

A shining diamond of knowledge

The French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP), an important repository of ancient knowledge and hub of multi-disciplinary research that attracts scholars from across the world, celebrated its diamond jubilee in November.

The IFP enjoys a unique place in the network of 27 research centres under the joint supervision of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and

International Development (MAEDI) and the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS), as it is the only institution whose charter was written into the Treaty of Cession of French Territories in India.

Each of its four divisions — Ecology, Indology, Social Sciences and Geomatics — has made signal contributions.

The real tour de force though is the painstakingly accumulated collection of 8,187 palm-leaf manuscripts (the largest collection of texts on Saivasiddhanta in the world and registered as such in the “Memory of the World” register of the UNESCO).

Its photo archives with a collection of 1,60,000 photographs, of temples and edifices in South India notably, has even helped sleuths from the US Homeland Security in investigations into antique smuggling.