



Nearly 400 visit the Puducherry Village Heritage Festival

Over the course of the last couple of decades, the relationship between Auroville and the rural community in surrounding villages has evolved from one of curiosity and perhaps an element of distrust to a more harmonious and symbiotic bonding.

This change of relationship was most evident at the Puducherry Village Heritage Festival organised by the Mohanam Cultural Centre and supported by the Department of Tourism this weekend, where the variety of crafts and personal products (recycled paper, ceramic, crochet, bamboo) on display was inspired by the creativity of Auroville.

"The relationship between Auroville and the villagers has changed. The villagers have benefited through employment. The villagers have become conscious about quality of their products. Auroville has also taught the villages to value their traditions and their crafts," says P. Balasundaram who heads the Mohanam Cultural Centre.

The festival, which had traditional foods and crafts from Alankuppam, Sanjeevi Nagar and Annai Nagar villages of Puducherry bordering Auroville, offered visitors a chance at some traditional fast-vanishing games like Pallanghuzi (played on a board with pits) and Ilavattakal Thukuthal (lifting a heavy stone).

Future plans

Hoping that the festival becomes an annual affair, Mr. Balasundaram said this edition had helped build confidence among the villagers. Kadirvel, a villager said as the products are made locally and visitors buy directly from the craftspeople, they would get good quality products at economical price. "The event has helped us in the villages economically," he said.

Jyothilakshmi, who put up a stall for traditional food, said that such events attracted tourists and helped them.

While work for the living heritage museum (a place where visitors can interact and try out crafts) under the Alankuppam rural tourism project (a joint project by the Puducherry government and the Ille-et-Vilaine, Brittany region, France, administration) is going to begin, another project involving a Central government scheme is yet to take off.

"Seeing the tourism department's cooperation and encouragement to the festival, we hope that the Central government project too is started soon. The particular project had envisioned accommodation for visitors, a village craft information centre and a boutique and was sanctioned in 2009," said Mr. Balasundaram.

The festival was inaugurated by Tourism Minister P. Rajavelu and attended by local MLA P.M.L. Kalyanasundaram and officials from the tourism department.

The festival, which had around 35 stalls and a variety of cultural programmes, saw an attendance of more than 400 people, said Mr. Balasundaram.