S. Prasad

The French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) has completed the first phase of documentation of endangered temple art, murals and paintings in Tamil Nadu in an effort to bring them back to life and preserve them for posterity.

A team of researchers from IFP documented the murals in Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple; Kallalagar temple Le Alagarkovil; Chennaya Perumal temple in Adhyamankottai; Chithirairachwadi near Narasinappatti and Jain caves of Tirumalai in the first phase in collaboration with the British Library. The IFP has already completed a major portion of digitisation of its photo archives which contain over 1,60,000 photographs of temples in South India and are an unique repository of information on temple art and iconography in South India. The documentation of temple art is aimed at enriching the collection enabling historians and researchers to carry on their work. Dr. N. Murugesan, researcher IFP told The Hindu that “Documentation of temple art and murals in these five vulnerable sites in Tamil Nadu should have been done at least 50 years back. Many of the sites had lost their glory and historical importance. IFP has now provided a fresh lease of life to these murals and paintings that had been created using herbal colours and natural pigments.” There are more than a hundred inscriptions found on the walls, gopuras and corridors of the Kallalagar temple in Alagar Kovil dating back from 11th to 18th centuries. The paintings are of high quality and depict episodes from the Ramayana.

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N. MURUGEAN RESEARCHER IFP

HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE: The Meenakshi Thirukalyanam mural in Madurai; endangered temple art at Chennaya Perumal temple in Adhyamankottai, Dharmapuri and the sequences depicting the birth of Rama at Kallalagar temple, Madurait. - PHOTOS: SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The murals found in the world famous Meenakshi Amman Temple in Madurai depict Meenakshi Thirukalyanam, the celestial wedding ceremony of Goddess Meenakshi with Lord Sundareswarar. The murals are more than 600 years old.

At the Chennaya Perumal Temple in Adhyamankottai there are five galleries that lead to the sanctum sanctorum depicting the scenes of Mahabharata, Vishwakarma Darshan of Lord Krishna, scenes from the Ramayana including the life of Lord Rama and various episodes from Mahabharata and Vedas.

Mr. Murugesan said that the murals in Chithirarachwadi near Narasingappatti are estimated to belong to 17th – 18th century and have similarities with Nayak era murals. IFP is planning to take up documentation of 10 more sites in Tamil Nadu in the second phase.