

Keeping up with the friends of heritage

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The seventh anniversary of Friends of Heritage Sites was held on Friday. (Photo | Susan R)

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CHENNAI: They say that we are judged only by what we leave behind. This seems to hold true, especially in a diverse land like India which is home to heritage sites of historical significance, and archaeological excavations, contributing to path-breaking discoveries.

While there's been a constant effort from the government's end towards restoration, it also takes active participation and enthusiasm from people to preserve the legacy.

This is precisely where Friends of Heritage Sites (FoHS) has been instrumental in creating a people-centric approach towards preserving heritage for the past six years. Run by 15 like-minded individuals, from all walks of life, FoHS identifies lesser-known locations of historic importance and undertakes awareness programmes through field visits and trails for enthusiasts.

It works with stakeholders, local communities and government organisations to showcase the traditions, and the tangible and intangible ethos of that region. On Friday, FoHS celebrated its seventh anniversary in the presence of its members and veterans in the field, at Hanu Reddy Residencies in Poes Garden.

The chief guest for the event, Arun Raj, superintending archaeologist, Trichy circle, ASI, said, "There are plenty of excavations happening across the country. Keezhadi might have been a path-breaking one but that's not the only one. It's my humble request to not dig further, and instead document the already excavated sites, re-study and approach the process scientifically. This will also save government resources. The scope for archaeology is so immense that youngsters can pursue the field confidently and contribute."

This was followed by a presentation of the FoHS annual award for the year to art historian KT Gandhirajan, for discovering Tamil Brahmi inscriptions dating back to third and second BCE at Kinnimangalam, near Madurai, in June 2020.

The historian has been exploring archaeological remains, rock art and wall murals for the past 25 years. Those in the archaeological circles draw inspiration from him for his vigour, passion and commitment to heritage.

"The pandemic couldn't stop me from venturing out for more than two months. The discovery wouldn't have been possible without a hardworking team. The findings at Kinnimangalam will help to understand ancient Tamil civilisation. Apart from inscriptions, there was other historical evidence found at the site," he said.

Expressing her gratitude, Sharmila C Ganesan, president, FoHS, said, "This is the second year since we introduced awards. Gandhirajan was the most eligible candidate for his contribution, despite the lockdown and restrictions.

FoHS has otherwise been active even during the lockdown with Zoom webinars, and we even conducted our latest field visit to Madurai in December." V Arasu, former professor at Tamil Department, Madras University, felicitated the award winner.

Docu watch

Artist and documentary filmmaker Gita Hudson's 'Tales from the Rocks!', Expedition to Karikiyur, Nilgiris, was premiered. It captured Gandhirajan's rock art explorations and the lifestyle of four tribes of Nilgiris the Todas, the Kotas, the Kurumbas and the Irulas.