening of a documentary on Bahour, in which scholars and residents shared their stories which shed light on the intricacies of Bahour's ancient heritage, conceptualised by Susanne, a German volunteer from PondyCAN.
The audience watching the dance drama at Moolanatha Swami temple, Bahour
PHOTO EXHIBITION – “10 YEARS IN PONDICHERRY” - LOCAL LIFE & ARCHITECTURE IN PHOTOS BY DR. VEERAN KONERU

On the 10th of February, a pleasant Friday evening, several participants gathered at Geethanjali Artifacts in the French Quarter of Pondicherry.

The event was inaugurated by lighting the kutthu vellaku, a traditional south Indian lamp by Dr. Nallam, Thiru Lakshminaryanan MLA, Bitsta Samantaray of PPH (People for Pondicherry heritage), Ashok Panda of INTACH and Sunaina Madeen of PondyCAN.

Dr. Nallam walked us though the history of Pondicherry architectural heritage, focussing on how he has seen Pondicherry evolve as a city from his childhood. He touched upon the issue of destruction of beautiful heritage structures in the Tamil town and his constant dissent against the demolition of the old buildings and his personal effort in their conservation.

Dr. Veeran spoke about his exhibition of photos inspired by Pondicherry, 10 per year of stay in Pondicherry

Dr. Nallam narrating stories on Pondicherry from his childhood
BOOK RELEASE FOR "AATHMATTHIL THILAITTAVAN" - A COLLECTION OF 100 VERSES OF POEMS BY "VARAKAVI" SHRI SUBRAMANIA SWAMIGAL

On 11th of February, 2017, paintings by kids from a special creative school were displayed for 2 days. The Exhibition, a contribution from Natura Foundations under the ongoing Suvadugal Project was inaugurated at Natura Femina, 38 Mariamman Koil Street, Kathirkamam, Pondicherry. The exhibition featured 27 sketches by kids and 42 paintings by the student facilitators from Bharatiar Palkalai Koodam.

There was also a book launch to pay tribute to the Late "Varakavi" Shri Subramania Swamigal, the trustee of Natura Foundations. Mr. Swamigal had contributed over 10000 poems in the Tamil Bhakti tradition during his lifetime, out of which a collection of 100 poems were published and released as the first book. The book was entitled "Aatthmatthil Thilaithavan" (The one who revels in his soul) and was presented as a dedication to the city of Pondicherry.
A DANCE DRAMA – “THE BIRDS OF PARADISE & THE DANCING GIRL” BY CHANDRAKALABHOOMI DANCE TROUP, ANEGUNDI HERITAGE VILLAGE, HAMPI

On the 12th of February, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Library, a beautiful heritage building in Pondicherry was host to a contemporary Indian dance performance, choreographed by Ms. Poojarani. The venue was overflowing with people before the start of the evening’s performance. MLA Lakshminarayanan, Raj Bhavan was also present on this occasion.

The dance-drama narrated the story of a young village dancing girl whose heart was as pure as gold. The birds from paradise were unable to resist her innocence and purity and her unconditional love of nature; so much so that they came to earth and started dancing along with her. The birds of paradise brought the Nature God along with them and blessed the dancing girl with gold, as a token of affection. At the same time, there also lived an evil and greedy queen, who was informed about the girl by one of her loyal servants.

A scene from the dance-drama: “THE BIRDS OF PARADISE & THE DANCING GIRL”
She grabbed the gold from the dancing girl, locked her up in jail and tortured her, hoping to lure the birds of paradise. The birds flew down to rescue her but eventually the evil queen beat them down, captured and tortured them too. Finally, the Nature God appeared to rescue the young dancing girl and the birds of paradise and punished the greedy queen. The final scene portrayed the girl dancing happily ever after with the birds.

This performance, a contribution of INTACH Anegundi - Hampi Chapter, charmed the whole gathering.

A DEMONSTRATION OF THE EPIC STORY "RAMAYANAM" — SHADOW PUPPET SHOW

On 18th February, the Lycée Français hosted a shadow puppet show depicting the Hindu Epic, "Ramayana". Ravana, the king of Lanka, calls his powerful elder brother Mayil Ravana who was resting peacefully under the earth’s surface to join the fracas on the surface of Lanka to defeat Lord Rama.
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.

A scene from shadow puppet show: “Rama plotting with Hanuman and Lakshmanan”
(Top) View of the puppeteer at the puppet show  (Bottom) The audience at the shadow puppet show, Lycee Francais
“HISTORY OF MAGIC IN INDIA AND FRANCE” – A TALK AND A MAGIC SHOW BY FRENCH MAGICIAN LAWRENS GODON ORGANISED BY THE ALLIANCE FRANCAISE OF PONDICHERRY

In the packed auditorium of the Alliance Francaise, Lawrens Gordon kept the audiences guessing with his optical illusion, sleight of hand, coin manipulation and much more as he talked about the connection of magic in India and France.

“KIDS ON ROLLER SKATES AND ZUMBA FLASH MOB FOR THE HERITAGE FESTIVAL” – PROMOTIONAL EVENT

On 19th February, a Sunday evening, the people of Pondicherry were enjoying the pleasant weather with their families on the Beach Road. Around 60 kids on roller skates gathered near the Chief Secretariat Office on Goubert Avenue. Director General of Police (DGP) Shri S.K. Gautam, flagged off the event in the presence of Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Shri Rajiv Ranjan, Thiru Lakshminarayanan MLA, Raj Bhavan and Director of Tourism, Thiru R. Mounissamy.
The kids, some of them champion skaters, skated to the Gandhi statue. Those in the lead were holding the banners highlighting the “Pondicherry heritage festival” and the others were holding the balloons. At the Gandhi statue, they gave a scintillating performance showing not only their speed but also their precision by doing slalome skating. This electrifying performance held the crowd spellbound clamaring for more. It was a spectacle to watch and the volunteers of the festival distributed the program calendar.
Kids on roller skates promoting the Heritage Festival on the Beach Road

Just as the skating finished the Zumba flash-mob jumped on the road too and took the people by surprise. Many spectators too joined in and started dancing along with the instructor, from La Casita.

Zumba flash-mob promoting the Heritage festival
It was a lovely evening and people were excited to know about the upcoming programs and activities. After the awareness campaign, Anita Ratnam performed "A Million Sitas" at the Gratitude Heritage, a beautiful guest house, a heritage building restored by INTACH.

“A MILLION SITAS” BY BHARATNATYAM DANCER ANITA RATNAM

On Sunday evening, in the garden, at Gratitude Heritage, Anita Ratnam’s ‘A Million Sitas’ offered a different viewpoint on some key female characters in the Ramayana -- Ahalya, Manthara, Sabari, Mandodari and Surpanakha -- all bound by the common thread of Sita’s questioning yet compassionate persona. The performance in Harikatha style, collated wide-ranging inputs from theatre, mime, classical dance, music and oratory. Sharanya Krishnan’s alluring singing throughout the performance was the perfect accompaniment to this mesmerising performance, leaving the audience in tears at the end.

A scene from “A million sita’s” – performance by Ms. Anita Ratnam, at Gratitude - a heritage guest house
EXHIBITION OF “ARCHIVE OF TAMIL AGRARIAN HISTORY 1650-1950” BY FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERY AND PONDYART

The French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) and PondyART came together to put up a month long open exhibition on the Eastern wall of the IFP, Goubert Avenue. The display captured the attention of all passing by the beach road, besides those to came especially to see it.
OPEN HOUSE

Along the lines of the 'journee de patrimoine' in France, an enormous celebration of the country's rich architectural heritage, the festival conducted several guided tours of well preserved public and private heritage buildings. At Ecole francaise d'Extreme-Orient (EFEO) and Institut Francais de Pondichery (IFP), there were two, hour-long guided tours where visitors interacted with researchers and got to know a little bit about the research going on there which spans a wide range of subjects.

Open House Days were organised at the following heritage buildings as a part of the celebration of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival.

1. Ecole francaise d'Extreme-Orient

Visitor at the open house, “Ecole francaise d’Extreme-Orient”
2. Lycee Francais

Open house at Lycee Francais

3. Institut Francais de Pondichery

Open House at Institut Francais de Pondichery
4. Cluny Embroidery Centre

Open house at Cluny Embroidery

5. Mahakavi Bharathiar museum

Open house at Mahakavi Bharathiar Museum
6. Ananda Ranga Pillai Mansion

Ravi Rangapillai, descendant of Dubash Ananda Ranga Pillai narrating his family history
**WALKING TOUR OF PONDICHERRY**

INTACH along with Urban Design Collective, Story Trails and Soulful Pondy Organised four different types of Heritage walks on February 18th, 19th, 24th, 25th and 26th to enable local residents and tourists to get a complete synopsis of the Boulevard town.

Urban Design Collective conducted a late evening and an early morning walk - “Revisit Pondicherry – A Jane Jacob inspired photo walk”
INTACH conducted “Heritage walk” – highlighting architecture of the French quarter

“Heritage Trail” – a walk in the French Quarter

Soulful Pondy conducted “Pondy cultural trail – A walking tour of The Tamil Quarter”

“Pondy cultural trail” – A walking tour of The Tamil Quarter
StoryTrails conducted – “French Connections” – a walkthrough of the French history in Pondicherry.

“French Connections” – a story trail
“INCREDIBLE PONDY – IN IMAGES” AT ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE DE PONDICHERY

Maison Colombani of the Alliance Francaise hosted two photography exhibitions.

The Urban Design Collective mounted photos taken during their Jane Jacobs inspired photo walks

Photo Exhibition inspired during the Jane Jacobs photo-walk at Alliance Francaise de Pondicherry
Ladies Circle of Pondicherry (LCP), Rivage 47 had invited photo entries of “Incredible Pondy”. There was an overwhelming response with over 50 photographs submitted by local amateur photographers, residents and visitors to the city. They documented various facets of Pondicherry – its landscape, monuments, street life and people. A fee was charged for each entry and the collection contributed to a wheelchair which was presented by the LCP to a physically challenged young lady. Attractive prizes were given to winning entries by the LCP.

Photo Exhibition of Incredible Pondy at Alliance Francaise de Pondichery
MADE IN PONDY – AT THE CRAFT BAZAAR

The region of Pondicherry has a long history of creativity and entrepreneurship, with international trade dating back to the beginning of the Common Era. The Pondicherry area also has a rich heritage of local manufacturing. The Periplus of the Erthraen Sea, a Roman merchant guide written in the 1st century AD, references a marketplace right outside of modern day Pondicherry. In 1937 Roman pottery was found there and later excavations confirmed that the local inhabitants traded with Rome throughout the 1st century.

The Chola rulers prided themselves in their cotton, and silk manufacturing and textile guilds in south India exported high quality clothing materials that Roman women particularly enjoyed. Along with textiles, the Pondicherry area exported spices, jewels, and metal works. By the end of the 9th century, the Chola dynasty had established itself as a trading powerhouse, sending Tamil merchants up the east coast of India and into Southeast Asia and China. The international trade continued until the 13th century.

In 1674 the French East India Company set up its first trading center in Pondicherry. Over the subsequent period of colonisation, Pondicherry sent goods to several European countries. The region’s strong history of manufacturing allowed Pondicherry to continue to impress foreign countries with the quality of their diverse products.

The heritage of creativity and entrepreneurship continues to this day. Today the region still has many companies producing a wide variety of products, most of them hand-crafted that are known around the world. ‘Made in Pondy’ celebrated this at the Crafts Bazaar.

Ponfab had a loom on demonstration along with their line of fabrics while LAL were doing live demonstration of their hand block printing where people could choose the designs and colours and have bags, scarves or saris printed right in front of them. Saran exports displayed their very high count and high quality bed and bath linen for the first time in Pondicherry as they normally go straight from their factory here to a select group of luxury hotels in the Middle East and the UAE. Golden Bridge Pottery, the ‘mother’ pottery out of which have sprung so many potteries not just in the Pondicherry-Auroville region but the whole country, had their gorgeous stoneware in an array of glazes, from bowls and plates to cups and vases, beautifully displayed. There was also a table displaying the exquisite embroidery from the Cluny Embroidery, done on pure white cotton. Two Auroville potteries – Mandala and Windglaze along with two individual potters Supriya Menon Meneghetti and Indrani Singh Cassime had their wares displayed playfully in carts and some of them even had special “Made in Pondy” pieces. Two stalls at either ends of the crafts bazaar charmed everyone with their colourful display of handmade paper, the Sri Aurobindo Handmade paper and Auroville paper, handmade but so different, brightly coloured and thoroughly charming, hard to resist products. In the midst of this were the jams, chutneys, cookies, muesli and many more delicious natural products from Naturellement in Auroville. While on one end there was Senteurs, the perfumery of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram with its fragrances, skin fresheners and rose water being made and perfected over the years since the late 1950’s, and Auroshikha Incense which has also become synonymous with Pondicherry, at the other end was Auroville’s Maroma with many more high end products to complement their incense including bath and beauty products, soaps, essential oils and more – all so
Pondicherry Heritage festival 2017

fragrant. While Auromics from Auroville displayed their knitted clothing, Auroknits and their Amano line of leather bags, Disdis had a display of clothing by designer Disa and handmade jewelry by her Italian friend. Offbeat had their stall full of brightly coloured t-shirts and bags with interesting, quirky “offbeat” messages, the Puducherry Khadi and village industries board had all their traditional well-loved khadi products. In the midst of all this was a local master village potter demonstrating his terracotta pot making and also had on display a range of his products, including a pair of beautiful Ayyanar horses he made for the Heritage Festival, which now adorn the open square at the INTACH office. Pondicherry Sri Lakshmi Jewelery who were celebrating their 80th anniversary, had on display their line of silver jewelry and other silver items and was a crowd puller, as was the Svaram stall from Auroville where the wind chimes sang different ragas and people could try their hand out at playing several of the fascinating musical instruments on display. Geethajali Artifacts displayed a whole range of antique furniture from the nearby region which bring many antique lovers to Pondy, be it traditional Chettinad columns or beautiful Kerala brass uralis and painted boxes to the more local French and English Colonial furniture still to be found in some of the heritage houses around this region. Aquarelles water colour studio displayed Djearamin Ejoumale’s lovely watercolours depicting the street life and beautiful ambience of Pondicherry. The festival logo of the doorway comes from one of his paintings. Upasana design studio from Auroville primarily displayed their small steps bags, the bag with a message of ‘say no to plastics and reuse’. They had made a special festival bag with the logo of the People for Pondicherry’s Heritage inviting people to come and join hands to save our heritage. And finally, there was Pondicherry’s flagship international brand Hidesign, which started out small all those years ago, making handmade leather bags using natural dyes and continues making their mark in the world with their whole range of world-class products that are always incorporating newer ideas, but continue to be made in that old traditional way.
On 23rd February, Thursday evening, the Crafts Bazaar was inaugurated by Chief Secretary Manoj Parida, in the presence of MLA Lakshminarayanan, Director Tourism and CEO of Kadhi Bhavan followed by a musical performance “Heritage of the future” by Svram sounds.
The highlights of this event were live demonstrations of handloom weaving, pottery and block printing. The audience participated on several instances under the supervision of the craftsmen.
At the Craft Bazaar
THE VENUE OF THE PONDICHERRY HERITAGE FESTIVAL 2017

The venue for the final 3 days of the Pondicherry Heritage Festival 2017 was set against the backdrop of a beautiful old heritage building, “Pensionnat des Jeune Filles” school. The structure needs to be restored and the location also served to remind the people of Pondicherry the importance of restoring and protecting heritage structures.

Back drop of a Heritage building - the stage is set for the live performances
CELEBRATING PONDICHERRY’S INTANGIBLE HERITAGE THROUGH MUSIC & DANCE BY LOCAL ARTISTS

On 24th February, Friday morning and Maha Shivaratri day, musicologist and poet Dr. Arimalam Padmanabhan sang the poems of Mahakavi Bharathiar dedicated to Manakula Vinayagar at the temple, a rare honour, delighting the audience as well as visitors to the temple.

Sunaina Mandeen introducing Dr. Arimalam Padhanabam at Manakula Vinayagar Temple
On 24th February, Friday evening, Poet Meenakshi recited her specially composed poem on the intangible heritage of Pondicherry after lighting the lamps along with Thiru R. Radhakrishnan, MP (Lok Sabha), the Chief Secretary, Mr. Manoj Parida and member of the organising team. The program of the evening was dedicated to the legendary Carnatic singer, M S Subbulakshmi.

Poet Meenakshi speaking on the significance of Heritage
The performances started with:

1. Meera and other bhajans performed by the students of Shoba Raghavan

Students of Shoba Raghavan singing Meera bhajans

2. Bharatnatyam performance by Gayathri and Bakthan to two of MS Subbulakshmi’s well-known compositions

Bharatanatyam by Gayathri and Bakthan
3. Debaleena Bhattacharjee performed Kathak to MS Subbulakshmi’s Meera bhajan

Kathak dance by Debaleena

4. Aneesh Raghavan performed an Odissi piece to MS Subbulakshmi’s "Bhaja Govindham"

Odissi by Aneesh Raghavan
The evening ended with Puducherry AIR’s Mrs. K. Vijayalakshmi singing several compositions of M S Subbulakshmi.

A ROUNDTABLE WITH EXPERTS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF HERITAGE IN A CITY’S PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, AT THE FRENCH INSTITUTE OF PONDICHERRY

On 25th February, Saturday morning, “How heritage of a city informs its future and forms the base of its developments” was the topic of the roundtable. The experts from varying disciplines stressed on the relevance and importance of heritage conservation in today’s era of smart cities. The field of expertise of the participants ranged from urban planning, heritage conservation and management, architecture, finance development, economics and humanities. The speakers advocated an increased focus on the human connectivity aspect to heritage conservation and increased public participation in the planning and development phases. Heritage conservation needs to be looked at as an economic gain rather than a drain.

Roundtable discussion with various speakers “How heritage of a city informs its future and forms the base of its developments”

The speakers from left to right: Satya Prakash Varanasi, Urban designer, heritage conservation architect, and erstwhile convenor INTACH Bengaluru chapter; Mukund Padmanabhan, Editor, The Hindu; Dr. Aurelie Varrel, CNRS researcher, Geography, center for South Asian studies, currently at IFP; Devngi Ramakrishnan, urban planner; Nicolas Fornage, India Director, French Development Agency (AFD); Raj Poduval, a former economist with the UN and the EU; Raphael Gastebois, architecture expert; S.P. Shorey,
urban planner, heritage conservation and management consultant, erstwhile member secretary Hyderabad heritage committee of the Government of AP

S.P. Shorey, retired Urban Planner from Hyderabad, speaking on the necessity of a heritage regulation in Pondicherry
LIGHTING THE TORCH FOR PONDICHERY’S HERITAGE

The evening commenced by lighting of lamps by Minister M. Kandasamy; Consul General of France, Philippe Janvier-Kamiyama and MLA, Raj Bhavan, Lakshminarayanan with the help of the festival team and young ballerinas of SITA cultural centre who performed several ballet pieces for the audience that evening.
INTACH’s projects on Intangible Cultural Heritage, namely PondyPost and PondyMap were then launched.

The festival introduced the recognition of an Individual who has done extensive work towards the conservation of Pondicherry’s heritage by honouring the person as “Guardian of Pondicherry’s Heritage”. The first such person to receive this honour was Dr. Nallam. The evening ended with Adavu Kalai Kuzhu’s electrifying folk performance.
BAHOUR VISIT CELEBRATING PONDICHERRY’S ANCIENT AND NATURAL HERITAGE

The visit to Bahour, the rice bowl of Pondicherry, located 21 km south of the city, took place on Sunday morning, 26th February, to emphasize the natural and ancient heritage of the region. In the early hours of the day, Alexander and Susanne from PondyCAN and Natesa Iyer from PPH guided nearly 30 people into the waiting bus to take them to Bahour. At 7:30 AM, the group arrived at their first destination, the Ayyanar Temple located at the base of the north eastern bank of the Bahour lake. Ayyanar is a guarding deity who protects the people and his temples are mainly located in rural areas, near waterbodies and sacred groves surrounded by trees and medicinal plants. From here, while enjoying a short walk along the Bahour Lake, the second largest lake in Pondicherry, the group could spot some rare birds, since the lake is located on the migratory path of central south-asian birds and is a hosting and breeding ground for various bird species.

At the northern end of Bahour Lake, the group walked down to see the Bangari and Singari
inscriptions in a 200 year old sluice structure. These two legendary sisters played an important role in the extension of the ancient tank-system of Bahour, by spending all their wealth to build the feeding channel to the nearby Ponanaiyar river and strengthen the tank’s bunds thus overcoming the famine of their time. The Tank System in Bahour, consisting of 27 tanks, dates back to the Chola period and is still in use. The system encourages the use of water from its tanks, which while preventing run-off to the sea, allows the recharge of groundwater and also provides water for irrigation to this primarily agrarian community. At the southern bank of this lake, near Bahour town, Raghunath T. P. from Pondicherry Science Forum (PSF) and Centre of Ecology and Rural Development (CERD) spoke about rural agriculture, which boasts of a history as old as the ancient tank system. In earlier times, the region was well known for its dairy products from Iraipunasseri, now known as Pinnachikuppam. In recent years, grain farming has assumed a more important role. Large parts of Bahour have shifted to organic farming today.

The visit to the Moolanatha Swami temple, dating to the pre-Chola period, with visible influences to its architecture from all the subsequent periods right upto the colonial period, was captivating and quite a bit of time was spent by the group walking around the temple compound looking at its exquisite sculptures that adorn the outside walls of the temple. An interaction with the priest who is the 13th generation of priests working in the temple was captivating. Though the temple is under the ASI, it is open to worship. But right now as work is going on and preperations for the kumbhabhishekam underway, the sanctum sanctorum is locked and the diety, Lord Siva can be worshipped in a room nearby. Raghunath T. P. and Natesa Iyer guided the group around the temple and explained the ancient inscriptions on the temple walls, which are a rare archival source regarding community life, tank maintenance and the religious practices of ancient times.

The group then had the opportunity to meet one of the farmers, P. Arjunan, Secretary of Keezhparikalpet tank association. His association has been undertaking huge efforts to preserve the natural heritage and provide healthy food to the people. Since 1999, the Tank Association has been involved in the rehabilitation and maintenance of the tank system, with active participation from all stakeholders. They take into account the traditional knowledge of older generations and also current necessities.

Mrs. Arul Selvi, the Director/Principal of the Professor Annoussamy Higher Secondary School in Bahour, who has taken on the responsibility to ensure that the kids receive a holistic education in the school started by her grandfather, was generous enough to provide her Smart-Multi-Media-Classroom to the group for a breakfast break. A documentary on Bahour was screened there. https://vimeo.com/205272654/04e0a343c1

This short film was directed and produced in record time for special screenings during the festival. This was a combined effort by Raghunath T. P., (PSF) and (CERD), Jeremias Eichler, a cinema and television technician from Germany, Susanne Wengler, an architect from Germany and a volunteer at PondyCAN and farmers, teachers, students, workers, fishermen as well as experts in architecture, history, biodiversity and agriculture. The movie presented the historical, cultural, environmental and social prosperity of Bahour. It is hoped that the Bahour inhabitants as well as people of other rural areas are inspired by these stories where these residents are actively designing the future of their community and environment in a sustainable way.
Another short walk through the small streets of the city, past the old church, the panchayat office dating back to the colonial period, and the group proceeded to the Parikkalpattu Lake, where they could see for themselves the efficiency of the Bahour Tank Association.

While digging a foundation for a construction project, in the periphery of the Moolanatha Swamy temple, the construction crew discovered an overturned stone sculpture lying face down at the bottom. There were two more sculptures but ASI stopped further digging till their experts arrived on the site after the weekend. This discovery of an ancient sculpture just the night before was an added gift to the group's visit to ancient Bahour.
GOING FORWARD FOR PONDICHERRY’S HERITAGE

26th February was the final day of the month long celebration, and on this pleasant Sunday evening, people started to assemble around the centre stage for the Closing Ceremony events which included a

Folk dance by the Mohanam culture centre

Performance of the local French choir Domus Dei
After the electrifying performances by local folk dancers and musicians, the organisers, People for Pondicherry Heritage (PPH), INTACH, and Pondy CAN thanked the audience – the people of Pondicherry.