French institute documents 459 Jain sites

They include Jain temples, rock bed inscriptions and loose sculptures throughout Tamil Nadu

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PUDUCHERRY: In a pioneering effort, the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) has completed the photographic documentation of Jain sites spatially distributed throughout Tamil Nadu detailing their cultural and religious heritage.

The exhaustive study documented 459 sites including 86 sub-sites such as Jain temples/cave temples, rock bed inscriptions and loose sculptures throughout Tamil Nadu.

13 rituals documented

The study has also documented 13 rituals and festivals of the community and around 7,873 images of temples/cave temples, rock shelter sites and dilapidated temples. The study is funded by Paris-based ARCUS Ile-de-France, Hukamichand Jain and R.K. Jain, former president of All India Tirthshetra committee.

"Though Jain temples in Tamil Nadu make up for a rich heritage they are still unrecognised. Many of the historically important temples are in ruins and in a dilapidated condition and it is important to document them. The documentation shows the temples in their artistic and religious dimension, as an architectural heritage and living place and also sheds light on the uniqueness of Jainism in Tamil Nadu. IFP will be bringing out a DVD ROM that includes a map of all the Jain sites," N. Murugesan, Researcher, Department of Indology, IFP told The Hindu.

The study has given special emphasis on the iconography of 24 Tirthankaras and other associated Gods, the rituals and festivals of Jain community and their role for the development of Tamil language. Over 500 inscriptions in various Jain sites in Tamil Nadu have also been documented.

Mr. Murugesan said that a survey of Jain monuments (temples and rock cave beds) was prepared and a systematic field work carried out for the purpose of documenta-

(Clockwise) A sculpture of Mahavir and the bas-reliefs at Jain cave in Muthupatti, near Madurai; a view of Keezh Kuil Kudi, Samanar or Jain Hill in Madurai and an ancient Jain bas-reliefs on a gigantic rock atop the hillock at Yanamalai

PHOTOS

The DVD ROM includes a location map all the Jain sites and photographs with attributes of each site. The sites have been classified into 11 districts and include inscriptions, architecture, monuments, ritual and festivals.

IFP has already brought out three CD ROMs on Bhaarava, Pondicherry Past and Present and Darasuram Temple complex.