Ilaignarkal Education Centre (2016-17)

Introduction
The programmes offered at Ilaignarkal impart basic education to workers and their wards of Auroville hailing from the immediate neighbourhood of the Auroville region. We aim to help in bridging a healthy relationship and understanding between Auroville the international city and the ancient Tamil villages through social, cultural, economic and health programmes.

Programmes of the year

- **Regular classes:** These impart basic knowledge in various skills to suit the needs of students of all age groups, guided by trained staff and resource persons. Classes this year included Tamil, English, computer languages, arts and crafts, cookery, body awareness, health and healing through Siddha medicine, hatha yoga and breathing exercises. We conduct classes from 9:30am to 6:30pm, allowing the students to choose their own schedule.

- **Teacher training programme:** A value-oriented education and joyful learning programme was offered to the teachers of panchayat union schools of the Auroville region, i.e. Irumbai, Edayanchavadi, Kottakarai and Kulapayalam. About 8 teachers with 70 children under the collaborative education scheme supported by the Department of Education, Vanur region, attended our classes twice a week for the past one year. We are happy to share our space, facilities and expertise to help them to move forward and co-evolve with Auroville people.

- **Summer camp:** This year we conducted our summer camp with 30 children from Auroville workers' families from neighbouring villages. The main theme was ‘water’: how to protect and save water. The children performed theatre on water, and had a field trip to Irumbai lake. Parents enjoyed the open house evening.

- **Regular Vizhavattam:** This year we focused on Tamil Bhakti literature. Prof. Arunan along with Prof. Meenakshi carried the lecture cum discussion sessions. Around 30 participants attended these sessions.

- **Bharati Educare:** Girl children from Auroville workers' families getting foster care through our school met every fortnight with their guardians, to evaluate their progress in health education and creative expressions. We have a lot of interactive sessions with the nearly 20 children along with their parents or guardians.

- **“Auroville Seythimadal”**: We published 12 issues of our monthly Tamil language newsletter “Auroville Seythimadal”. Beneficiaries included schools, libraries, communities in and around Auroville, and many institutions in South India. Through the newsletter we reach out and share knowledge with nearly 5,000 readers (500 printed copies).

Special activities of the year

- **Tamil New Year celebration:** The aim was to introduce the Tamil lunar calendar and celebrate the summer season. We shared our local experience of how to protect ourselves with right food, clothing, protected herbal water, and the right type of cosmetics, and shared other artistic expressions and utility items suitable for hot sunny days. We had a mini exhibition which highlighted Tamil literature. References from Sri Aurobindo, poet Bharati and other great personalities were also on display.
• **Children’s literature:** In collaboration with Sahitya Akademi of India, Tamil Heritage Centre, and Aikiyam School, we conducted a one-day seminar in children’s literature. We interacted with great writers, local teachers, members of NGOs serving the cause of child welfare, and friends in Auroville.

• **Kolu celebration:** The Festival of Evolution was celebrated as usual for 10 days in October 2016. We displayed colorful dolls in the library hall which attracted hundreds of school children and their parents. Every day group singing and sacred cooking classes were conducted. It was a special happy Dasara where we could appreciate the evolution of our human divine life described by Sri Aurobindo and The Mother.

• **Pongal festival:** The flavours and colours of Pongal were celebrated to educate the Auroville community and neighbouring villages. Sweet rice pongal and vegetable curry made from 28 seasonal vegetables were cooked and served for all the attendees. A kolam drawing competition was conducted, and traditional sports and games attracted both adults and children. Our school campus was filled with the joy of music and dance from local to global.

**Future direction**

We plan to continue our Siddha healing way in day-to-day life, to be expressed in our daily food practices, bathing and care of body, cosmetics, improved safe drinking water and natural beverages.

We are ready to publish a collection of Tamil songs for children, “*Marakkilai oonjal*” (“A swing from the bough of a tree”), with illustrations. It will benefit kids aspiring to learn Tamil, teachers who teach Tamil language, and parents sharing their time with children.

Our eco-friendly school building with rooftop solar panel system is visited by many students of architecture and sustainable learning centers. We may need more support in improving the structure with a few more facilities. We are concerned about the drying up of our donated seed money in Unity Fund, and feel we need more economic support.