

Digital atlas: History of TN AT THE CLICK OF A MOUSE

Pics: French Institute, Pondichery

An Online Project Is Under Way To Chart The History of South India Through Maps, Illustrations And Descriptions

By N Nandhivaman

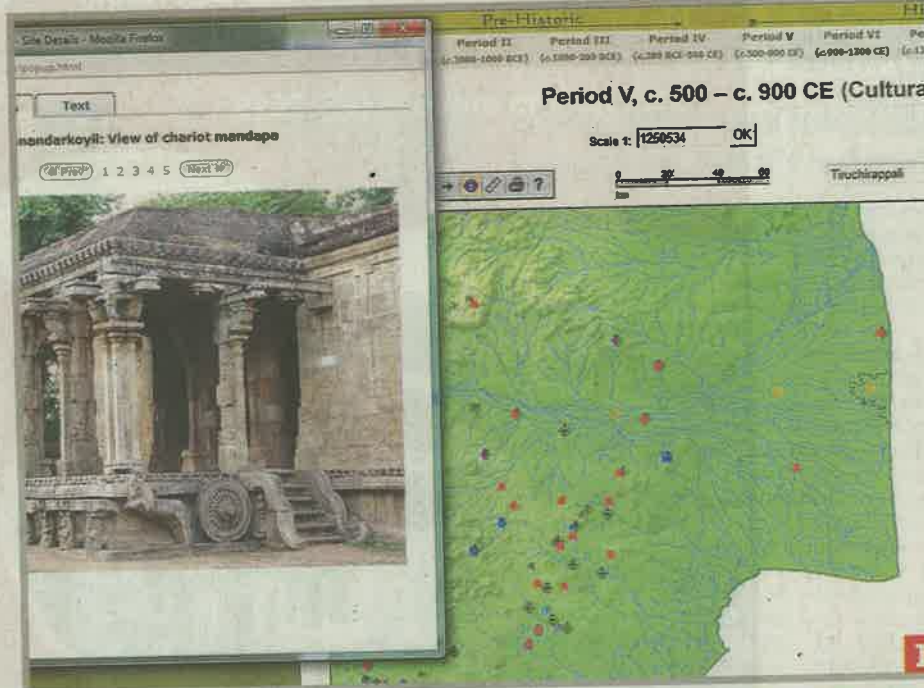
The department of epigraphy and archaeology at the Tamil University, Thanjavur, and the Laboratory of Geomatics and Applied Informatics of the French Institute Pondichery are collaborating to develop and deploy a digital atlas of south India on the internet. The aim is to provide easy access to information relating to the political, social and cultural history of the region through a combination of maps, illustrations, text and geographical information, says Y Subburayalu, coordinator of the project.

Tamil University, Thanjavur, has been a major source of the information relating to Tamil Nadu that is being fed into the Atlas. Mahatma Gandhi University of Kottayam, Mangalore University and Hyderabad University have joined as partners as the project moves to map the other southern states. The project grew from a pilot project done for Pudukkottai. Since Andhra and Karnataka entered the fray late, two pilot projects have been taken up to gain momentum.

Using the maps by Survey of India as base maps and improving upon them with satellite pictures, the Historical Atlas of South India is being prepared. The satellite imagery will be in the background and these maps will have 30 layers of information packed to suit the needs of scholars and also whet the appetite of laypersons.

The Geomatics and Applied Informatics Laboratory of the French Institute Pondichery specializes in the acquisition, management, modeling and analysis of spatial information relating to the Indian sub-continent. The contribution of the laboratory to the research project is based on expertise in the development of Geographic Information Systems and analysis of satellite remote sensing data. Recently, the laboratory was responsible for launching a new area of activity pertaining to the development of web-browser based applications for the dissemination of scientific results through CD-ROMs and the web.

The Historical Atlas of South India is dynamic in the sense that new information will



1 Screenshot of a map of the historical atlas pertaining to the period 500 AD to 900 AD. Inset is a pop-up pic of a mandapam
2 Mahendravadi temple inscription
3 Memorial stone in Eduttanur, Tiruvannamalai, circa 6th century
4 Mundakapathur rock cut caves

THE FRENCH NEXUS

The project aims to create an online historical atlas of south India through maps, photos, illustrations (ifpindia.org/histatlas)

► Project is being implemented by French Institute of Pondichery in cooperation with Tamil University's department of epigraphy and archaeology

► Ford foundation grant of ₹1cr. A pilot project was conducted for Pudukottai, based on which this project was launched in 2005

► TN, Kerala have been covered. Mapping of Andhra and Karnataka has been taken up, starting with pilot projects

► A team of 15 is implementing project. Four coordinators, 10 research scholars and computer professionals

► Seven periods in history have been taken up. Separate maps are dedicated to providing social, political, cultural and economic information of various places

► Political maps mark locations as royal centre, battlefield. Cultural map keys include menhirs, rock art, sarcophagus. Social maps locate brahmin villages, idangai/valangai (caste nomenclature)

be added as and when it is found. Dating back to five lakh years and covering the stone age up to 10,000 years ago, the atlas travels down the new stone age between 3,000 to 4,000 years ago. It covers the metal age down to 1600 AD.

Tamil University, Thanjavur, which studied extensively and intensively the Pudukkottai area, has established the contributions of Jains to the iconography of Tamils. The tank irrigation system of Pudukkottai region with inscriptions found in the sluices of the tanks have yielded a lot of information on irrigation and

land administration practices in the region. This information was one of the first to be fed into the atlas.

The atlas is arranged in a timeline of eight broad periods. It covers four major themes: political, social economical and cultural. Textual information is provided in link files.

Besides the atlas, the French Institute of Pondichery has a collection of rare photographs dating back to 1956. This assorted collection consists of over 1.2 lakh black and white photographs and 5,500 color films and slides

focusing on south Indian religious art and iconography including temple views, stone and bronze statues, paintings, architectural motifs, pre-historic cave rock paintings, palaces, jewelry and so on. The department houses some 10,000 bundles of manuscripts and photographs of manuscripts on Saivasiddhanta.

(The author is a socio-political activist and writer)

Email us your feedback at southpole.tot@timesgroup.com