

FOR THE POSTERITY

French Institute of Pondicherry on a mission to digitise its photo archives of over 2,900 temples in the southern States

NEW TECHNOLOGY SHEDS LIGHT ON TEMPLES

S. Prasad

In a pioneering effort the French Institute of Pondicherry has embarked on digitisation of its photo archives of over 2,900 temples in the southern States of Tamil Nadu, Puducherry, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The archives now contain over 1.36 lakh photos and are a unique repository of information about South India.

Researchers from the French Institute of Pondicherry (IFP) started photographing temples in the four southern States as well as monuments of major significance in other parts of the country since 1956. Out of a total of 1.36 lakh photographs in the archives of the institute, about 1 lakh photographs have already been digitised. The digitisation of the remaining is under way.

According to N. Murugesan, Researcher, Department of Indology, "the collection classified by place and subject focuses on south Indian religious art and iconography, including temple views, stone and bronze statues, paintings, architectural motifs, pre-historic cave rock paintings, palaces, jewellery and carvings in ivory and also depicts some of the archaeologically most famous monuments in India."

Of the total collection, 86,057 photographs are from Tamil Nadu, 16,639 from Karnataka, 14,283 from Andhra Pradesh and 9,725 from Puducherry.

The rest are from the other States of Maharashtra, Odis-



The archives at the French Institute of Pondicherry contain over 1.36 lakh pictures. PHOTO: S.S. KUMAR

ha, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Monuments such as the Ajanta and Ellora, Puri Jagannath Temple and 480 Jain temples and Jain rock beds and loose sculptures across Tamil Nadu have also been documented.

The initiative is a boon to the temple authorities and the government to ensure proper protection and upkeep of the idols dating back several centuries as many of the temples



have been modernised. The photographs are taken using high-resolution camera in large format (6cm x 6cm) on black and white negatives that can be enlarged to 30 inches by 40 inches. Explaining the digitisation process Ramesh Kumar, photographer, IFP, said that for the first time an innovative technique was adopted by the institute in the digitisation process. The black-and-white negatives are loaded in glass folders and placed under a digital camera.

After focusing, the images are captured at a high resolution of 36 mega pixels. The entire process is calibrated and all actions are controlled manually.

IFP has also been facilitating the Tamil Nadu Idol Theft Wing police in tracing the missing idols based on the negatives maintained at the archives.

N. MURUGESAN
Researcher

Mouse click identifies deities

S. Prasad

Now tourists visiting major temples in Tamil Nadu and the other Southern States can identify Hindu gods and goddesses at the click of a mouse.

With Hindu iconography known only through books and other descriptions, Researchers at the French Institute of Pondicherry have developed an open source software for easy identification of Hindu gods and goddesses.

The project, Biodiversity Informatics and Co-operation in Taxonomy for Interactive Shared Knowledge Base (BIOTIK), was developed by Pierre Gard, director of IFP, for creating a database of the tree species in the Western Ghats.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, N. Murugesan, Researcher, Department of Indology, said that the same BIOTIK software was

The software, when downloaded on a smartphone or iPad, would enable tourists to identify Hindu gods based on a set of over 300 characters uploaded

now being used to identify Hindu gods and goddesses. The different poses and attributes of gods and goddesses such as Abhaya, Varada, Katakaand Simhakarna will be loaded into the software instead of plant.

The project is entirely funded by the French Institute of Pondicherry and currently under way.

The software, when downloaded on a smartphone or iPad, would enable tourists to

identify Hindu gods based on a set of over 300 characters uploaded. With a user friendly graphical interface one can easily identify the gods and goddesses.

