

## Students admire architecture, discuss preservation in Pondicherry visit

BY MOHAN VADAYAR

DUBAI: Three students of architecture from **Amity University in Dubai (AUiD)** visited the Indian union territory and a former French colony, Pondicherry, often referred to as a sea of tranquillity.

The **AUiD** students Kajal Shah, Sherlyn Daniel and Mohammed Umar, after their tour of the “French” town, have finally learned what Frank O Gehry, the Canadian architect and “the most important architect of our age,” said was true.

He said, the students quoted, “Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness.” And that was what they have noted in Pondi, as the town is fondly called.

Commenting on “a walk through the white town of Pondicherry, as part of a field trip to Auroville, Pondicherry, student Kajal Shah said, “We were there to compare about sustainability in Dubai and Auroville, Pondichery.”

“At 4pm, we stepped out from the bus at Marina Beach, Chennai, and Tamil Nadu. Before we got a glimpse of the beach, our eyes were searching for water to drink due to the scorching temperature out there.”

“Then we headed towards a small street with shops on both sides. The town of Pondicherry is an amalgamation of Tamil and French architecture. The former is mainly found in the west part and the latter in the east which is separated by a storm water canal.”

Watching the statue of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru the students started their heritage walk along with Ashok from INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage).

“We noticed there were barely any motor vehicles on the beach road except cycle rickshaws. We started our voyage by visiting a construction site of an old French residence which was getting renovated.”

The students were attracted by the roof of the building, which was known as “Chennai roof,” made up of clay bricks.

Commenting on the Chennai roof, Sherlyn Daniel said, “The light pastel colours of yellow, pink and white with similar front façade, gave us a feel of traversing through the European streets on the Indian soil. We noticed that all the streets were laid in grid pattern, their names beginning with ‘RUE’ which means street in French.”

Student Mohammed Umar added that in the second street, “we saw buildings which looked very similar to modern apartments and had no resemblance to the colonial French architecture, due to construction activities.”

Encroachment of modern buildings into the French town was evident in diluting the beauty of the old French town, the students felt.

INTACH and other local authorities are trying to put effort for preservation and restoration of the old French buildings and streets of a bygone area.

**Amity University** faculty members Abraham Samuel, Banafsha Rajput and Vidya Mohanan accompanied the students on this trip.