

Dear Friends,

Wow! 2016 is a great year for us with lots of fun and friends, lots of challenges; we have achieved a lot as you will read in the overview in this newsletter.

All this was made possible through the collaboration and contributions of parents, children, teachers, volunteers, staff, sponsors & donors, for which we are grateful.



Pongal Celebrations

On the 15th of January Mohanam and the Tamil Heritage Centre jointly organized a Pongal celebration at the Solar Kitchen in Auroville. This Pongal event promoted 34 local vegetables that are not generally used in every day cooking, and included a display stand with the vegetables and information about local crops. "Many people kept coming to taste, three or four times. The young generation was very impressed - it was educational. Every time we do something with akka, it's enjoyable, and we learn from her. She's the one holding lots of wisdom about Tamil culture here." Meenakshi chimes in, "Many people wanted to buy the native vegetables, but I had to say, 'It's a display!'"



We have introduced traditional food like millet, ragi, steamed food, oil food, butter milk, curd, tender nut and sugar cane. There were traditional cultural performance like kummi, kollatam, kuitchiattam, thappattam and folk dance from local youth and children.

We have given the opportunity for Athiyans people for their dance and music, and they have enjoyed this very much. Meenakshi was keen to include a nomadic tribe - Aathiyar - that is trying to settle down on land outside Auroville, to give them a chance to express their own culture. "Traditionally, they are professional beggars," she says. "They used to go around the village door-to-door with musical instruments and a well decorated bull and say nice words, such as 'This house will flourish', 'Good news will come', 'More crops will come', 'You will be blessed by the Lord'. The women make gift bags with waste material from tailors' shops. They also do quilling [decorative paper work]." The festival included a stall displaying the tribe's beautiful and finely detailed paper decorations. The Tamil Heritage Centre continues to work with the tribe for their rehabilitation and particularly supports the children's education.

While the festival received good attendance from dignitaries and coverage in the local media.



Special Guest Visit:

Tourism secretary site visit

On 15th February a group of tourism higher officials and the Ille-et-Vilaine team visited the proposed site. The tourism Director was very happy that he has seen the place and they suggested that it is a suitable place to build the heritage hub.



(From left) Mr. Chithambaram (Tourism Manager)
Mr. Balasundharam (Mohanam Director)
Mr. R. Mounissamy (Tourism Director)
Mr. Muruganandam Mandjiny
(India representative of Ille-et-Vilaine)

Village heritage Festival

Mohanam and Tamil Heritage Centre jointly organized with support from the government of Puducherry a two-day festival (on 13th & 14th February 2016) to celebrate Tamil heritage and culture – a first of this scale (though we have done same model many times) and vision. The brainchild of Balu from Mohanam Cultural Centre, and Meenakshi from Auroville's Tamil Heritage Centre and Ilaingnarkal School, the festival brought together artisans, performers, farmers, VIPs and visitors for festivities on Auroville land.



Fifty stalls displayed the contemporary and traditional crafts of local artisans and nomadic tribes, including metal, wood, pottery and stone crafts. Performances included storytelling, street theatre by local artists, a puppet show and traditional folk dance. Children participated in drawing games, and girls played “checks” (a game similar to hopscotch).

Young women took part in a kolam drawing competition, tracing their elaborate designs in white powder mixed with rice powder on the red earth. The traditional games of breaking pots and lifting heavy stones drew large crowds. “In the old days, if a man could lift the stone *vattakkal*, the village would offer a girl in marriage,” says Balu. “One person at the festival said, ‘Now I’m ready for marriage!’ and lifted up the stone!” (He was from Europe!)

Visitors were invited to eat and drink local specialties, such as a delicious fermented ragi porridge (Koozhu) and local women took part in a traditional food competition. Many locally grown millets were on display, including ragi, kambu, saamai and thinai. Balu recounts how one farmer brought his collection of 100 varieties of paddy seed, all displayed with their traditional names. “We could see immediately that we have lost this knowledge”, says Meenakshi, referring to the shift in local dietary habits towards consuming mostly polished rice and white maida.



Traditional sports and martial arts were played, such as kabaddi for women, kho-kho, sillattam, kotipul and thayam. A Siddha medicine doctor took visitors' naadi (pulses) and prescribed traditional remedies. "Even the MLAs went to the Siddha doctor for the check up and found it useful," says Meenakshi. A selection of heritage books was on display, reflecting the passions of Meenakshi, who is a lauded poet in the Tamil language and an expert in Tamil culture.

Balu and the Mohanam team appeared slightly stunned by their achievement of bringing together so many different bodies in the planning phase. "The festival brought together three village panchayats: Alankuupam, Annainagar and Sanjeevinagar, the Auroville Foundation, the government of Pondicherry, Aurovilians and local entrepreneurs," he says.

After the success of their Pongal festival, Balu and Meenakshi came to the awareness of the Pondicherry government (Departments of Tourism, Arts and Culture) They submitted a concept that would bring together the artists of the region in a two-day festival celebrating traditional heritage on Auroville Land in the Isaiambalam area, and the team began building keet stalls and inviting participants.

Balu and Meenakshi assert that their promotion of Tamil heritage, arts and crafts is a response to the rapid loss of knowledge about local traditions in recent decades. Meenakshi points out that most of the traditional arts and crafts are associated with agrarian culture, and as people swap agrarian life for outside jobs or sell their land, they become distanced from traditional craft practices. "For example, mat weaving needs grass and water, and if there's no water, there's no weaving," she says. "For pottery, you need a particular soil. Pottery has lost its charm and use, as people are now using materials such as aluminium, stainless steel and plastic. Pottery has great importance for religious ceremonies, so now people only use it for Pongal and other rituals. Our region was also known for Koothu, our special Tamil theatre, which takes stories from the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Now people like to go to movies and watch TV. Not performing the art."



Parents' Sharing:

On 15th of March Mohanam organized a parents' meeting for the young trainees. We gave a visual presentation to their parents and shared our financial situation with them, as well as what they are doing in Mohanam. One of the parents said our son wants to learn spoken English for his communication skill. All the parents are very happy that our son stays with Mohanam. More than 12 parents participated.



Children's Heritage Festival:

Puducherry Children's Heritage Festival happened on 07-02-2016. Our Mohanam art class children did the cultural performances in this festival. The children are very happy to do this performance in front of a mass audience and the parents were also happy to see the children's performances.

Kottakarai Pongal Festival & Dynamized water station reopen

On 17th March the Mohanam team performed during the Kottakari Pongal Festival. Kottakari is one of the villages which is situated close to Auroville. There are many building like library, health centre, night school and dynamized water station which have not been running due to the lack of cooperation among the communities. So a group of youth from Kottakari community approached Mohanam for help. We have promised we support only as an advisor which they needed.



Spiritual Experience:

On 20th of February a group of 10 people came to understand about the Tamil god and its worship, we took them to the Irumbai Legend Shiva temple and we explained about the history of the temple as well as worship of the god. They were really inspired about the temple.



Village experience:

On 6th of March NIA group around 20 people came to visit Mohanam, the main aim to inspire Tamil culture and village experience. The mohanam children to showed our cultural performance, finally they were enjoyed local traditional food; the visitors said it was wonderful experience especially the craftsman make handmade product.



Cultural Performance:

Dakshnachitra cultural sharing program:

On 1st of January our young trainees went to perform traditional dances (like thappattam, kollattam, kutchiyattam and African music) for their cultural sharing and inspiring local cultural and values of our region. We have presented this cultural performance for more than five days and 15 young trainees participated. Our boys were inspired; Mohanam has given this opportunity for local youth and children.

On another day we brought 10 children from Alankuppam Annainagar. They have done a wonderful performance at Dakshnachitra. This is the first program for them, and the children enjoyed the music and dance.



International Yoga festival

On the 5th of January, the Government of Puducherry organized an international yoga festival. Our Mohanam team gave a capoeira dance performance on the stage. This is a new, innovative performance. Our Mohanam trainees were inspired by this program. It was a good opportunity to explore their talent on a very big stage.



Auroville ITI school performances on 09-01-16

"Each one Teach one" Germany group comes once a year to Auroville and they are giving break dance workshops in different schools. This time, they gave workshop in Auroville ITI schools. A few of our young boys participated in this workshop. They learned break dance and also they taught the Capoeira dance with Jeremy Roske to the ITI students. This workshop happened three days in Auroville ITI schools. The final day we did the performances with Indo- African rhythm. At that time the break dancers did the dances with our beats. Our students are seeing these different kinds of dance and music for the first time.

Street theatre performance

On 19th March mohanam young trainees performed street theatre at Ilaijnargal School. They used beautiful costumes and make up when they performed in this ancient style. The name of the story, which was Mahabharata, Abhimanyu fight, inspired our young children. Many parents participated. They have seen that their son has done a wonderful performance and remembered ancient Tamil folk arts style. Nowadays this art form is being destroyed. So Mohanam has been engaged to train young people to preserve their values and wisdoms.



Sikkim cultural exchange program (Discover Northeast Culture)

On 18th, 19th and 20th of February a group of people went to participate in a cultural exchange program at Sikkim (north east India.) It was a very good opportunity for the Mohanam young trainees to explore their talent.

There were three day cultural programs at different places like Geezing, Legship and Saring with 10 groups from all the cultural zones who participated to express their local cultural by way of presentation . On the 18th February our group presented thappattam at Geezing. The chief guest was delighted by the young trainees. When we spoke to him, we learned that the chief guest was a young man from Tamil Nadu with his destination (SDM) Sub-divisional Magistrate. He was very happy that he was reminded of Tamizh folk art.



On the second day we performed for the local community people at Legship. It was a different experience to see local people and local government officials.

On the third day, we performed at a school in Sortang. The chief guest honored our young artists, and the festival organizer gave certificates to all participants.



We brought young trainees to be inspired at all the important places of Sikkim and we shared our wisdom and cultural with other state artists (Sikkim, Nagaland, Manipur, Kolkatta, Kullu Manali, Assam and Mizoram)





We are very grateful to the Friends of Mohanam our staff, the volunteers and the sponsors, who prepared and manifested the various programs.

Also thank the local village communities which have helped and supported us in so many ways.

With love and gratitude
The Mohanam Team

The contribution of Auroville, the parents and the participants it is not enough to cover all the costs of our program. Without the financial support of our sponsors we would not be able to offer this rich variety of programs.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO DONATE?

HERE'S HOW

The easiest and simplest way to transfer money is by "SWIFT" (electronic transfer) from anywhere. Go to your bank and give them the following information, with your donation.

SWIFT CODE: S B I N I N B B 4 7 4

Account with State Bank of India, Auroville

International Township Branch, Kuilapalayam,

Auroville - 605 101 - India

Branch Code: 03160

Name of the Account Holder:

Auroville Unity Fund

Account No: 1 0 2 3 7 8 7 6 508

Purpose: Mohanam Cultural Centre