Catching up with some scholarly powwow

French Institute of Pondicherry brings ‘Tamil studies’ students, resource persons together

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PUDUCHERRY: The city’s unique Franco-Tamil identity has been in the crosshairs of many a scholarly powwow.

As has been its tradition for the past few years, the French Institute of Pondicherry, hosted one such scholarly exchange here last week that covered the broad gamut of Tamil studies across linguistics, folklore, performing arts, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, politics and history.

Sean Kerr, a student at the University of California, Berkeley, was inspired to come over here after “finding to his surprise the extensive use of Pali language in South India during his Masters studies.”

The ancient Pali language of the 1st century B.C. belongs to the Theravada Buddhist canon and is not in use today, except in research studies. It is also believed to have been used extensively in North India.

Kerr examined this further and is now pursuing a PhD in ‘the Pali Ācariya Anuruddha and Pali Literary Production in South India.’

“There is a tremendous literary heritage of Pali language used in South India. I hope to bring awareness about this through my research. The workshop has been very good in getting guidance on the subject of my research,” said Kerr, who hopes to complete his Ph.D. in another couple of years.

Ph.D. students caught up in research find that the years of in-depth study is often a lonely process.

Hours of hard work also mean there is little time to catch up on studies in other areas.

“We have resource persons attending the workshop who gave Kerr guidance on Pali language and Sanskrit,” added Professor Y. Subbarayalu, head, Department of Indology, French Institute of Pondicherry.

The French Institute of Pondicherry has been bringing together researchers and students of ‘Tamil studies’ in workshop meetings since 2009, providing through such fora opportunities for students to interact and exchange notes.

“We have varied topics under Tamil studies. We have covered topics related to Tamil Nadu and South India. We also have a session on how GIS is used so students can learn and understand the technology behind it,” said Kannan M., of the French Institute of Pondicherry, who helped organise the workshop.

Doctoral students from India, Sri Lanka and America presented their theses, reference and methodology, he said.