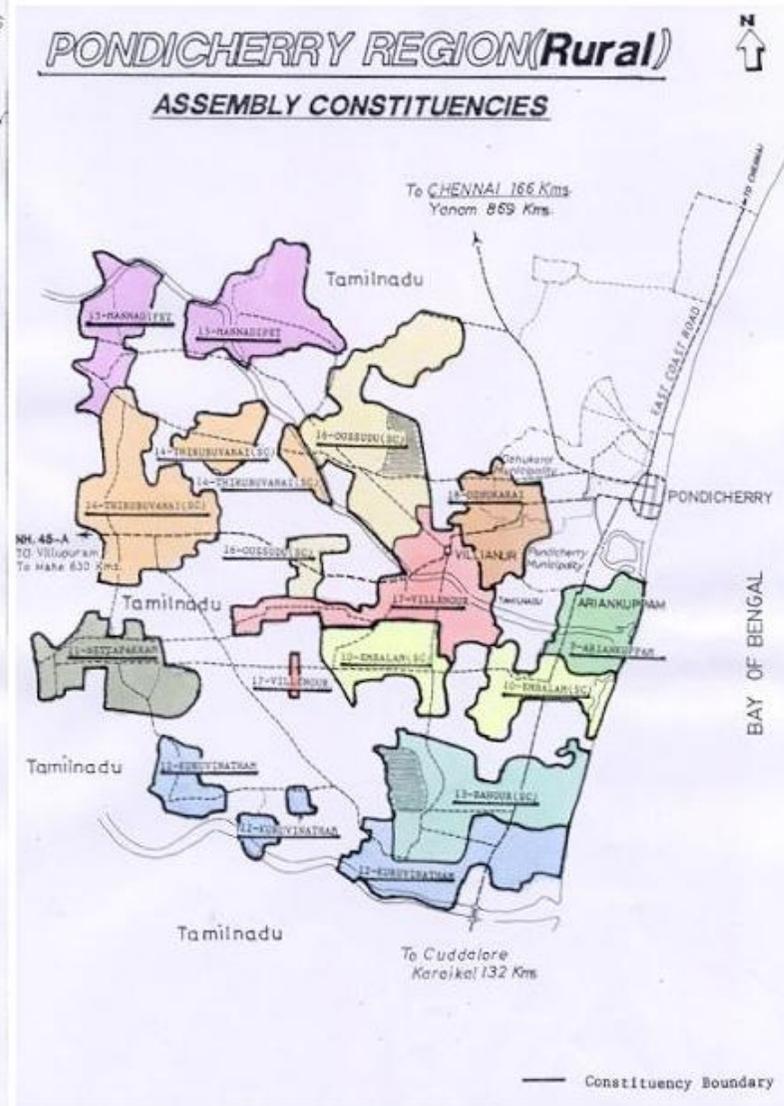
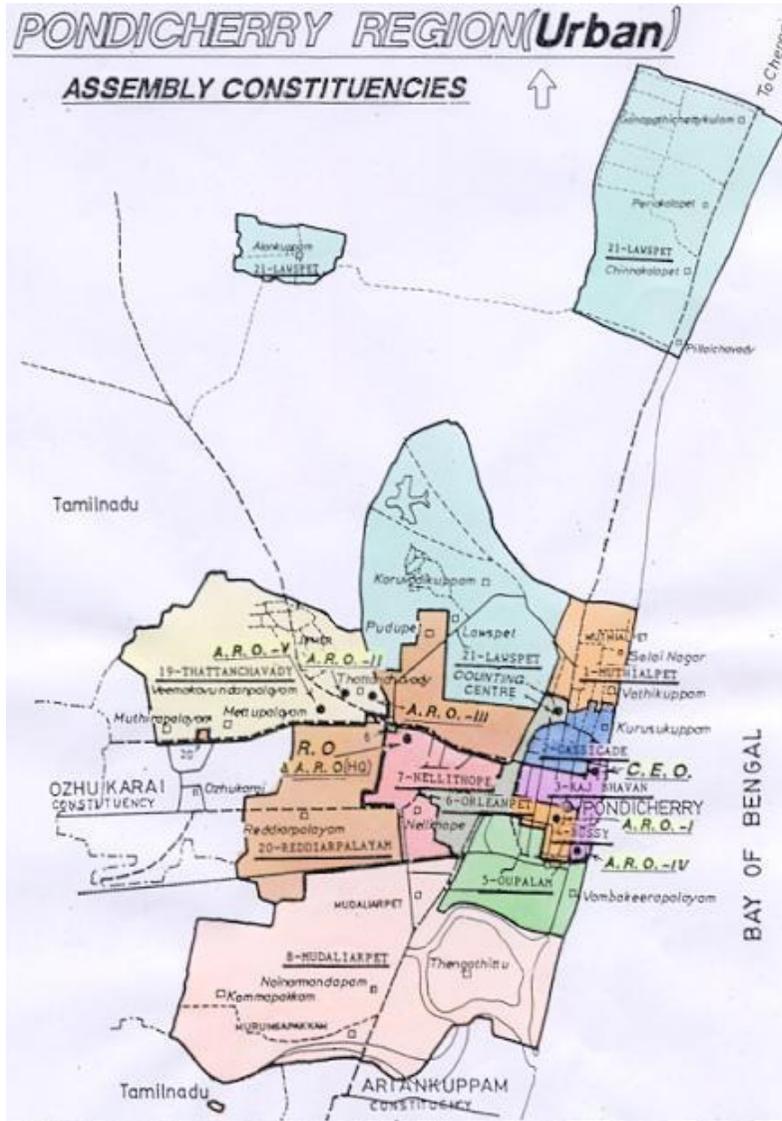


HISTORY OF PONDICHERRY (PUDUCHERRY)



LOCATION :

The Union Territory of Pondicherry is constituted out of the four erstwhile French settlements of **Pondicherry**, **Karaikal**, **Mahe** and **Yanam** regions. Pondicherry is located 160 Kms. south of Chennai and is surrounded by Cudallore and Villupuram districts of Tamilnadu. Karaikal lies about 150 Kms. south of Pondicherry and is located within Nagapattinam district of Tamilnadu. Mahe region is located on the Kerala coast and lies on the borders of Kozhikode and Kannoor districts of Kerala. Yanam is on the banks of the river Goringa Godavari and is situated within the east Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh.

ACCESS :

Pondicherry can be reached from Chennai within three hours by road or by metre gauge railway trains. Chennai is the nearest airport to Pondicherry. Karaikal is four hours drive from Tiruchirapalli airport and the nearest rail head is Nagoor. The Calicut (Kozhikode) airport is two and a half hours drive from Mahe and is located on Thiruvananthapuram - Mangalore railway line. The nearest rail head for Yanam is Kakinada which is only an hour drive from Yanam. The nearest airport is Vishakapattinam and is four hours drive from there.

HISTORY

Peeping into history of Pondicheery one will be aware of the fact that human habitation of this union territory of India can be traced quite a long back in history. The numerous views about origin of Pondicherry say that this place was initially famous by the name of Vedapuri and Agastya, the saint used to live here. In fact it would be interesting to note that some French archaeologists consider that the ashram of Agastaya was situated, today where Sri Aurobindo Ashram stands. Another fact that makes the history of the Pondicherry interesting is the existence of business relation. The evidence of Ancient port town excavated at Arikamendu proves this fact.

Historians consider the history of Pondicherry is the cradle of numerous civilizations. Ancient, medieval and modern are the three distinct section of history of Pondicherry. Talking about the ancient history of Pondicherry, the written documents say that it was under the dominance of Pallava dynasty, well known as mighty rulers. Archaeological excavations show that Pondicherry is an eyewitness to the rise and fall of many dynasties. As we have already mentioned the fact that ancient Pondicherry have been able to develop trading relations with Roman Empire through sea. Historians say that this region was the flourishing and popular maritime centre of the country.

In the fourth century Pondicherry came under the reign of Pallava kingdom. Academically, Pondicherry flourished during this reign as the reference of Sanskrit University can be found in Bahur Plates. The inscriptions of Vedhapuriswara temple imply that Agastya founded his ashram in Pondicherry region.

The medieval history of Pondicherry saw the rise and fall of many royal dynasties. The Pallavas had a good influence on region and was on continuous conflict with Pandyas and Cholas who in the mean time followed them in reign of the Pondicherry region. In medieval age the Chola dynasty was the first who set up their empire in Pondicherry. After the decline of the Chola dynasty the Pandayas came in thirteenth century and ruled till fifteenth century. An interesting fact about Pondicherry's medieval period is that it witnessed the rule of Muslim period even for a brief period of time. Socio-economic situation was very much affected due to rise and fall of numerous empires.

While talking about the modern history of Pondicherry the influence of the foreign countries increased in Pondicherry in the beginning of 16th century. The reason that foreign countries found Pondicherry attractive was the potential of the site as an access point to the east coast of India. They realised this fact when they had participated and enjoyed in maritime activities. So, Portuguese, Dutch, Danes and English arrived to set up colonies in Pondicheery.

The commerce and the economy of Pondicherry were highly benefited because of the presence of the foreign countries. The credit of setting the first factory in Pondicherry goes to the Portuguese that was built in early 16th century. Following this the Dutch and Danes formed trading centres in Cuddalore and Novo.

The French set their foot in Pondicherry when the ruler of Gingee started to have trade relations with them. By 1643 Pondicherry came under French control and remained for quite a long time. During this period Pondicheery saw the conflict between British and the French and ended after British recognized French supremacy in 1814. The French domination continued till then.

Under the effect of French rule, the architecture of Pondicherry flourished a lot. Forts and churches that stand in the area are the evidence of this foreign influence. The conflict to control this place contributed in shaping Pondicherry's modern history and continued till this place gained independence to be listed in Union territory of India in 1954.

As a consequence of bitter Anglo-French rivalry on the Indian sub-continent the French were driven to five small settlements on the Coromandel and Arabian sea coast by the end of 18th century. They were Chandranagoor {presently in West Bengal}, Pondicherry, Karaikal and Yanam on the Coromandel coast and Mahe on the west coast of India. Pondicherry was the headquarters of the French settlements in India.

By the beginning of 19th century, the French had lost all its hopes of any kind of territorial expansion and they were reconciled to these tiny and scattered settlements. Unlike rest of India, Pondicherry got its independence only in the year 1954 and the *de facto* merger with rest of India took place on 1st November, 1954. The *de-jure* merger took place on 16th August, 1963. Eventhough, independence was given to Pondicherry in the year 1954 itself, the Treaty of Cession signed between India and France regarding independence of Pondicherry had to be ratified by the French as well as the Indian parliaments for which certain amount of time had to be set apart. Hence *de-jure* and *de-facto* transfer of power.

It was in the year 1963 that the Government of India decided to confer Union Territory status to Pondicherry by an enactment of the Parliament-"The Government of Union Territories Act, 1963" which provided for legislative assemblies and council of ministers in the Union Territories. The Union Territory of Pondicherry is administered in accordance with this act. Before the Union Territory status was granted to Pondicherry, the wishes of the people were ascertained regarding maintaining their distinct identity or for merging with the neighbouring states. Chandranagoor alone opted for merger with West Bengal. The other four enclaves wanted to be a Union Territory. According to the Indo French Treaty, the people were given the option to retain their French citizenship or to be an Indian citizen. Such of those who opted for French citizenship were allowed to reside within the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Today, there are approximately 10000 French citizens of Indian origin residing within the Union Territory of Pondicherry. They regularly exercise their franchise during election to the French Parliament and the French government sets up polling booth for the benefits of their citizens within Pondicherry.

AREA AND POPULATION:

The Union Territory of Pondicherry is comprised in 480 sq.km. area with Pondicherry region alone accounting for 290 sq.km., Karaikal with 161 sq.km., Mahe in 9 sq.km. and Yanam in 20 sq.km. According to 2001 census the population of Pondicherry was 9,73,829 out of which 4,86,705 number were males and 4,87,124 were females. The Karaikal region is 150 Km away from Pondicherry, Yanam about 840 Km north east of Pondicherry and Mahe is 653 Km west of Pondicherry. Tamil is spoken in Pondicherry and Karaikal, Malayalam in Mahe and Telugu in Yanam. There are number of peoples who also speak French. Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, English and French are the official languages of the Union Territory of Pondicherry.

POST INDEPENDENT ELECTORAL POLITICS:

According to Government of Union Territories Act, the whole of Pondicherry is comprised in one single parliamentary constituency (Lok Sabha). Pondicherry also enjoys one seat in the Rajya Sabha. There is a uni-cameral legislature for the U.T. with 30 elected members and three nominated members. There are 6,36,045 number of registered voters in the Union Territory of Pondicherry out of which 3,10,289 numbers are males and 3,25,756 numbers are females as on 20.01.2004.

MAJOR POLITICAL PLAYERS :

Almost all the nationally recognised political parties as well as state parties of Tamilnadu have a major presence in the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The Union Territory of Pondicherry was ruled by the following political parties either on its own strength or as a part of coalition Governments one time or the other in the last 38 years of independence.

1. The Indian National Congress
2. Congress (I)
3. Dravida Munnetra Khazhagam
4. All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Khazhagam
5. Communist Party of India
6. Janatha Dal
7. Tamil Manila Congress

Places to see

Sri Aurobindo Ashram: The main attraction of Pondicherry is Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Sri Aurobindo who was the stalwart freedom fighter of the pre- Gandhian era, following spiritual Adesh (voice or order) came to Pondicherry in 1910, then a French territory, and remained here forever practicing Yoga. He was later joined by a French lady, Mirra known as the Mother. After the Mother's coming, the followers increased in number and the Ashram came into being. After Sri Aurobindo's retirement to recluse in 1926, Mother shouldered the entire responsibility of the Ashram. Ever since, the Ashram has grown in leaps and bounds and today there are about 2000 inmates- Sadhakas practicing in action the integral or supramental yoga of Sri Aurobindo. The main Ashram building where Sri Aurobindo and the Mother's samadhis are enshrined is open to public from 8.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. with a recess from 12.00 noon to 3.00 p.m. Anyone who happens to be there by 9.00 a.m. can take special permit and visit the room where Sri Aurobindo resided and his splendid spiritual work. The things used by Sri Aurobindo and a rare collection of beautiful artifacts are kept there. In the reception counter the books of Sri Aurobindo are on sale. One could also buy pictures, calendars and diaries there - all connected with Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. The information center will give you all details. The educational institutions run by the ashram, the gymnasia and the playground activities and the cultural programmes and exhibitions organized every now and then by the Ashram could also be seen after obtaining permit from the reception counter. One can also take one's breakfast, lunch and dinner in the Ashram dining hall by paying a small amount. Ashram guest-houses scattered nearby provide accommodation too at reasonable rates and most of them would be full- only early birds will find a niche in them.

There are some important days observed in the Ashram and public are allowed to have darshan of Sri Aurobindo's and the Mother's rooms. Thousands of devotees will gather on those days. The most important days are:

1. January 1st - Prosperity day
2. February 21st - Mother's Birthday
3. August 15th - Sri Aurobindo's Birthday
4. November 17th - The Mother's Samadhi Day
5. November 24th - Supramental Day
6. December 5th - Sri Aurobindo's Samadhi Day

Beach:

Pondicherry is on the coast of the Bay of Bengal and the 1500 meter stretch beach is an ideal place for swimming and sunbathing. 4 meter tall statue of Mahatma Gandhi, a beautiful artificial mountain park near the Ashram playground, the statue of Pondicherry's illustrious governor Duplex and the War Memorial built by the French to commemorate the soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the victory of the First World War, the 150-year-old lighthouse are other attractions of the beach. The beach is maintained clean and of late boulders have been erected to prevent sea-erosion. Sri Aurobindo Society's beach office and the Pondicherry Government Tourist Office are on the beach road.

French Institute:

The only present link with France in Pondicherry is this institute. It is an internationally acclaimed institute on Dumas Street founded in 1955 by Dr. J. Fillozet, the renowned French Indologist. It has a brilliant collection of rare books on Science, Technology, Ecology, Cartography, Pedagogy, Indian languages and culture. The Romain Rolland Library run by the government has a collection of 60,000 books some of them being rare French volumes.

JIMPER:

Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Post-graduate Medical Education and Research, started in 1979, it is one of the most prestigious institutions of its kind in India. This is one of the foremost medical institutions in the country and is located at the western entry point to Pondicherry. This place is called Gorimedu. Botanical Garden: The botanical garden planned by C.S.Perrotet in 1826 is near the old bus stand off the West Boulevard. It has a good collection of exotic flower plants, both alien and indigenous. There is a toy rail to amuse children and the Jawahar Bal Bhavan- a unique all- India organization to train children in various arts is also located here.

AQUARIUM:

Another attraction in the Botanical Garden is the aquarium which has some rare species of ornamental fish.

MUSEUM

The 1984 museum near the park facing the beach houses the antiques apart from the Roman coins and other articles of Roman origin unearthed from Pondicherry. This reveals the connections of ancient times. There are also sections of archeology, geology, and sculpture, handicrafts, artifacts, ornaments and things obtained in Arikamedu, a place in the nearby village Ariyankuppam. The bed used by Duplex, a palanquin and a pousse-pousse that resembles a hand-pulled rickshaw are also on display.

PARK

There is a well laid out park facing the beach and opposite the governor's residence. Most people take rest during the afternoon under the shady trees. The statues of Bharathiar and Bharathidasan have been erected here. One main attraction is the sculpture park interspersed in the garden with beautiful images and ornamental pillars looted by Duplex from Gingee. In the center is a cenotaph, raised by Napoleon, called Ayi Memorial-a woman who donated her tank to quench the thirst of people which is now the symbol of pondicherry. Bharathiar & Bharathidasan Memorials: The national poet Bharathi took asylum in Pondicherry when the British atrocities against freedom fighters were rampant. The house where he lived in Pondicherry on the Dharma Raja Koil Street has been converted into a fine memorial by the Pondicherry government. Rare photographs, manuscripts written in Bharathiar's own hand, volumes of his works and the papers he published are on display. Some of the things he used and some rare photographs of his associates are also on display. Bharathidasan, the true revolutionary poet and disciple of Bharathiar is a native of Pondicherry. The house where he resided has also been converted into a fitting memorial in Bharathidasan Road.

ANANDHARANGAM PILLAI'S HOUSE

The famous dubash who was right hand to Duplex and who recorded the events of his days in his diary. Anandharangam Pillai's house could be seen in Ranga Pillai Street. The beautiful ornamental carvings on tables and stately doors with carvings and the articles used by him are on display here.

TEMPLES

There are several temples in Pondicherry town and nearby villages built by the Cholas between 10th and 12th centuries dedicated to local village gods.

In Madagadippattu village, a beautiful temple with excellent art works was found in the excavation. In Bhahur, another village, once a centre of Sanskrit-learning flourished during the Pallava period. The Varadharaja temple is the heart of the town is a Vishnu shrine of the Chola period built in the 12th century. There is a Chola inscription here that speaks of a Sanskrit university. There is a Siva temple known as Ambalathu Adigal Mutt temple nearby. The Kimbili Swami Mutt temple a little away has a rare sculpture which is a unique pose of Siva and Mahakali dancing together in unison. The Siddhanta Swami Samadhi temple near the burial ground is famed in one of the songs of poet Bharathiar. One can see the statues in stucco of all the siddhas and saints in this temple where people of all faiths visit. Thirukkameswara temple in the nearby Villiyanur is a Siva temple built by the Cholas in the 12th century. The annual festival of this temple held in May-June attracts thousands of devotees.

The most famous and important temple of Pondicherry is the Manakkula Vinayagar temple near Aurobindo Ashram. It was originally an idol planted near a "manal kulam"- sandy tank. The legend is that the early European settlers wanted to remove it from there and they had actually thrown it several times into the sea. After each throwing, the deity appeared in the same place the next day. This caused some concern among them and they abandoned the idea. Later on, the Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram donated lands for building the temple in a fitting manner. Poet Bharathiar has sung a beautiful prabhandam (poetic work) on this deity. Mural painting of all ganapathis could be seen around the corridors. In Thiruvamathur village is the famous Vattaparai Amman. It is a round-shaped rock and in olden times if any dispute arose instead of going to court they came here and standing before the deity will tell only the truth and nothing but the truth. The deity is supposed to be so powerful that any false witness would be severely dealt with by Amman, so none dared to utter falsehood. Many disputes were thus solved here.

CHURCHES

There are a number of beautiful churches in Pondicherry. The most beautiful is the church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on south Boulevard. It is a Gothic style church with three stained glass panels in a corridor behind the altar depicting the life of Christ. The English de Notre Dam des Anges on Dumas Street built in 1865 has an oil painting of our lady of Assumption donated by Napoleon III. Another famous church is the one called the Englise de Notre Dame des Lourdes in Villiyanur. It has been built exactly as the Basilica at Lourdes in France. The local Tamilians call it Villiyanur madha church. The church festival in June attracts lakhs of devotees to all faiths. There is also a tank, the only one of its kind in a church in India.

AUROVILLE

The city of dawn is the brainchild of the Mother designed by the well known French architect Roger Ongar. Its aim is an international community living in amity despite all creeds, politics and nationalities. The inauguration was on 28 February 1968 when the President of the Indian Union and representatives of 121 nations came to pour the soils of their lands in a lotus-shaped urn symbolic of universal oneness. About 500 people from different countries live in 40 settlements of Auroville. The best way to go round this vast area is to hire a bicycle and set on an adventurous expedition. Near Matri Information centre is a 25 hectare farm and orchard successfully practicing organic agriculture without using chemicals and factory fertilizers. The produce is utilised in the kitchen at Auroville as well as the Ashram.

Matri mandir is the main attraction of Auroville. It is a huge globe-like structure visible everywhere in Auroville. Its construction is still going on and it is a place of meditation. In the hall, a huge crystal ball is kept which glows absorbing the natural light- a crystal to gaze and meditate. When it is completed it would be one of the wonders of the world. The Mother has conceived it as a temple of truth and inaugurated the work which still continues. Public are allowed to have a look at the progressing mandir and at particular hours to meditate before the crystal ball- a unique experience indeed!

NEARBY PLACES OF EXCURSION

-Gingee

-Thiruvannamalai

-Sathanur Dam

-Thiruvakkarai

-Sanyasikuppam

-Nandaga Pattu

-Cuddalore

-Thiruvahindrapuram

-Vadalur

-Thiruvadigai