

## Restoring the TDEF

Around 200 years ago the Auroville

Plateau, where Pitchandikulam is located, was covered in scrub jungle and herds of elephants roamed the area. During the 1820s trees were felled to drive away the tigers. The last remaining forests were cut down in the 1950s for timber to make boats. Today the indigenous vegetation of the area, the Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest (TDEF), is only found in isolated reserve forest patches and in small remnant sacred groves around temples. The first Aurovillian settlers found the land dry and desolate; prior to 1973 only a few scattered palm trees were found in the area and the traditional dryland farming of peanuts and pulses had degraded the soil leaving deep eroded gullies. In that year, restoration processes were set in motion using green manures to rebuild the soil. Live fences were created to protect the land from goats and cows, and pioneer species of acacia, leucaena, gliricidia, and eucalyptus were planted to provide windbreaks and shade. At the same time seeds and other plant materials were introduced from nearby remnant patches of the almost extinct Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. Now Pitchandikulam is a peaceful sanctuary of self-generating forest with a wide diversity of flora and fauna. More than 800 species of plants can be found in the sanctuary forest, grasslands and ethno-medicinal gardens. Pitchandikulam Forest is now actively engaged in a seed propagation nursery from which endangered medicinal plants are established in the sanctuary and other locations within the Auroville bioregion where plantations of TDEF have been set up. .