

Udavi School



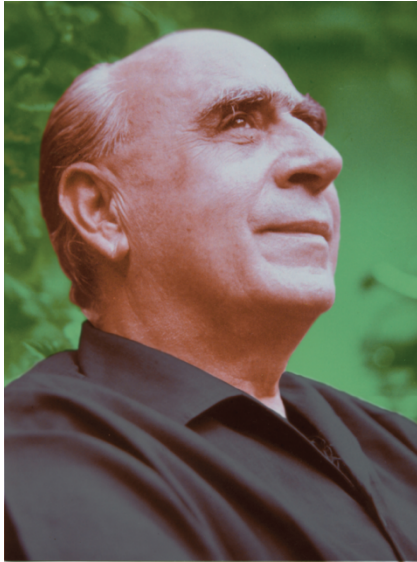
“No, there will be a primary class problem for the whole population... for Auroville. And that will be an interesting problem: how can we prepare the children, children taken from anywhere, who have no way of learning at home, whose parents are ignorant, who have no possibility of having any means to learn, nothing, nothing but the raw material, like that – how can we teach them to live? That will be an interesting problem.”

The Mother – Mother’s Centenary Edition, Vol. 12

Introduction

Udavi School was started by Nata, an Italian Sadhak at the behest of the Mother. He was already running the Auroshika incense factory in the village Edayanchavadi. Udavi started as a crèche where the children were bathed, given clean clothes to wear, given proper nutrition the whole day and had games and activities organized for them. Over the years the school was turned into a proper matriculation School under the guidance of Maggi, Anuben and Guy. The school was part of the incense factory which belongs to the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. In 1999 the school was handed over to SAIER in Auroville as Auroshika closed its factory due to labour problems. SAIER has improved the physical infrastructure of the school by creating a compound wall around the huge campus of over 13 acres of land, and by building additional needed structures for the school. SAIER also invited Aurovilians to work in the school as teachers and currently more than half the teachers are Aurovilians. A huge effort has been made to make the

school child-centered. Punishments, rote learning, regular examinations as a way to memorize the subject matter have been done away with. A cordial relationship between the teachers and students prevails, activities and projects are used to teach wherever possible, and the program includes regular sports and physical education and a number of creative activities.



The Program

The school follows the Tamil Nadu board syllabus up to 10th grade. This includes courses in Tamil, English, mathematics, sciences, and social sciences. The medium of instruction is English. In addition to these academic subjects the school provides the following programs to develop an all-round personality in the students:

- The daily sports and physical education program that includes games like basketball, volleyball, badminton, frisbee, football and table tennis. There is a season for athletics which includes long jump, high jump, shotput, and races of various lengths. Every 2 years the school organizes a physical demonstration by the students.
- Anna our clay teacher trains our children to make colorful dolls, flower pictures, animals such as butterflies and birds and different art designs. The work produced by the children is used for gifts and prizes in the annual school fair and Christmas celebrations.
- An innovative program developed in Auroville called Awareness through the Body is being offered at Udavi School. It is a comprehensive curriculum of exercises that aim to raise awareness and to enable children to become conscious of their own perceptions and ability so that they may actualize their full individual potential. The activities are creative and the children enjoy them.
- Play of painting is another innovative program offered in the school to the students. Here the children use paper, paint and brushes as a means for self-discovery and the ability to trace out what is already within, allowing a universal language to emerge.
- A program of teaching Odissi dance is offered to the students from the kindergarten onwards. Many of our students are able to choreograph their own dance pieces when they are in higher grades. They have also produced dance- dramas based on the stories of Ramayana and Krishna.
- Drama work is offered to the children since a young age. Once a year each class of students prepares a drama, which is then staged in our cultural programmes which are held at the end of every term.
- Tailoring, art, singing, and vegetable gardening are some other activities that are part of our program.



The Challenges

- The nurturing of the psychic being of the student is at the core of the vision of The Mother and Sri Aurobindo in relation to the education of the child. This nurturing of the psychic being can only be done in some minimum conditions of freedom for the child. The students of Udavi School are from the village where there is a highly paternalistic and rigid family system in place which allows no room to breathe freely, particularly to the girls. In such conditions we still find ways for the children to be in contact with their psychic being.
- The medium of instruction in the school is English. The students who come from the village have no contact with the language outside of the school. Their circle of friends and relatives and family do not speak English. In this situation it takes a long time before they have an understanding of simple texts in English.
- Most of the parents of the students would like the children to have a traditional education, which means for them rote learning, good marks and a certificate. They are not at all sympathetic to the number of artistic and creative activities that are offered in the school. They are also not sympathetic or supportive of the physical education program being offered to the students. Such an attitude remains a constant challenge to the school.

“The educator should always remember he should not try to act upon the child, nor upon the needs, but upon the environment the child.”

The Mother

Mission/Conclusion

Udavi School is blessed with a large campus of over 13 acres. The campus also has many old trees which create a special environment in the school. Our effort is to keep the physical environment of the school simple, beautiful and clean. The relationship between the teachers and the students is friendly and mutually respectful. Self-discipline is maintained by the students. All causes of fear are removed from the school. The cultural environment of the school is kept rich with a large number of guest artists coming to the school to perform or teach the children. It is our belief that the school is making a significant difference in the lives of its students as also the general progress of the village which falls partly within the Greenbelt of Auroville.



Testimonials

“Our childhood would be the most memorable and cherished of all still in our lives. Wherever and whomever I meet, I am proud to say that I am an Udavian.”

Maheshwari (Former Student)

“What I learned from Udavi helped to differentiate me from other students. It was here, at Udavi that I learned how to live and to face difficulties and the challenges of life.”

Arunpandian (Former Student)

“This laughter and freshness of Udavi will always be in my memories. The sounds of, ‘Appu Akka, Appu Akka’ as I walk into my paradise, I will always remember.”

Aparajita (Former Volunteer Art Teacher)

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