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

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

By H Shankar

The department of epigraphy and archeology at the Tamil Nadu University, Thanjavur, and the Laboratory of Geomatics and Applied Informatics of the French Institute Ponchette are collaborating in developing and deploying 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 V Subbarao, coordinator of the project.

Tamil Nadu University, Thanjavur, has been a major source of the information relating to the historical atlas, says Bhuvneshwar, a professor at the university. The 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 Pondicherry, since Andhra and Karnataka received a lot of praise in the first phase. The pilot project has since been taken up with good 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 worked on. The satellite imagery will be the background and these maps will have 50 layers of information packed to suit the needs of scholars and also the objectives of other researchers.

The Geomatics and Applied Informatics Laboratory of the French Institute Pontchette specializes in the acquisition, management, modeling and analysis of spatial information relating to the Indian sub-continent. The collaboration with the laboratory is essential, as the research project is based on expertise in the development of Geographic Information Systems in small areas of satellite remote sensing data. The laboratory was responsible for funding the development of a new area of inquiry pertaining to the development of web-browser based applications for the dissemination of scientific events through CD-ROMs and the web.

The Historical Atlas of South India is dynamic in the sense that new information will be added as and when it is found. Dating back to the fifth millennium and covering the stone age to 1000 AD, the atlas provides a comprehensive overview of the region.

The four main themes are political, social, economic and cultural. The information is provided in three phases. Besides the atlas, the French Institute of Pondicherry has a collection of rare photographs depicting life in pre-1948 India. This assorted collection consists of over 20,000 black and white photographs and 3,000 color slides and prints focusing on south Indian religions and art and iconography, including temple views, statues and monuments, paintings, architectural models, pre-historic cave rock paintings, palaces, jewelry and so on. The department houses some 6,000 bundles of manuscripts and photographs of manuscripts on Tamil literature.

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