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Borders, Nationalism, and Representations: Imagined

Emmanuelle C. Guenot

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## Abbreviations

<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABP</td>
<td><em>Amrita Bazar Patrika</em> (newspaper)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Archives Diplomatiques (Ministère des Affaires Etrangères - Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEF</td>
<td>Afrique Equatoriale Française</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AICC</td>
<td>All-India Congress Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AN</td>
<td>Archives Nationales (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOF</td>
<td>Afrique Occidentale Française</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOM</td>
<td>Archives de la France d’outre-mer (Aix-en-Provence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library (London)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BNF</td>
<td>Bibliothèque Nationale de France (Paris)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFEO</td>
<td>École française d’Extrême-Orient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIDES</td>
<td>Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FND</td>
<td>Front National Démocratique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IFP</td>
<td>Institut français de Pondichéry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INC</td>
<td>Indian National Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JOIF</td>
<td><em>Journal Officiel de l’Inde française</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JORF or JO</td>
<td><em>Journal Officiel (de la République française)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives (Kew – London)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAI</td>
<td>National Archives of India (New Delhi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDRM</td>
<td><em>Mouvement Démocratique de la Rénovation Malgache</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMML</td>
<td>Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (New Delhi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCF</td>
<td>Parti Communiste Français</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PCIF</td>
<td>Parti Communiste de l’Inde Française</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDM</td>
<td><em>Parti Démocratique Malgache</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSIF</td>
<td>Parti Socialiste de l’Inde Française</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTP</td>
<td>Union Territory of Pondicherry (later Union Territory of Puducherry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VOC</td>
<td><em>Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie</em> - Dutch East India Company</td>
</tr>
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INTRODUCTION

Locating French India in the historiography of decolonisation

French India, referred to more commonly as *Inde française* and officially as *Les établissements de français l’Inde* or *Les établissements français dans l’Inde*, consisted of tiny territories, remnants of former trading posts established in the seventeenth century and scattered along the coast of India. There were Chandernagor located in West Bengal, Pondichéry and Karikal on the east coast or Coromandel coast (Tamil Nadu), Yanaon in Telegu-speaking country (Andhra Pradesh), and Mahé on the Malabar or western coast (Kerala). They covered a total area of 500 square kilometres and had a population, according to the census of 1948, of 362,045.¹ In addition to these five territories, there existed eight parcels of land, called *loges*, covering an area of four square kilometres over which France also claimed sovereignty; these had a population of approximately 3,000.² After seven years of negotiations, which first saw France handing over the loges to newly independent India in October 1947 (*Accord de cession des anciennes loges françaises*), then ceding Chandernagor in 1951 (*Treaty of Cession of the Free Town of Chandernagor, 1951*), the last four territories were finally transferred to the control of the Indian government on 1 November 1954. Eighteen months later, on 28 May 1956, both governments signed the Treaty of Cession (1956) though it took until July 1962 for the French Parliament to approve the ratification of the Treaty, and for France’s 300-year colonial presence in India to come officially to an end. Treaties and the negotiations that lay behind them all attest to the complexities associated with the withdrawal of France from her tiny Indian territories.

While the choice of the word ‘transfer’ in the history of decolonisation has minimised the success of an independence movement, the term is suited to the particularities of French India for

two reasons.\(^3\) Firstly, French India did not attain independence; it was incorporated into an existing national entity that had earlier gained freedom from another European colonial power. The changeover of territorial sovereignty from France to India was the result of an agreement between two nation-states and the incorporation of French India formed part of India's nation-building process, involving the integration of the princely states of the subcontinent, former British India, and the colonial territories of Portuguese India and French India. Secondly, France's withdrawal from India occurred in several stages, and was marked by two Franco-Indian treaties as well as a number of agreements directly related to the issue of sovereignty (the handover of the loges in 1947, the holding of referenda, the termination of a Customs Union Agreement, and the *de facto* transfer) before the *de jure* transfer took place in 1962.

However, since the existence of the French Indian territories was the result of colonial rivalries on the subcontinent embodied in the two Anglo-French Treaties of 1763 and 1814 - which asserted British control of India and permanently marked French India’s singular territorial particularities – the history of French India is undeniably intertwined with that of British India. The first instance of France's forced withdrawal from India can be traced back, after a short period of territorial expansion over the Deccan, to her first defeat at the hands of the British during the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). Hence this event takes the process of France’s decolonisation of French India back to an earlier period that enables an analysis of short-, medium-, and long-term perspectives on France’s historical presence in India.\(^4\) An emphasis on Franco-British relations and their effects on France is important because when India gained independence in 1947 France had long ago been relegated to a subordinate colonial power on the subcontinent. It was from this subordinate colonial position that France, after dealing with the British authorities as the dominant colonial power in India, had to face a new kind of authority, that is the government of an


independent India that had just displayed its ability to negotiate India’s freedom from Britain, and whose foreign policy rejected the presence of any foreign possessions on what it considered its national territory.

While these points stress the geographical, historical, and political complexities of French India, a conceptual problem arises when considering the specificities of the end of France’s colonial presence in India. Decolonisation is usually viewed from the perspective of either the national narrative of India as an ex-colony that achieved statehood, or the wider story of the breakdown of imperial systems in the world, whether British or French. Both narratives involve the interaction of three forces: the colony, the mother country, and the international arena. In the case of French India, neither of these narratives tells the full story, since French India did not achieve independence but joined a former colony. Hence on the one hand, the Indian national narrative, which has focused on diplomatic relations and the achievements of the Indian National Congress, has depicted a history from ‘above’, subjugating the local history of French India and specifically muffling those voices that were opposed to its merger with the new Indian nation-state. On the other hand, the wider French colonial narrative has underemphasised the causal effect of Britain’s withdrawal on peripheral foreign territories sharing common borders, language, culture, and religions with their neighbours in British India. It has also failed to highlight that France’s departure in 1954 and belated signing of the Cession Treaty (1956) in 1962, were themselves closely intertwined with local, national, and international issues.

The most important of these issues were directly related to France’s war in Indochina (1946-1954) and Algeria (1954-1962), traumatic events that undermined any attempt at re-imposing a colonial order in the post-war era, and which precipitated France’s decolonisation of her overseas empire. Both wars impacted the Franco-Indian diplomatic relationships and the future of French India, with the dates of the de facto transfer and the de jure transfer respectively

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5 Ibid., p. 120.
taking place when France withdrew from her two major colonies. Decolonisation is usually understood as ‘a process by which colonial powers, whether voluntarily or by force, depart from their overseas possessions, and during which hard-won battles are waged between nationalists and metropolitan colonial powers’. But the particularities of French India demonstrate that decolonisation, a process involving disputes and changes affecting a wide range of participants at various levels and in different regions, most often engages with intricately entangled politics and geographies.

While the British decolonisation of India, the influence of Indian nationalism, and the trauma of partition have been extensively investigated, other important issues have not. The impact of two major events in Indian history – the Sepoy Rebellion (1857) and India’s rise to independence and its associated nation-building process – on the other two subordinate European powers in India, Portuguese India and French India, has been less discussed, if not entirely excluded from the scope of these analyses. Similarly, comparative studies of European decolonisation have left scholars uninterested in juxtaposing the speed of Britain’s withdrawal from her large Indian territory with France’s stalled fifteen-year process of disengaging from her five minuscule, defenceless, and scattered territories. By overlooking the small French Indian

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territories, authors of the general narratives have passed over the opportunity to integrate French India into the broader comparative study of the decolonisation of the subcontinent along with associated ‘local’ anti-colonial movements, citizenship and enfranchisement, and post-colonial cultures. Likewise, studies centred on French decolonisation have been dominated by the colonial wars of Indochina and Algeria, the rebellion in Madagascar, the independence of former French African colonies, and the transformation of an extensive empire into ‘confettis de l’empire’ (remnants of empire). These works have generally failed to notice that parts of French India were the first territories of the French Union to secede from the new colonial framework created under the Fourth Republic (1946-1958). They have also neglected to investigate whether these cessions were constitutional and how they differed from other procedures of decolonisation, and to link the Franco-Indian negotiations and subsequent withdrawal agreements with the conflict in Indochina. Investigations of such issues would give the whole decolonisation process a more regional implication and also turn the spotlight onto the small French Indian population living in the Twentieth Century (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Shipway, op.cit.; Martin Thomas et al., (eds.), Crises of Empire: Decolonization and Europe’s Imperial States, 1818–1975 (London: Hodder Education, 2008).

While Catherine Candy and Mrinalini Sinha have provided an analysis of the development of women’s suffrage in India, historians of French colonialism have missed the opportunity to compare such development with the late enfranchisement of French Indian women in 1946. Catherine Candy, ‘Competing transnational representations of the 1930s Indian franchise question’, and Mrinalini Sinha, ‘Suffrage and Internationalism: The enfranchisement of British and Indian women under an imperial state’, in Ian Christopher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (eds.), Women’s suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, nation, and race (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 191-207 and pp. 224-241 respectively.

Indochina. In sum, except for passing references in book chapters and articles, French India has remained noticeably absent from larger thematic and chronological studies on Anglo-French relations and French colonial policy, as well as developments under the Popular Front, and the Vichy regime. This absence is an important omission because the inter-war era was marked by the rapid rise of Indian nationalism, which, as it will be shown in this thesis, did not confine itself to the imaginary borders established as a result of Franco-British conflicts.

The rallying of French India to de Gaulle’s Free France Forces in June 1940 has nevertheless generated generous references. But the lack of in-depth analyses of the local conditions and particular characteristics of Anglo-French relations in India during the Second World War indicates that the end of French India has not been deemed worthy of inclusion in the post-war colonial narrative of Indian history. Indeed, French India has been relegated to the status of a ‘forgotten territory’, a symptom of the general amnesia that has affected French colonial memory. It is equally worth pointing out that while many biographies have been written of South Asian anti-colonial leaders such as Aurobindo Ghose, Mahatma Gandhi, Vallabhbhai Patel, Jawaharlal Nehru and Muhammad Ali Jinah, and significant French and British politicians and leaders such as Pierre Mendès France, de Gaulle, Marius Moutet and Winston Churchill, no

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leading French Indian freedom fighter or other active participant in the Franco-Indian dispute has been the subject of a similar project. Numerous autobiographies of French Indian ‘nationalists’ have been written, but historians have been reluctant to offer a detailed assessment of the role that self-declared French Indian freedom fighters played during the period.\textsuperscript{14}

When the history of ‘Greater France’ is considered, French India is discussed along with the French West Indies, Guyane, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Senegal, and Ile Bourbon (Reunion Island), all ‘vieilles colonies’ (old colonies) acquired during the first French colonial empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.\textsuperscript{15} The history of early French India, of the Compagnie des Indes, and of the great colonial figures who attempted to establish French influence in India from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries has been explored at length, primarily by French historians and to a lesser extent by Indian historians.\textsuperscript{16} A selective bibliography on the relations between France and India compiled by the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (French National Library), its contribution to the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the de facto transfer of the French Indian territories in 2004, lists an impressive number of manuscripts and references on French India and its ‘bâtisseurs d’empire’, including Joseph-François Dupleix, the Comte de Lally, and François Martin.\textsuperscript{17} This wealth of interest in the great period of French territorial expansion in India in the early modern period stands in stark contrast to historians’ general lack of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Bibliothèque Nationale de France, \textit{Des relations entre la France et l’Inde: (XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles), Bibliographie sélective < http://www.bnf.fr/documents/biblio_France-Inde.rtf>}, viewed 12 April 2012.
\end{itemize}
interest in the post-1947 era.\textsuperscript{18} The writing of French Indian history has indeed favoured the promotion of narrative associated with the former ephemeral French Indian empire over that of France’s demise in the face of determined Indian nationalist leaders.

Journalists, public officials, politicians, civil servants, and those who lived during the negotiations leading up to the \textit{de facto} transfer were the first to produce memoirs and first-hand accounts of their experiences, keen to leave their legacy in a post-colonial world unwilling to pay great attention to the last days of French India. Most of these voices were critical of the French authorities for holding onto their foothold in India, and for their mishandling of what seemed an inevitable outcome. Their accounts focused primarily on the Franco-Indian diplomatic negotiations, evoking with great nostalgia the abandonment of French India, and expressing anxiety over the disappearance of French culture in the former Indian territories.\textsuperscript{19} But both French Indian and Indian nationalist accounts have made certain their struggle was incorporated into the Indian nationalist narrative.\textsuperscript{20} In 1955, Alain Coret produced the first French academic article on post-1954 French India, in which he discussed the constitutionality of the cession of French India and condemned India for seeking sovereignty over the French territories. A contrary view was expressed by Balveer Arora, an Indian student undertaking doctoral research in political science at the \textit{Université de Paris-Sorbonne} in the 1960s. Arora’s study emphasised the anachronism of France’s colonial presence in India and pointed out that Nehru, as head of the


Indian government, muted the local French Indian voices in favour of the national cause.\textsuperscript{21}

Access to French archives in the 1980s, after the statutory thirty-year ban had expired, produced a number of specialised studies on French India. The major academic contribution came from Jacques Weber, whose five-volume doctoral thesis focusing on the nineteenth century filled a gap in scholarship on the period between the Old Regime and the First World War. Weber argued that the introduction of republican ideals contributed to the formation of the first anti-French movement. Following Arora, Patrick Pitoëff re-opened the debate concerning events leading up to the cession of French India, while Hughes Jean de Dianoux, Jean-Charles Jauffret, Georgette David, and Michel Pousse concentrated their efforts on issues of territorial sovereignty, Anglo-French and Indo-French relations, economic development, population and citizenship.\textsuperscript{22}

Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch and Marie-France Latronche meanwhile focused on the interest that Gandhi and the Indian nationalist movement generated in France between 1920 and 1960.\textsuperscript{23}

Considering the period after the \textit{de jure} transfer, the American scholar William Miles has written a stimulating analysis on the social conditions of the small population of French nationals of ethnic Tamil origin (Franco-Tamils) in post-French India, while the Indian historians K.J.S. Chatrath and


Ajit Neogy explored Franco-Indian relations, and the Indian National Trust published a manuscript on the legacy of the French in India.24

Other Indian scholars have also made important contributions. In the early 1980s, a new historical approach that came to be known as the School of Subaltern Studies was initiated by a group of Indian historians who set out to challenge existing scholarship on the grand narratives of decolonisation and promote a perspective of the bottom layers of society. Under their influence, numerous Indian scholars have helped to integrate the participation of non-elites in the fight against colonialism into the history.25 Their use of local primary sources and interviews, unavailable to most European historians who are not familiar with the Indian languages (including Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam in the case of the French Indian territories), has allowed for a fuller picture of the last days of French India to emerge. In addition, this methodology has challenged the centrality of the colonial repositories where ‘indigenes figured chiefly as the anonymous object of colonial administration’.26 While some historians of French India have focused on Pondichéry, J.B.P More has ventured further out to the periphery of French India to investigate Mahe (Mahé) and Yanam (Yanaon). More demonstrated that measures put into effect by the colonial administration, especially the introduction of land ownership for tax


purposes, had adverse effects on traditional social organisation. Also worth mentioning is the recent work of the British academic Jane Chapman, whose research on printed communication has uncovered the voice of French Indian textile workers and, more importantly, of women, who had until then been ignored. Chapman’s research, although not conducted under the aegis of the Subaltern Studies group, has certainly added weight to that investigative work.

The fiftieth anniversary of the end of French India prompted a new surge of French and Indian authors writing the history of French India. These scholars moved away from the world of national politics and the commonly accepted binary of coloniser/colonised, and pursued new areas of enquiry on France’s legacy in India. Their work has focused on topics such as the commonality of the French language, education, the urban landscape of French India, the administrative and judiciary systems, and colonial administrators. From this work emerged a


focus on inter-colonial links, with studies on French Indians in Indochina, French Indian migration after the fall of Saigon (1975), South Indian communities in other parts of the former French empire, and créole food. These analyses emphasise the interconnectedness of the colonial enterprise and the varying impacts of the decolonisation processes on non-indigenous populations.  

It is the work of a group of British academics in culture, language, and media studies, however, that has provided the most exciting new framework for understanding French India. These scholars have engaged with Edward Said's seminal work on Orientalism (1978), which demonstrated that the West's depictions of the Orient are wholly inadequate; rather than an accurate account of the Orient, these depictions for Said were the means by which the West imposed its power on the people it colonised. Kate Marsh and Ian Magedra, for example, have demonstrated that representations of the Orient are also defined in relation to 'other' Western powers. Their analysis of French-language representations of India has highlighted that Francophone Indian narratives developed in the context of opposition to Britain. They offer a triangular model that consists of the colonised (India), the subordinate coloniser (France), and the dominant coloniser (Britain), a model that goes beyond the theoretical framework of coloniser and colonised that has inspired early post-colonial discussion.

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triangular model illuminates the historical dimensions of Franco-British relations in India, and especially the fact that France's colonial discourse was partly defined by its own colonial failures. These failures triggered the creation of a colonial nostalgia that can be found throughout French colonial literature, exhibitions, and the narratives of French Indian history. Representations of India and French India in French colonial discussions portrayed the French Indian colonial empire as far more important than it really was. As will be shown in the present thesis, France stubbornly held onto this glorified view, thereby undermining any possibility of a swift and graceful resolution to the question of her presence in India after the British departure.

Such a triangular configuration also challenges the tendency in Said's work, as well as in the scholarship it inspired, to see the West as an 'undifferentiated, omnipotent entity, imposing its totalising designs on the rest of the world without check or interruption'. In the case of French India, the presence of two rival colonial powers ensured a constant stream of opposition from the colonial rival as much as from the local population, which in turn used the particularities of the two adjacent colonial powers to evade reprisal from the other. Tools of power and knowledge such as political institutions, administrative systems, maps, censuses, and research institutes facilitated the control and acquisition of the colonial space, but within this space, as will be demonstrated,


claims and counterclaims were negotiated. However, this triangular model and its use of representations nevertheless has its limitations, which the authors themselves acknowledge. It is Eurocentric, and it is also unable to accommodate an analysis of Indo-Franco-Indian relations after India’s independence. But from this triangular model, I suggest in this thesis, a new conceptual framework emerges that retains that model’s main features but also allows for the examination of national and anti-colonial tensions specific to French India.

The new analytical framework triangulates India (the dominant national entity that by means of its anti-colonial struggle rose to become the successor to the former ‘dominant’ colonial authority, Britain), France (the ‘subordinate’ coloniser), and French India (the ‘subordinate’ entity that tackled both the coloniser and the Indian nationalists). This new triangular model accommodates the anti-colonial campaign against France as well as competing claims for territorial sovereignty by both France and India. It also takes into consideration an established methodology that distinguishes between ‘region’ and ‘nation’, two distinct realities of the subcontinent. Indeed, this model is able to clarify the variance between Chandernagor, a French-Indian Bengali territory whose residents in 1949 voted almost unanimously in favour of merging with India, and the southern French Indian territories, where greater tensions emerged and demands for alternative solutions to merging with either France or India were canvassed. I posit that the new model encompasses competing forms of nationalism based on historical, institutional, geographical, cultural, social, and political factors, all of which ultimately impacted on


the new state or ‘Union Territory of Pondicherry’ as it was later officially known. Even after French India become a new ‘Indian’ territory, peculiar colonial characteristics remained, and counter-nationalist forces continued to challenge New Delhi’s nationalist grip on power well after the Franco-Indian de jure transfer of sovereignty in 1962. Hence the conditions of the transfer of rule in French India and the subsequent creation of the Union Territory of Pondicherry are the outcomes of specific regional, nationalist, and colonial tensions that were played out during the formation of the Indian nation-state. These, I will argue, emanated from porous colonial borders, conflicting territorial claims over French India, and the use of contradictory representations of what was French India designed to meet particular local and national agendas.36

This thesis also contributes to the study of other anomalous annexations, former colonial territories such as West Timor (1949), Irian Jaya (1961), Goa (1961), Zanzibar (1964), Hong Kong (1997), and Macau (1999) which were merged into neighbouring independent states either forcefully or after a course of diplomatic negotiations.37 Here we need to differentiate between


37 West Timor was formerly known as Dutch Timor, Irian Jaya as Dutch New Guinea, Goa was Portuguese India, Zanzibar and Hong Kong were under the control of the British, and Macau under that of the Portuguese.
former colonised countries such as Indonesia (West Timor and Irian Jaya), India (Goa), and Tanzania (Zanzibar), which claimed territorial sovereignty, and the territories of Hong Kong and Macau which were retroceded to a long-existing political entity, China, but whose transfer required intense negotiations. An analysis of the merger of French India also contrasts with the case of France’s other ‘vieilles colonies’ of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and La Réunion whose status were changed from colony to département in 1946, administratively incorporating these former colonial territories fully into France though local independent movements are still contesting France’s historical claims in those outposts.

This thesis is organised into three sections. Part One, ‘Defining French India’, consists of two chapters that offer an account of early French India. Chapter 1 provides general historical background material, while Chapter 2 examines a number of geographical and territorial particularities of French India and through the analysis of culturally focused material that include maps, official reports, travelogues, and the Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris (1931), it argues that these various modes of representation were used to emphasise French colonial grandeur and heighten France’s colonising mission. I will demonstrate how this mythical depiction of French India was designed to construe French colonialism as preferable to that of its nemesis, Britain, and argue that this notion hindered any potential French withdrawal from India. Part Two, ‘Competing Claims of Sovereignty’, which includes Chapters 3, 4, and 5, considers in turn how France, India, and French Indian residents contested territorial legitimacy for nationalist purposes. Post-war French colonial policy, which seemed to make any cession of territory inconceivable, faced harsh opposition from Indian nationalists, who had just won independence from Britain and

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then successfully merged former British India with the princely states to form a new nation-state. Meanwhile, local anti-colonial and anti-national movements in French India rejected the idea of merger with either India or France. Finally Part Three, ‘Towards the Union Territory of Pondicherry’, focuses on dual sovereignty, citizenship, and French cultural legacy, all of which were issues embodied in the Treaty of Cession. Chapters 6 and 7 assess the extent of French cultural influence in the territories and explore how the various pre-transfer tensions crystallised the structures of post-French India into a new territory of the Republic of India, in which French cultural legacy had difficulty sustaining itself in the context of the changes generated by the withdrawal.

A note on nomenclature

When referring to French India until 1954, the French spelling of Pondichéry, Yanaon, Mahé, Karikal, and Chandernagor is used. When writing from an Indian context the following English spelling is adopted: Pondicherry, Yanam, Mahe, Karaikal, and Chandernagar, except in quotations.
PART ONE

DEFINING FRENCH INDIA
Chapter 1

French India: a ‘vieille colonie’

As Frenchmen, our rights have been more than once written with the blood that has been shed on the plains of the Carnatic, and it is on the remains of our fathers and brothers, who fell while defending the glory and honour of France, that the fortifications of Pondichéry have been erected. (Cahiers des doléances des Citoyens de Pondichéry à l’Assemblée nationale, March 1790)¹

Most references to colonial India invoke British India, but other European powers – Portugal, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands – had also acquired footholds. Only Portugal and France that had set up their territories in 1498 and 1674 respectively managed to retain their small Indian possessions after India had gained independence from Britain in August 1947. The French Indian territories were scattered along the coast line of India with Chandernagor located in West Bengal, Pondichéry and Karikal on the Coromandel coast (Tamil Nadu), Yanaon in Telegu-speaking country (Andhra Pradesh), and Mahé on the Malabar or western Coast (Kerala). They were five exotic names learnt by generations of French schoolchildren educated before and in the decade following the Second World War.² The diplomatic negotiations between Paris and New Delhi over the future of French India dragged out until the changeover took place at the customs office in Pondichéry, the chef-lieu (administrative centre) of the French enclaves, on 1 November 1954. The event was attended by the Indian Secretary of Foreign Affairs, R.K.

² Raymond Dronne, Senator and later deputy, mentioned during parliamentary discussions that ‘tous les Français ont appris sur les bancs d’école primaire les noms sonores des cinq comptoirs qui nous restaient en souvenir de l’immense empire de Dupleix,’ quoted in Marsh, Fictions of 1947, op.cit., p. 33.
Nehru, and a crowd of 30,000 people. On that day, the Indian Union flag was raised in Pondichéry to mark the *de facto* transfer of the French territories to the Union of India, an event which announced the end of three hundred years of French colonial presence in India and the success of India in gaining sovereignty over these tiny French enclaves. However, it would actually take until July 1962 for the *de jure* transfer to occur, and until August 1962 for the last legal instruments to be exchanged, thus legally marking the end of French colonial presence in India.

However, the question of how France managed to remain on the subcontinent alongside the more imposing British presence requires analysis and explanation. This chapter provides an historical background to France’s presence in India, which evolved from a series of trading posts, first established by a commercial company, to becoming an old regime colony, and shows later how the introduction of French republican institutions, embodied in the policy of assimilation, clashed with a highly traditional French Indian society. The chapter also explores the conditions imposed on France by the British so as to reduce it to a subordinate colonial presence in India, and how Franco-British rivalries impacted on the development of French India, reducing French territories to negligible strips of land.

**Origins of French India**

The Portuguese inaugurated the European-Asian maritime route to India, via the Cape of Good Hope, in 1498. Their initial mission was to defeat the Muslims who controlled the Mediterranean by creating alliances with Christians from the East, and to attack the Muslim world from the rear by naval operations in the newly-accessible Indian Ocean. While their plans to reconquer the Holy Land came to no avail, they succeeded in developing a lucrative spice trade

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3 AFP spécial Outre-Mer ‘*Les cérémonies du transfert*’, 1 Novembre 1954, AOM, AGEFOM_896_2627.
4 Ibid.
between the Moluccas (Indonesia), India, and Europe. The establishment of trading outposts along the African, Indian, and South-East Asian coastlines facilitated the development of a Euro-Indian and intra-Asian maritime network. The Portuguese dominated the spice trade for nearly a century, until religious wars between Catholics and Protestants in Europe, saw the rise of the United Provinces or Dutch Republic (1579), and the foundation of Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) or Dutch East India Company in 1602. Two years earlier England set up the English East India Company (1600), and both trading companies were motivated by the success of the Portuguese and the profits they had accumulated. The French were late comers in the Euro-Asian trade and their presence in India was the result of traditional commercial ventures combined with a policy of national grandeur initiated by the Louis XIV’s Minister of Finance, Jean-Baptiste Colbert. Inspired by the commercial achievements of the Dutch and English trading companies, Colbert created the Compagnie des Indes Orientales (the French East India Company) in 1664, at a time when Indian textiles and silks were increasingly dominating the Euro-Asian trade. The company failed in 1723, and was succeeded by the Compagnie des Indes Perpétuelles, which lasted until 1769. Both these companies had been set up under state control, but from 1769 on the East Indian trade was open to private individuals. Although the Danes and Swedes also joined the competition by forming their own trading companies, compared to the Dutch, English, and French, they were never important players in India. Meanwhile, Portugal had lost its earlier competitive advantages to the Dutch during the

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6 Markovits, op. cit., pp. 136-9; Om Prakash, European Commercial Enterprise in Pre-Colonial India (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. xvi-xxv.
While Europeans had maintained a distinct superiority to Asians in the field of technological and navigational knowledge until the Industrial Revolution, this advantage was offset by the great variety of Asian – and in particular Indian – manufactured goods produced by a cheaper labour force that had developed sophisticated skills in handicraft. European companies were ready to travel great distances to purchase these cheaper Indian goods, and since European products had little market demand in India, trading companies required large amounts of silver to acquire these goods. The success of this Euro-Asian trade could only occur with the concurrent arrival of the Spanish in the Americas (1492) and their exploitation of American silver mines. Although it originally arrived in Spain, the silver found its way to Amsterdam, which consequently became the European capital of the bullion trade that helped finance the Euro-Asian trade.  

All of the European trading companies established outposts along the coastline of India, and these outposts eventually led to more permanent settlements. The foundation of Pondichéry as a commercial outpost is credited to François Martin, a Compagnie administrator, who landed in the port in January 1674 and undertook the transformation of this fishing village into a trading entrepôt. Chandernagor, located thirty-five kilometres north of Calcutta, was settled after a small tract of land along the Hooghly River was ceded by the emperor Aurangzeb to the representatives of the Compagnie in 1688. Mahé was established in 1720 when Captain Mahé de la Bourdonnais purchased a tract of land; Karikal was likewise acquired in 1739. Finally, although the French had been trading in Yanaon since 1731, their land rights were not recognised until 1750 (Map.1).  

8 Prakash, European Commercial Enterprise, p. xvi.  
9 Ibid., pp. 84-5.  
10 Besson, op.cit., pp. 86, 106.  

Trégouët, Philippe, ‘La présence française en Inde’, op.cit., p.35; More, The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam, op.cit., pp. 9-16; Das, op.cit., p.30; for a historical overview of ancient Pondichéry see C. Premavalli, Education in French Pondicherry: 1674-1954 (Pondicherry: Pondicherry University, Department of History, 2001, unpublished Phd thesis), pp.101-6; French administration in India - the Conseil Supérieur des Indes - was first administered from the loge of Surat established in 1666 but was then moved to Pondichéry in 1701, it took fifty years for Pondichéry to acquire its status as an ‘permanent’ territory, Premavalli, op.cit., pp. 106-7, 111; The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, op.cit., p. 113.
France’s main aspirations in India were limited to a policy of mercantilism that benefited the métropole, and the Compagnie’s priority remained to pay dividends to its shareholders. Mercantilism was based on the establishment and support of a national industry through the promotion of commerce. It most particularly aimed at encouraging the importation of raw materials and the exportation of manufactured goods. As such, the Compagnie forbade territorial expansion, but it turned a blind eye to administrators who did pursue expansion as long as territorial gains favoured rather than impaired trade. French products for trade included wine, fabrics, flat iron, lead, and tin, while Indian goods carried back to France included cotton fabrics, especially muslins and silk clothes, opium, saltpeter (used for manufacturing ammunition), pepper, tea, cowry shells (used as money in Western Africa during the slave trade), alum, aloes, cardamom, rhubarb, lacquer, and woods used in cotton dyeing.

While the seventeenth century had been marked by French and Dutch rivalry over Indian trade, the eighteenth century saw increasing tensions between France and Britain for supremacy in India and access to her products. Joseph-François Dupleix (1697-1764), the Compagnie’s governor from 1742 to 1754, understood that trade success was closely linked with territorial expansion. The existing method of transporting gold and silver to buy Indian goods was risky because of pirates, shipwrecks, and the high cost of sea voyages. Dupleix therefore suggested to the Compagnie’s directors that territorial conquests followed by the setting up of an efficient local administration would greatly facilitate the raising of tax, thus enabling easier access to local currencies with which to purchase Indian goods. In 1749 he would establish greater French influence over the Carnatic and the Deccan through alliances with local rulers, thereby

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14 Philippe Haudrère, ‘Le commerce’, op. cit., p. 30. Trade with India required large amounts of capital for the construction of large ships. An average return trip took up to two years, so ships were sent yearly to ensure a yearly
undermining British expansion. But his many setbacks and constant demands for further troops alarmed the *Compagnie*, which ordered his return in 1754, thus bringing to an end his dream of establishing French supremacy in India.15

In any case, the landscape soon changed significantly, as the Seven Years' War (1756-1763) – which continued the earlier War of the Austrian Succession (1740-48) and set Austria, Britain, France, Prussia, and Russia against one another – marked a turning point in Franco-British relations in India. This particular war can be seen as the first global conflict because it extended its arena from Europe to the colonial world, from North America and the West Indies to the Indian Ocean. It mobilised a large amount of capital and men for several years, and, more importantly, transformed what had been warfare based on dynastic houses or religious conflicts into battles between emerging nation-states.16 Britain’s success against the local ruler and his French allies at the 1757 battle of Plassey in Bengal signalled the growing political assertion of Britain in the region where most of the European trade traditionally took place, and ensured her future economic domination over her competitors.17 Moreover, the Treaty of Paris in 1763 (Article 11) ended France’s first colonial empire, which shrank from a ten-million-square-kilometre domain to a number of small islands and outposts: Saint-Pierre et Miquelon off the coast of Newfoundland, the West Indian islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique, Guyane (French Guiana), Saint-Domingue, St Lucia, Tobago, the island of Gorée off the western coast of Africa, Île Bourbon (La Réunion), and Île de France (Mauritius). The Treaty also retroceded the French Indian territories, which it referred to as *comptoirs* or *établissement* (outposts, territories, revival of goods, Philippe Haudrère, ‘La Compagnie des Indes’, op.cit., p. 12; Das, op.cit., p. 30.
enclaves) as they were prior to the conflict. The prospect of a return to France’s previous, albeit ephemeral, influential position in India faded into the past as France’s military position was further weakened by conflicts with Britain in North America, which led to the Independence of thirteen British colonies (1776-1783), and in the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars in Europe (1793-1815).

France’s dreams of colonial glory were thus left to fester. The 1763 defeat was felt as a loss of prestige and a great humiliation. It triggered a myth of the French Indian empire based on Dupleix’s former conquests, and the dream of revenge whereby France would reconquer the territories lost to the British and recover her former influence in India. The myth became part of the construction of the French national identity formed in opposition to the British, and helped shape sentiments and ideas about the colonial past in India that persisted until the twentieth century. In addition, revenge provided a potent means of uniting a nation. As part of this myth, Dupleix was given the role of ‘surrogate victim’, a colonial hero with whom the public could identify, and who died penniless and dishonoured by the monarchy.

Despite the Seven Years’ War, however, French trade in India continued to flourish. The volume of sales in the years 1765-6 and 1770-1 (the last year of the Company’s accounts) were brought to a level similar to the peak years of 1735-6 and 1744-5, establishing French trade in

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18 Université de Perpignan, Digithèque des matériaux juridiques et politiques, Traité de paix de Paris (1763), <http://mjp.univ-perp.fr/traites/1763paris.htm>, viewed 24 March 2011; by the death of Louis XIV in 1715 the colonial domain consisted of an approximate area of ten million square kilometres comprising territories in North and South America, the West Indies, Africa and India, the overseas territories included in North America: Saint-Laurent basin and the region of the Great Lakes; in the West Indies: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Grenade, the Grenadines, Saint-Barthélémy, La Tortue, Saint-Domingue, Tabago, Sainte-Lucie; in South America: Cayenne island, Guyana; in Africa: Saint-Louis, the coastline of Sierra Leone, the outposts of Guinée; in Madagascar: Fort-Dauphin and the island of Sainte-Marie. Bourbon Island; in India: Surat, Pondicherry, Mazulipatam; the outpost of Trinquebar in Ceylon, in Bengal: Chandernagor and Ougly, Kazumbazar, Cabripatam, Besson, op.cit., p. 123.
19 Following the Treaty of Versailles in 1783, which concluded the conflict in North America and the independence of the thirteen colonies, Louis XVI did not attempt to have the Treaty of Paris (1763) revised; such a revision could have improved the condition of the French Indian territories, Le Tréguilly, ‘La présence française …’, op. cit., p. 48; Das, op. cit., p. 12.
21 Gilda, op.cit., p. 140.
India in the eighteenth century as the third most important after British and Dutch trade. However, because of the high costs of sea voyages, the proceeds of these sales did not generate profits.\(^{23}\) Between the setting up of the trading posts and the end of the Napoleonic era (the Congress of Vienna of 1815),\(^{24}\) the French Indian outposts were occupied by France’s rivals on many occasions: by the Dutch in 1678, and again between 1693 and 1699, and by the British in 1763, 1783, 1793, and 1802.\(^{25}\) The fate of France in India was finally sealed with the Treaty of Paris (1814), which retroceded the territories to France but forbad the use of military power by the French.\(^{26}\) From then on, the remnants of the first French colonial empire – Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyana, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Senegal, Île Bourbon, and the French Indian territories – were referred as ‘les vieilles colonies’ to distinguish them from the new colonial possessions that were acquired from the 1830s onwards.

The retrocession of the territories demonstrated how generous and conciliatory the British were after the end of France’s first Empire (1799-1814) under the leadership of Napoleon (1769-1821), and showed their support for the return of the French monarchy.\(^{27}\) Strategically, however, the Treaty’s prohibition on building fortifications and keeping a military force put an end to any possible French expansion in India and, as such, prevented territorial consolidation and compromised any economic prosperity that France might have sought in India. In addition, the British viewed the French trading posts as strategically useless and of minor economic

\(^{22}\) Mock, op.cit., pp. 162-3.
\(^{24}\) The Congress of Vienna (1814 and 1815) which sealed the end of the Napoleonic era (1799-1814) was attended by Britain, Russia, Austria and Prussia. The Congress aimed at re-establishing the old order. In the case of France, the monarchy was restored under Louis XVIII, frontiers on the European continent were redrawn and the fate of many colonies was decided, Tim Chapman, The Congress of Vienna: Origins, processes and results, (London, Routledge, 1998), pp. 1, 33.
\(^{25}\) These dates indicate Treaties between France and Holland (1678), and France and Britain (1763, 1783, 1802), while 1793 marked conflict between Britain and French revolutionary forces in India.
\(^{27}\) South East Asia Department, Foreign Office, 4 March 1949, Confidential paper, AN, FO371/76086: relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
importance. As such, France was set to become a subordinate colonial power on the subcontinent.

While the period until 1815 was fuelled with Anglo-French rivalries extended to the colonial arena, and in particular to India, the period between the Revolution of 1789 and the turn of the twentieth century saw a series of internal political turmoils and changes in French regime which greatly affected French India. The period re-enacted the political tensions of the Revolution and the Napoleonic era, and continued to pit monarchists, republicans, and Bonapartists against one another, leading to unstable governments and popular uprisings. The struggle for power was reflected by the family affiliation of the men who were called to head the new governments. However, despite the succession of governments, institutional changes that had been introduced by the Revolution, and more importantly by Napoleon, were not eliminated. Institutions that remained from this period included the *Code Civil* and law courts, which provided a new legal framework, the metric system, the secondary and higher education, and local government administration.

Napoleon’s demise marked the return of members of the Bourbon royal family, and of efforts to introduce a constitutional monarchy that negotiated republican and monarchical ideals. The allied forces of Austria, Prussia, Russia, and Britain fully supported the claim of Louis XVIII, brother of Louis XVI, to the throne. He reigned from 1814 to 1824 and was succeeded by his younger brother, Charles X, whose attempt to reinforce royal power caused an uprising in Paris, forcing his abdication in July 1830.28 Louis-Philippe, a descendant of Louis XIV, ruled during the period referred as the July Monarchy, until 1848 when, again, attempts at implementing a successful parliamentary system failed and another revolution, dominated by the growing working-class of Paris, gave way to the Second Republic (1848-1851). The short-lived Second

Republic was replaced by the Second Empire in December 1851 when a coup d'état, organised by Louis-Napoleon, nephew of Napoleon, led to him becoming Emperor and reigning until the French were defeated by Prussian armies in 1871. A Parisian revolution referred as the ‘Commune' then gave way to the proclamation of the Third Republic (1871-1940), which established a parliamentary regime based on universal male suffrage. The Third Republic marked the end of this series of monarchist and imperial regimes, and the end also of earlier failed attempts at founding a government that reflected the universal principles introduced by the Revolution. All of these political changes in Paris, starting with the Bourbon Restoration, would leave their mark on French India where concepts of modernity, and of inclusion and exclusion were introduced.29

**An Old Regime colony**

After twenty years of conflict, French India lay in ruins in 1815; Britain had asserted her influence over India and was determined to eliminate any possibility of France recovering her former glory. Britain’s supremacy was confirmed when the Danes, whose trade had been reduced by the 1780s, eventually sold their outposts to the British in 1845.30 The Dutch and the Swedish companies had wound up their activities in India by the early nineteenth century.31 The Portuguese, who had inaugurated Euro-Asian maritime trade, had by the seventeenth century lost their naval and commercial advantages to the Dutch, British, and French, but like France, Portugal retained only its former territories of Diu, Daman, and Goa (Map 1).32

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The 1789 French Revolution first introduced the idea of the social and political assimilation of the natives into the Constitution of the First Republic (1792-1799), which made the colonies an integral part of the new Republic and therefore subject to the same laws as the mother country. However, the concept proved short-lived, and the Bourbon Restoration marked a return to an old-regime style of colonial rule based on administration by two men strictly appointed by Paris: a civil Governor who oversaw internal political affairs – the legislative and judicial administration – and external affairs, and an intendant général who managed the police force, finances, and commercial and maritime issues.\textsuperscript{33} The King’s new governor of French India, Count Dupuy, took possession of the territories in 1816, two years after their retrocession, and found them devastated by twenty years of conflict with the British.\textsuperscript{34}

During the following decade, French India struggled with corruption and budget deficits; one of the most important economic impacts of this period was the loss of revenue from the sale of salt and opium. Under pressure from the British who wanted to maintain their monopoly in the Carnatic, the French agreed to sell the trading rights in these two products to the British in 1815 in exchange for a yearly indemnity of 400,000 rupees or 1,080,000 francs – often referred as ‘the million’. At the time, the French were pleased with the outcome but while the ‘million’ was appropriately listed as revenue in the budget of French India, the Ministry of the Navy and the Colonies from 1827 diverted this income to finance other colonies deemed more important, such as Senegal, Guyane, Madagascar, and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon. French India was thereby deprived of revenue that had been earmarked for its coffers.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{33} Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde}, op.cit., p. 50; Sudesh provides in Chapter 1 a detailed discussion on the administrative organisation of the colony in the eighteenth century until the retrocession of 1814, but in essence the administration was authoritarian and natives had little participatory role in the management of the territories, \textit{op.cit.}

\textsuperscript{34} French Indian governors represented the French monarch and an old style of administration where justice was for sale, personal interests and monetary gains often preceded those of the colony, Weber, \textit{Les établissements français en Inde} …,op.cit., p. 231.

\textsuperscript{35} Subventions to Senegal and Guyane amounted to 500,000 francs each, grants to Madagascar and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, 60,000 francs and 70,000 francs respectively, and 70,000 francs were held as contingency funds,
French India was never compensated for this diversion of funds which significantly undermined the economic development of the Indian territories. The decision to divert the ‘million’ points to a significant exploitation of the territories in favour of other colonies, and the lack of compensation showed that the French government paid little attention to the hardship that the diversion caused. Furthermore, French India could not compensate for this loss through an increase in trade because the régime de l’exclusif, based on the idea that the colonies were subordinated to the métropole, considered goods entering French ports from the colonies to be foreign, and therefore subjected to high import taxes. The system also mandated that all French colonial merchandise be sold in France, while the colonies could only purchase French goods. Hence, goods exported out of French India could not be sold anywhere but in France, where like other colonial goods they were expensive and had a limited market.

The economic situation was further impaired when in 1817 the British imposed an economic blockade by introducing a double tax of 16% on the value of all products entering and exiting their territory. Britain’s decision was intended to weaken French India’s economic development, and perhaps to induce the French to either abandon or sell their territories, as the Dutch, Swedes, and Danes would eventually do. Dupuy responded by declaring French Indian ports tax-free in the hope that this measure would boost trade, but Pondichéry and Karikal nevertheless stagnated. In contrast to the earlier period of prosperity that the Compagnie had experienced, maritime trade was now limited to the immediate region and seldom reached the

37 Although during the Revolution, the system was abolished it was reintroduced under the Restoration, see Weber, Les établissements, op.cit., p. 376.
Atlantic.\textsuperscript{40} Yanaon, Mahé, and Chandernagor were particularly badly affected, and they never recovered from the high tariffs and river transportation restrictions imposed by the British economic blockade.\textsuperscript{41}

Despite the diversion of the ‘million’ and setbacks caused by the British authorities, numerous developments in this early 1800s period indicate France’s strong intention to remain rather than withdraw and abandon the territories, as the British might have hoped. In 1826 the first French state school, the \textit{Collège royal}, was opened in Pondichéry, the administrative centre of the region. The school was reserved for the education of the children of Europeans and French Indians of European descent. The following year a public library opened to promote French culture and education.\textsuperscript{42} Under the aegis of the government, a new boarding school for girls, established by the Soeurs de Saint Joseph de Cluny (Sisters of Saint Joseph of Cluny), provided education free of charge to a growing number of ‘topaz’ girls (the word defined persons of mixed descent, also sometimes referred as \textit{créoles}).\textsuperscript{43} The textile industry was promoted with the setting up of the first factory in 1828.\textsuperscript{44} Administrative buildings were erected, and numerous general embellishments of Pondichéry were also undertaken.\textsuperscript{45} Clearly, France was determined to stay.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[40] Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 82-3
\item[41] Chandernagor had 7,000 textile artisans in the middle of the 18th century, there were only 2,606 in 1823, 400 in 1839 and 50 a few years later. The population of Chandernagor went down from 45,258 in 1825 to 31,000 in 1850, or a decrease of 31.5% over twenty five years. Yanaon’s population went from 14,000 to 6,000 between 1815 and 1852, Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 86-7.
\item[42] Ibid., p. 57; education had been provided since the late seventeenth century by Jesuit priests who were later joined by Catholics nuns in the running of schools, A. Suresh, \textit{Politics and Social Conflicts in French India: 1870-1939}, (Pondicherry University: Department of History, 2010, unpublished PhD thesis), pp. 47-8; the public library was initially opened to Europeans only though natives and \textit{créoles} were only allowed by authorisation. The prohibition was removed in 1837 as it was realised that access to the library was one of the fundamental means for natives to acquire French knowledge, Premavalli, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 155.
\item[43] In 1844 the Sisters of Saint Joseph de Cluny began a school in Karaikal for young French girls and another for boys. Three more schools were opened in Karaikal for the Europeans, the caste Hindus and for the Harijans (untouchables) in 1851, Emiliana Emprayil and Benjamin Kanjiramelkunnel, ‘Education of Girls in French India’ in K.S. Matthew (ed.), \textit{French in India and Indian Nationalism: 1700-1963} (New Delhi: BR Publishing Corporation, 1999), p. 331.
\item[44] Weber, \textit{Les établissements}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 396-411;
\item[45] Governor Vicomte Desbassayns de Richemont (1826-1828) was responsible for the realisation of these projects, Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 58.
\end{footnotes}
The July Monarchy of Louis-Philippe following the 1830 Revolution, saw the introduction of liberal reforms intended to give more autonomy to the colonies. *Conseils coloniaux*, elected by suffrage based on property qualification, and replacing the former *conseils généraux*, were set up in Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, and the former Île Bourbon, which had been renamed Île de la Réunion in 1848. But French India continued to be ruled for another decade by a special regime based on the King’s ordinances. Hence, French India essentially remained an old-regime colony ruled arbitrarily by the Governor, the King’s representative, until an *ordonnance organique* of 23 July 1840 granted French India her first local representation.\(^{46}\)

The 1840 *ordonnance* conferred on the Governor the power to execute French laws, to implement decrees of the King and (later decrees of the President of the French Republic), and to apply *arrêtés* (a ministerial or administrative decision) and regulations of the French Ministries. The Governor ruled from Pondichéry and was assisted by personnel who included administrators who were in charge of the secondary territories of Chandernagor, Mahé, Yanaon, and Karikal, the *Commissaire de la marine*, who was the chief of the administrative service, the *Procureur-Général*, responsible for the management of the judiciary, and an *Inspecteur colonial* who supervised public services.\(^{47}\) A *Conseil d’administration*, headed by the Governor and three high-ranking civil servants, assisted with the administration of the territories. An *Assemblée des Notables* (local assemblies) consisting of nominated French and native members was set up to provide support in the management of local affairs. The governor selected a handful of notables to form the *conseil général*, a consultative body that participated in the administration and whose purpose was to advise on the colonial budget and express the wishes of the population. However, since the Governor chose the members of the *conseil général*, the organisation had little power to change an administration that remained highly centralised in the hands of the

\(^{46}\) Ibid., pp. 64-6.

\(^{47}\) Suresh, *op.cit.*, pp. 20-1.
Governor. Nonetheless, for the first time, natives were formally invited to participate in the
governance of the territories.\textsuperscript{48}

The under-representation of local French Indians in the local assemblies of 1840
triggered the first opposition movement, organised by wealthy local landowners sitting as
members. Indeed, the minority of Europeans was vastly over-represented, with 39 members for a
population of 975. The community of European descendants had two members for a population
of 1,514, while the local population, which numbered 165,240 people, was granted only four
members. The numbers pointed to a severe imbalance in favour of a small minority of the French
and their descendants. However, the local notables declared that, since French Indians
contributed in larger numbers to the payment of local taxes, they should be given a larger
proportion of representatives.\textsuperscript{49} Although their claim went unanswered, it nonetheless
emphasised the increasing tensions between a group of wealthy and powerful natives and the
colonial administration that had imposed on them its legal and administrative systems. These
notables, politicised by their first-hand experience of French institutions, formed the first
embryonic group of dissidents that challenged the rule of a minority of French colonisers and
rejected the Christian values that they epitomised.\textsuperscript{50} These first dissidents were few in number,
however, and represented a group of privileged land-owners with little connection to the much
larger population of poor, uneducated, and landless natives. It would take until the 1880s, when
a new, expansive wave of republican institutions clashed with the structure of French Indian
society, for socio-political tensions to become more acute.

\textsuperscript{49} Most of the local budget came from property taxes with up to 48% of the harvest being used to pay taxes. There
were in 1825 about 837 French Indian property owners, 73 of whom could be considered ‘wealthy’; 262 were
‘comfortable’ while 502 were poor, Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit., pp. 65-6, 73-4, 88-9. It is
believed Piramassamy organised a clandestine ‘anti-French’ party which was responsible for the Karikal riot of 1845,
\textsuperscript{50} Weber, Les établissements, op.cit., p. 224; Suresh, op.cit., p. 22.
French Indian society and parliamentary representation

Since 1714, when Governor Dulivier’s opposition to the celebration of a Hindu festival causes the temporary exodus of a large number of the Hindu population of Pondichéry, French policy towards the indigenous population was one of non-interference with local customs. This policy translated into a legal regime of exception, whereby local Indians were judged according to their customary laws, or Mamool (tradition), while Europeans were subjected to French law. French judges were assisted by a consultative committee on Indian jurisprudence consisting of members of different castes, with their role limited to ensuring sentences were given in conformity with customary law. In cases of litigation between castes, the Governor could determine the sentence. Hence, French Indian society continued to be ruled overwhelmingly by customary law, and any attempt at introducing reforms to improve social conditions was met with stern opposition.\footnote{Ramasamy, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 184; Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 92-9.} In 1845, the removal of a Hindu funeral pyre to the outskirts of town during an outbreak of cholera triggered riots in Karikal, confirming that religious matters were better left untouched. With both the police force and the company of sepoys in Karikal reduced because of budget restrictions, French authorities were forced to request military assistance from the British to put an end to the riots.\footnote{One hundred and fourteen British soldiers assisted French troops to put an end to the riot. Weber, \textit{Les...}} France’s position in her own territories seemed vulnerable, and if she wanted to remain in India, she had to compromise with the local population. While the policy of non-interference with local customs guaranteed a high level of social peace, it also helped maintain the status quo.

French Indian society consisted mainly of Hindus, Muslims, and Catholics. Although accurate figures are difficult to obtain due to the lack of civil records (until the introduction of civil registration in the 1880s), the majority of the population of Pondichéry in the 1830s was Hindu (87.6%), followed by Catholics (10.4%), and a small groups of Muslims (1.9%).
Karikal, Hindus (77.9%) still formed the largest community but in a lesser proportion than in Pondichéry, and the percentage of Muslims (12.1%) and Catholics (9.8%) was greater. There were no Catholics in either Chandernagor (with 87.7% of the population Hindu and 12.3% Muslim) or Mahé (with 73.4% Hindu and 26.6% Muslim). No population estimates are available for Yanaon during the period.\(^\text{53}\)

Between 1880 and 1926, the relative size of the Hindu population increased across all of French India except in Mahé, while the size of the Muslim population decreased, except in Yanaon where it remained stable; the Catholic population decreased across all of the French Indian territories during that period (Table 1). The overall population of French India, however, was far from negligible when compared with that of France’s other colonial territories. Even after the establishment of French colonial power in Algeria in the 1830s and the expansion of French colonial influence over French Polynesia (1842), Mayotte (1843), and New Caledonia (1853), the population of French India still amounted to nearly 220,000 inhabitants, the second most populous French colony after Algeria.\(^\text{54}\)

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century, however, French India lost this population ranking when France acquired a vast range of new territories in Oceania, Africa, and Asia.\(^\text{55}\)

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\(^{54}\) It is important to note that the totals were most probably higher due to Indians refusing to comply with civil registration even when it was introduced under the Third Republic, Premavalli, op.cit., p. 205.

\(^{55}\) New colonies included Indochina (Vietnam 1860s-1880s, Cambodia 1862, Laos 1893); Tunisia (1881); Afrique Occidentale Française (1854-98), consisting of present-day Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso (formerly Upper Volta), Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Benin (formerly Dahomey); Afrique Equatoriale Française (1876-1912), comprising present-day Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, and Chad; Wallis and Futuna (1887); Comoros (1886); Madagascar (1895-96); Djibouti (1888); the Terres Australes and Antarctiques Françaises (late 1880s); the condominium of the New Hebrides (1906, Vanuatu); Morocco (1912), and the mandated territories of Cameroon, Togo, Lebanon and Syria (1919). Between 1843 and 1901, France also acquired concessions and extraterritorial rights in China, including Shanghai, Tien-Tsin (Tianjin), Hankéou (Hankou), Canton (Guangzhou), and a ninety-nine year lease in Quang-Tchéou-Wan (Guangzhouwan). Jacques Weber, ‘Un siècle de présence française en Chine (1843-1943)’ in Jacques Weber (ed.), *La France en Chine, 1843-1943* (Nantes: Presses académiques de l’Ouest, 1997), pp. 9-33; Léon Silbermann, *Souvenirs de campagne par le Soldat Silbermann* (Paris: Plon, 1910), pp. 145-75.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondichéry</td>
<td>128,562</td>
<td>158,146</td>
<td>2,434</td>
<td>19,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikal</td>
<td>63,973</td>
<td>42,654</td>
<td>14,825</td>
<td>13,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandernagor</td>
<td>17,469</td>
<td>23,264</td>
<td>4,031</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanaon</td>
<td>4,259</td>
<td>4,754</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahé</td>
<td>5,315</td>
<td>7,302</td>
<td>1,617</td>
<td>340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>219,578</td>
<td>236,120</td>
<td>23,080</td>
<td>33,591</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most French Indians were Hindus, and the Hindu socio-economic system is divided along four major *Varna* or caste groups: Brahmins (priests and religious teachers), *Kṣatriya* (warriors), *Sūdras* (labourers and artisans), and *Vaiśyas* (merchants, farmers). Only Brahmins and *Sūdras* could be found in French India. While Brahmins, *Kṣatriya*, and *Vaiśyas* were regarded as ‘clean’, *Sūdras* were considered impure and their function was to serve the upper three castes. All groups were subdivided in a number of *jāti* (communities). Alongside the four *Varna* existed another group formed by pariahs or outcastes, who by their activities were

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56 It is necessary to add five Parsis and 318 Protestants of whom 161 lived in Karikal, 91 in Pondichéry, 63 in Chandernagor and 3 in Yanaon. Weber, *Les établissements*, op.cit., p. 2728.
considered impure.  

Christians formed the second most important religious group in French India. The first signs of Catholicism in India were attributed to a community of Christian Syrians in the fifth century in Kerala, while conversions in the modern era were associated with European trading and the work of Jesuit missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Proselytising, a tool for cultural assimilation, was sanctioned by the French monarch, and formed part of a programme to civilise the natives through religion and education. Although only 1.5% of the South Indian population was Catholic in the nineteenth century, the percentage in Pondichéry and Karikal, as well as in Portuguese Goa, ranged between 10% and 15%, resulting in Pondichéry being referred as the ‘Rome of the Coromandel coast’. Most Catholics came from the Sūdra caste, and especially from the Vellaja sub-group, regarded as the aristocratic segment of the Sūdra and often engaged in liberal professions such as law and trade. Converted Christians, referred to in French as Choutres, were more likely to be educated, the result of the work of missionaries who set up the first schools to teach Christian doctrine to natives. Ultimately, Christians often found employment in the French public service as translators and clerks, occupying nine out of ten public jobs in the late nineteenth century.

The Muslim population was the least numerous group. The Muslims had arrived in India with the invasions of the eleventh to the sixteenth centuries, as well as through Arab trading with the west coast of India in the eighth and ninth centuries. Most conversions to Islam in the south of India were the result of inter-marriages and forced conversions during the reigns of Aurangzeb (1618-1707) and Tipu Sultan (1750-1799). In addition, some lower-caste Hindus had joined the

57 Brahmans in French India were divided in two main groups, the Shivaites (Shiva devotees) and the Vaishnavites (Vishnu devotees), while the Vellaja group formed the aristocracy of the Sūdra caste, it was followed by numerous sub-groups. Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde*, op.cit., pp. 36-8.
58 Missionaries first arrived in Pondicherry in 1675. Suresh, *op.cit.*, p. 58
59 Ibid., pp. 52, 62, 100.
Muslim faith to improve their socio-economic conditions.\textsuperscript{60}

Overall, the composition and proportions of the three communities in Pondichéry, the largest of the French territories, varied only slightly between 1830 and 1948, as shown in Table 2. The Hindu population remained the most important, accounting for 85 to 90\% of the population, with the Catholics ranging from 8 to 12\%, and finally the Muslims from 1.9 to 3\%.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hindu Number</th>
<th>Hindu %</th>
<th>Catholic Number</th>
<th>Catholic %</th>
<th>Muslim Number</th>
<th>Muslim %</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1830</td>
<td>66,045</td>
<td>87.6</td>
<td>7,837</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>1,441</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>75,323</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>11,016</td>
<td>87.7</td>
<td>11,658</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>3,716</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>125,390</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>128,562</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>19,043</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>2,434</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>150,039</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>158,146</td>
<td>90.3</td>
<td>12,425</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>4,499</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>175,070</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>194,997</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>21,137</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6,815</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>222,949</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The population was allowed elected representation under the Second Republic (1848-1851) when the revolutionary principle of equality was revived and extended to the colonies. The idea of assimilating the colonies had first been expressed by Boissy d’Anglas, a deputy of the Third Estate in 1789 and later became deputy at the National Assembly. He declared: ‘Let the colonies be a part of our indivisible Republic; let them be controlled and ruled by the same laws and the same government; let their deputies called to this precinct [Paris] be mingled with those of the entire people’.\textsuperscript{61} Although he was primarily referring to the island colonies of the West Indies,\textsuperscript{62} the spirit of his call for assimilation extended to French India. All French Indians gained


\textsuperscript{62} Assemblée Nationale, Histoire et patrimoine, *Les Départements d’outre-mer, Les bouleversements de la
the status of French citizens by a decree of 28 March 1848, and male citizens over the age of 25 years or those who had resided in the territory for a period of at least five years, without distinction of caste, religion, and colour, were allowed to elect, by secret ballot, a deputy to sit at the French parliament in Paris. Since most French Indians were unable to speak or write French, and religious restrictions meant that Hindus could not travel outside of India, the candidate was likely to be French or of French descent, or a créole (mixed French-Indian ancestry).

Introducing the republican idea of equality embodied in the right to vote, however, only exacerbated existing social divides, and resulted in the opening of caste wars in French India. The concept of equality caused great concern amongst French Indians, as it ultimately challenged the crux of French Indian society, based as it was on hierarchy and the segregation of castes. Even Catholic churches had partitions to separate high-caste from low-caste converts. It was inconceivable that the vote of a lower caste person be valued the same as the vote of a Brahmin. Incidents broke out in July 1848 when low-castes believed that the introduction of the suffrage would allow them to wear slippers like the Vellaja, their superiors. When a few of them appeared in public wearing slippers, the violent retaliation of the Vellaja resulted in the burning down of the low-caste quarters and the murder of several residents.

The electoral process also encountered problems. Despite registration being mandatory, French Indians did not register births and marriages, and penalties for non-compliance were


65 Weber, ‘Chanemougan’, op.cit., p. 292; attempts at fusioning castes was defeated by the traditionalists whose protests succeeded in maintaining the status quo, Suresh, op.cit., p. 91.
rarely enforced due to the French administration’s unwillingness to interfere with local religious customs, hence there were no accurate civil records to aid in the organisation of elections.\textsuperscript{66}

Jean-Baptiste Lecour, a merchant from Nantes, was elected deputy of French India on 9 March 1849, but his seat was abolished only six days later when the number of seats in the French Assembly was decreased from 900 to 700. French authorities argued at the time that French Indians were not ready to exercise political privileges because their ancient religious practices would clash with the spirit of democracy. Indeed, since most voters were illiterate, they had been allowed to have their ballot paper marked in advance with the help of a person who could write on their behalf.\textsuperscript{67} Such a practice opened the door to numerous irregularities, fraud, and above all to the pressure that a high-caste candidate could place on low-caste voters. Violence and intimidation were not uncommon, and as a result French India earned the reputation of being the land ‘of electoral frauds’, ‘of electoral violence’ and the ‘country of elections without voters’.\textsuperscript{68}

Confronted by so many difficulties, this first attempt at elected representation in French India in 1848 raised the question of whether cultural assimilation, defined as mastering the French language and culture, should not precede political assimilation. Besides, Paris’ decision to withdraw the parliamentary seat showed the capital was unwilling to continue with the idea of electoral representation in her French Indian colony, despite the renewed spirit of republican idealism. Thus although in theory a parliamentary seat was first decided under the First Republic,

\textsuperscript{66} A civil registry was established in 1842, but by 1854 only 684 records had been made. Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit.}, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., pp. 103-5. Suresh states that the high percentage results for the other candidates also point to a number of irregularities, Joseph Hayes secured 100% of the votes in Mahé, Rohan had 99% in Chandernagor, Arockiasamy 95.1\% in Karaikal, and Lecour 97.5\% in Pondichéry. Lecour had an alliance with high-caste notables, who sent large numbers of illiterate and dutiful servants to vote \textit{en masse} for Lecour, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 90, 92.

\textsuperscript{68} Soudandiram (\textit{Liberté}) 20 May 1938, 18 February 1939. Irregularities went from inclusion of British Indian names to the electoral lists. There were also problems with uneven distribution of electoral cards, unreliable civil registration resulting in dead people and absentees voting, and polling officers under the influence of the political masters. Food and liquor were freely distributed on the eve of elections, voters were paid to vote for a particular candidate, and muscle power was used to intimidate voters. There were three categories of polling stations where intimidation occurred: stations that did not open, stations where no one voted, and open stations guarded by police but where actual fraud took place in the form of ‘stuffed ballot boxes, false names, and false records’. Parliamentarian and journalists’ protests and petitions against electoral malpractices came to no avail, Suresh, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 147-50, 155,
and then a deputy was voted under the Second Republic, no deputy actually sat in the French Parliament during these periods.

The Second Empire (1851-1870) offered some respite to these problems of suffrage by returning to an authoritarian style of colonial management. A Sénatus-Consulate ordinance of May 1854 stipulated that the colonies were to be ruled by decrees of the Emperor Louis Napoleon III, and no deputy was elected under his reign. But with the establishment of the Third Republic, assimilation once again dominated colonial policy. The principle of assimilation was based on the belief that French India, like the other vieilles colonies, had been associated with the métropole since the seventeenth century, a history which testified to French Indians' level of ‘francisation’, or adoption of the French way of life. It is unclear, however, what exactly constituted this ‘French way of life’ or how it was defined. The Third Republic also inaugurated a new era of relations between France and her colonies, although elected representation changed from region to region. A decree of 1 February 1871 called for the election of a deputy by universal male suffrage, that is by men over the age of twenty-one years of age born in the territories. If proof of birth was unavailable, evidence of residency for a minimum of five years was to be sufficient. A constitutional law of 24 February 1875 also called for the election of a senator. While no legislation existed that detailed the specific duties of a senator or deputy who represented the constituency of French India, the position bestowed prestige and gave direct access to the Minister, the only authority who could recall an uncooperative governor. The deputy could also use his position to lobby the government on behalf of the French Indian population and influence the implementation of programs and projects applying to the colony.

Candidates standing for representation had to be able to speak and write French, and in

the case of parliamentarian representation, they also had to be able to travel overseas. Unsurprisingly, eight out of the nine candidates in the 1871 elections came from the small minority of French residents and those of French descent; only one candidate was a native.\textsuperscript{72} The two elected representatives also became members of the Conseil Supérieur des Colonies, based in Paris and consisting of elected representatives of the colonies, nominated members, and administrators. The role of the Conseil Supérieur was to provide advice to the Minister of Colonies on legal projects, decrees, and other colonial questions, but the role was limited by the fact that the Conseil had no legislative or budgetary powers.\textsuperscript{73} The election of representatives did not provoke much reaction amongst the French Indian population.\textsuperscript{74} Civil records were no better than they had been for the 1849 legislative election, with the result that ineligible men such as minors and British subjects were allowed to participate in the voting process, while many young men who were eligible to vote fled to British India in the belief that by voting they would automatically be enrolled in the army.\textsuperscript{75} The result, which was overwhelmingly in favour of Alexandre Panon-Desbassayns, comte de Richemont, raised strong suspicions that electoral fraud had again been committed.\textsuperscript{76}

The establishment of republican institutions continued with a decree of 13 June 1872, which created a Conseil colonial and five Conseils locaux, one per comptoir. The Conseil colonial consisted of five members from the colonial service and seven elected members from the Conseils locaux, who represented the three religious communities: Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. Each conseil local was to advise the Minister of the Colonies on matters relating to French India. The Conseils locaux were responsible for deciding the budget of the colony as well

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{72} Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit., pp. 216-21; of the eight ‘white’ candidates, six were créoles, Suresh, op.cit., pp. 93-5. 
\textsuperscript{75} Premavalli, op.cit., p. 204 ; Weber, ‘La politique républicaine d’assimilation dans les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit., unpanigated.}
as electing members to the *Conseil colonial*. Europeans and their descendants, who numbered approximately 2,854 out of a total French Indian population of about 240,000, elected half the members of each *Conseil local*, while the indigenous population elected the other half. However the number of members elected to the *Conseil local* differed across French India: eight members in Pondichéry and Karikal, six in Chandernagor, and four in Mahé and Yanaon, a system that favoured the more populous territories. Later that year, a decree replaced the *Conseil colonial* with the *Conseil général*, and increased the number of members to twenty-five, fourteen of whom were Europeans and eleven of whom were natives. Once again, the system favored the minority of French and their descendants. The extension of the administrative metropolitan system continued with the introduction of *communes* or municipalities (1880) and their associated *conseils locaux*.

Despite these reforms, the local population’s ability to change the status quo through their representatives was limited because colonial administrators sat on and dominated both the *Conseil général* and the *Conseil Supérieur*. Moreover both the *Conseil général* and *Conseils locaux* had only an advisory rather than an executive role. The plenary powers of the Governor, who had full decision making on the running of the territories and was only accountable to the Minister of Colonies, minimised the extent to which the self-government that the new institutions suggested could be implemented. Finally, the establishment of two electoral colleges, or the two-list system – one composed of Europeans and their descendants, the other of indigenous

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79 Coret, ‘La Cession de l’Inde française’, op.cit., pp. 590-1. In 1880, five municipalities were established in French India: Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, Yanaon, Chandernagor. Pondichéry and Karikal had several municipal councils, four and three respectively, with one in each of the other territories of Mahé, Yanaon and Chandernagor. In 1907, municipal councils were increased to seventeen Pondichery (8), Karikal (6), and one for each of the other territories, Suresh, op.cit., pp. 72-4, 122.
80 Suresh, op.cit., p. 84.
people – favoured the minority of whites who thereby continued to retain their hegemonic advantage.

Alain Coret apologetically states that this system facilitated a ‘certain equilibrium’ in the pluralist and Indian society.  
81 But in reality the system continued a policy of division that was dictated, firstly, by the hierarchy and segregation of Indian society, and secondly by a colonial society which favoured the French and those of European descent over the natives. The maintenance of French authority and the dual electorate system limited the assimilation suggested by this re-introduction of suffrage. J.B.P. More has likened the two-list system to a form of apartheid because voters were differentiated on the basis of race.  
82 Thus, while the new form of representation did mark an evolution in the history of colonial relations between the métropole and French India, the setting up of the two electoral colleges would contribute to a deepening of social divisions in French Indian society, exemplified by increasing political violence and electoral irregularities.

**French Indian politics and renonçants**

Two types of legal status existed in French India, one based on French common law and applied to French citizens, the other based on local usages and customs – Mamool law – and applied to the indigenous population. The introduction of such a dual legal system had been understood since the early eighteenth century as necessary if France wanted to gain the loyalty of the population, as any interference with local customs was strongly objected to by indigenous people.  
83 The right to renounce one’s personal status – that is, for a French Indian to be tried in

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court under French law rather than Mamool law – was recognised by the French authorities but rarely applied, and most indigenous French Indians were tried according to customary laws.

The restoration of suffrage in 1871 – first introduced into French India in 1848 – shook French Indian society, and marked the end of the policy of non-interference. It also started a debate involving those opposed to assimilation, on both the French and French Indian sides. The question was: did French Indians qualify for the right to vote? And why should those who had chosen to retain their customary status and who did not speak French be allowed to participate in French institutions and be given the right to make decisions within a system that could not even judge them in legal courts? The assimilation debate was intensified by a group of French educated Sūdra, headed by Ponnoutamby Pillai – also referred as Ponnoutamby - a barrister and a high-caste Vellaja who adhered to the French assimilation principles and actively campaigned for a greater participation by the wider French Indian population. Ponnoutamby’s followers broke with tradition by wearing Western style shoes and adhered to the Code Civil by registering their marriages at the town hall. They rejected French Indian social hierarchy and discrimination in favour of what was regarded as a more progressive French way of life, and they perceived the introduction of suffrage as a means to ‘franciser’ the population. Their view was sternly opposed by a coalition of conservative Hindus and Muslims headed by Chanenougam Vellayuda Modeliar – also referred as Nadou or Chanenou gam – the leader of the Sūdra and a strong partisan of preserving traditional Indian social organisation.

In order to establish the eligibility of voters, civil records, as set out by the Code Civil, had to be improved. Since the imposition of the Code Civil over Mamool law could have triggered fierce reaction from religious communities, a compromise was reached. A decree of 24 April

85 Ibid., pp. 227-230.
1880 adopted the *Code Civil*, which stated that births, marriages, and deaths had to be registered at the town hall with local mayors acting as civil registrars. However, modifications to the decree were made to accommodate religious requirements, and ‘agents’ – usually representatives of the religious communities – acting on behalf of the mayor were allowed to issue marriage and death certificates. This compromise allowed the necessary religious ceremonies to take place.\(^{87}\)

The introduction of parliamentary and municipal representation generated increasing tensions within French Indian society. The minority of French residents, and those of French descent, believed that by giving greater power to the majority of French Indians, republican institutions would diminish their own hegemony. French Indians themselves were divided into those in favour of assimilation (headed by Ponnoutamby), and the conservatives who supported the status quo (headed by Chanenougam). While the assimilationists believed that the representational system would eliminate religious discrimination and ignorance, the conservative faction exploited the electoral process to thwart the assimilationists.\(^{88}\) Rather than rejecting the electoral system, the traditionalists realised that they would greatly benefit from taking it over. Thus, while they did not oppose the inclusion of eligible male Hindu voters on electoral lists, they ensured the maintenance of social segregation by organising a *pandal* – structure or tent – outside the polling booths to keep low-caste Hindu voters separate from those who were high-caste. As part of their political maneuvering, the traditionalists maintained their influence over low-caste and illiterate Hindus by using intimidating tactics, such as inciting fear of an imminent

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\(^{87}\) Civil marriages had never been enforced in French India because of the impossibility for women to appear in public and consequently to go the town hall for the ceremony. Hindu laws forbade young couples from leaving the house before one had removed the *kappu*, the cord that was tied on their forearm on the eve of the marriage. Another two local practices could not fit within the legislative requirement set by the *Code Civil*. The Code sanctioned the age of marriage to be 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys, so could not recognise the child marriages which was common practice amongst high-castes, as well as co-sanguinary marriage, between an uncle and a niece, which the Church and the *Code Civil* condemned, Suresh, *op.cit.*, pp. 113-4, 122-3; Weber, *Les établissements, op.cit.*, pp. 1465-70.

tax increase or a French attack on traditions, to obtain greater support at the polls and achieve political power. It was said that peasants voted ‘like a herd of sheep’ on the order of caste leaders. The divisions between pro- and anti-French positions in French Indian party politics evident during this period would continue until 1954.

The conservatives were successful at the municipal elections of 30 May 1880. Ponnoutamby retaliated by obtaining a ‘renunciation of personal status’ decree of 21 September 1881, which distinguished two categories of French Indian indigenous voters: on the one hand, those who had officially renounced their personal status and who could be included in the first electoral list reserved for whites and those of French descent, and, on the other, those who continued to be subject to the customary law. The process of renunciation, which added numbers to the first list of electors, involved a signed declaration by the applicant, the adoption of a French-style name to be entered into the civil registry, and the publication of the declaration in the Journal Officiel de l’Inde française (JOIF). It is worth noting that the application to renounce did not specifically require that the applicant speak French, and, as William Miles notes, the decree did not discriminate against caste, religion, or gender. An examination of issues of the JOIF reveals that women changed their legal status as part of a husband’s application rather than on their own; since women were not allowed to vote, there was little incentive for them to submit to the process as an independent applicant. Finally, the act of renunciation did not guarantee French citizenship for the applicant and his descendants, a point that would be hotly debated when the French withdrew in 1954.

By renouncing Mamool law and embracing the French way of life, a renonçant met the ideal promoted by the Third Republic’s assimilationist policy. The essence of the policy was

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89 Suresh, op.cit., p. 123, 184
90 Miles, op.cit., p. 40.
91 Journal Officiel de l’Inde française.
summarised in the June 1885 edition of the French Indian tri-monthly, *Le Trait d’union: journal des colonies françaises, organe de l’amitié franco-indienne*, created with the aim of promoting overseas colonies, including France’s older colonies such as French India, to the French public. The paper strongly supported the expansion of republican institutions such as suffrage and education; one of its aims was to erase despised Hindu customs, a task the paper acknowledged would be difficult since the French Indian territories were virtually swamped by the neighbouring population of 200 million – mainly Hindu – inhabitants.\(^9^2\) The unnamed author of one article wrote that, ‘with time this personal initiative [renunciation] will convince the mass of Hindus in our colony of the advantages of European colonisation and that Hindu fanaticism will be replaced by the education and the wise government of the French Republic’.\(^9^3\) Not only did the comment emphasise the cultural superiority of the secular French Republic, but, above all, it dismissed the potency of Indian religions and culture. The author believed that a handful of renonçants would provide a model that could be replicated by other French Indians, and that the two key principles of assimilation – education and the extension of republican institutions – would eventually weaken, if not replace, local religious beliefs.

When Ponnoutamby ‘renounced’, he took the name of Laporte (the door), a name associated with his refusal as a Vellaja to wear traditional slippers for which he was sanctioned by the governor. The case was eventually overturned by the Minister of Colonies on the ground that France respected local customs and would not penalise those who rejected them.\(^9^4\) Hence Laporte literally ‘opened the door’ for Vellajas to embrace European values without legal recrimination. Although the number of renonçants increased, they nonetheless remained minimal – the number only increased from 1,537 to 3,000 between 1884 and 1898 – and consisted

\(^9^2\) *Trait d’Union*, June, July, August, 1885.

\(^9^3\) *Trait d’Union*, June 1885.

primarily of men who lived in urban communes. Moreover, the French Indian authorities refused to include renonçants on the first list of voters, as this would have reduced the majority of the ‘white’ French and their descendants. Indeed, the number of renonçants greatly outnumbered the 572 European electors, while the number of electors on the second, ‘indigenous’ list stood at 65,000. A decision of the Cour de Cassation on 7 November 1882 forced the French Indian government to allow renonçants to be included on the first list, but this was challenged by Chanemougam, who declared that, since French Indians had forefathers who had fought for France during the Franco-British wars, all French Indians should be included on the first list alongside Frenchmen and their descendants. Fighting alongside the French was evidence of French Indians’ allegiance to France, which in the eyes of Chanemougam weighed far more than a mere declaration of renunciation. Since France was unwilling to take assimilation as far as handing over all electoral power to French Indians, a decree of 24 February 1884 established three electoral lists. The first one consisted of Europeans and their descendants, whose number had slightly decreased to 570; the second list was for renonçants who numbered 3,000 and the third was made up of the majority of indigenous voters, whose number stood at 68,000.

The next fifteen years saw the emergence of two political alliances. The Hindu-Muslim traditionalists defended the ‘Indian idea’, campaigned to safeguard the status quo, and used party politics to minimise the effect of the extension of republican institutions. The French-créoles-renonçants front worked for the ‘French idea’, a platform that supported the economic improvement of the lower castes and compulsory primary education across French Indian

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95 Suresh, op.cit., p. 200.
97 Ibid.
99 Ibid., p. 244; Suresh, op.cit., p. 140-2
society. The period continued to be dominated by intimidation, fraud at the polls, and fighting on election days, with constant political manipulation by Hindu-Muslim traditionalists to weaken the electoral power of the ‘French’ alliance and, more importantly, to eliminate the renonçants. By supporting the candidature of the Paris-based Louis Henrique-Duluc, who was elected deputy of French India in 1898, Chanemougam succeeded in obtaining a new electoral reform that eventually removed the second list consisting of renonçants.101

A decree of 10 September 1899 returned to a two-list system, with the conditions for a renonçant to be enrolled on the first list becoming much stricter. The first list now included Europeans, their descendants, and those who had renounced for a minimum of fifteen years and who possessed a degree from a university or who had worked for a minimum of five years as a civil servant; they also had to demonstrate fluency in French. The result of these tough new conditions was that only seventy renonçants were included on the first list, compared to 3,000 before the new decree. Those who did not fulfill the new conditions were relegated to the second list along with indigenous voters.102 The structure of this electoral system hardly changed until the Second World War, and thus does not need to be reviewed in detail.

While renunciation was perceived in official sources as a testimony to the success of French civilisation, the decision to become a renonçant was also based on socio-economic concerns. The status facilitated access to positions usually reserved to French citizens, which meant employment opportunities in the French colonial administration and the military, especially in Indochina. Indeed, the colonisation of Cochinchina in the late 1850s, followed by the establishment of a colonial administration in 1867, relied on French Indian labour that came mainly from Pondichéry and Karikal. Soldiers and workers who specialised in food supplies were

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102 These assimilated were partly from the Vellaja cast, while most of the renonçants ‘from below’ or form the low-castes were now included in the natives list. Suresh, op.cit., p. 200, 202; Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de
used in the first stages of colonisation; French-educated assistants were then needed to work in the newly established colonial administration. Being a renonçant thus opened the door to a career in the colonial service in Indochina and, to a lesser degree, in the private sector, especially in the large commercial houses. However, it is worth mentioning that this specialised migration from French India to Indochina remained limited. Although it is difficult to establish their exact numbers, at its apogee in 1936 the French Indian community in Indochina had only around 2,000 members and was outnumbered by 4,000 British Indians who were involved in the commercial, agricultural, and financial sectors, mainly as shopkeepers, labourers in the rice fields, and money lenders. Though small in number, French Indians in Indochina nonetheless formed a new socio-economic group in French colonial society.

Moreover, most renonçants were former out-of-caste Hindus who had converted to Christianity or Islam in order to break away from the constraints of Hindu society. Changing status seems to have been an easier step for them to make than for high-caste Hindus, whose peers frowned upon the change of status as it challenged local customs and the social organisation. The fact that orthodox Hindus avoided the renunciation movement strongly indicates their disapproval. Indeed, the movement never attained a significant proportion of adherents. There were no renonçants in Yanaon and Chandernagor, and only four in Mahé, partly because there were few out-castes and Indian Christians in these enclaves. Most of the renonçants lived in Pondichéry, which had the highest percentage of Christians, where employment opportunities in the administration could be found, and above all where secondary education was available.

But even in Pondichéry, after the initial peak in the 1880s, the number of renonçants who

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104 Vidy, op.cit., pp. 1-16; Simon, op.cit., Table 3, pp. 40, 130; Chanda, op.cit., p. 32.
105 Although renunciation entailed giving up local customs, in practice it was very negligible, Suresh, op.cit., p. 130
registered over the next sixty years remained negligible. The most probable cause of this decline was that the process of renunciation involved a change in social and cultural ties to traditions to which Hindus in Pondichéry might have been unwilling to embrace. In addition, the death of Laporte, the leader of the assimilationists, in 1886 and the return to the system of two electoral lists contributed to the stagnation of the movement. While renunciation acted as a social equaliser and conferred on renonçants the same rights and privileges as the European French, their special status did not prevent discrimination or contempt from both the French and Indian communities. French colonial services in Indochina excluded French Indians from advancement to high-level positions, while Indians criticised the renonçants for seeking special favour from the French and benefiting from privileged positions in the colonial government. By changing status, renonçants were seen to support the colonial system and France’s institutions, thus forming a distinct colonial group. Brahmins frowned upon the changes that republican institutions were imposing, and hence condemned a process that elevated the social conditions of low- and out-castes. Above all, French colonisation facilitated the growth of such a socio-economic group because it made access to education and economic opportunities possible.

_Economy and education_

It was under the Second Empire that French India reached its apogee. The regime of the ‘exclusif’ was finally removed in 1860 at the same time that the British eased their policy towards the French and alleviated the economic blockade, causing an increase in French India’s commercial activity. The 16% tax on import and export goods entering or leaving British India

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108 The only noticeable increase occurred between 1940 and 1960 when India became independent and negotiations over the future of French India took place. Suresh, op.cit., figure 3.1, p. 128.
111 President “union démocratique et sociale” Pondichéry to Prime Minister of India, 14 February 1949, ANI,
was reduced to 10% on imported goods, while exported goods attracted a 3 to 4% tax. Lower
tax promoted the export of French Indian goods to France and her colonies, and the volume of
trade increased four-fold, mainly from Pondichéry and Karikal; trade from Chandernagor, Mahé,
and Yanaon contributed only minimally. The main exported goods were sesame (46.6%), indigo
(24.2%), cotton materials (15%), groundnuts (7.3%), coffee (2.4%), and coconut oil (2%).

Napoleon III’s vision of imperial aggrandisement and his infrastructure projects in France
was extended to French India. The French emperor, inspired by the British model, believed that
economic modernisation was essential for France to remain a great power, and his regime. He
provided a stable political environment in which economic expansion was possible. He
encouraged the development of the transport network system with the extension of railways
(1851-1869) and the building of the Suez Canal (1859-1869), and the renewal of Paris, which
included the extension of the capital’s boundaries, the erection of new boulevards and public
buildings, and the implementation of a water, sewage, and drainage supply system. Sectors such
as banking, metallurgy and engineering, coal, and branches of the textile industry were all
promoted under his leadership. In the colonies, he abandoned old mercantilist principles in
favour of free-trade policies, putting an end to a system that had subordinated the interest of the
colonies to that of the mother country.

Governor Verninac de Saint-Maur (1852-1857) followed the new economic impetus by
lowering the property tax in order to incite small landholders to cultivate fallow land. His decision
contributed to an increase in production and the purchase of more goods on which indirect taxes
were levied. The overall result was an increase in tax revenue for the local budget, which had

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113 Ibid., p. 188.
Guenot, ‘Napoleon III and France’s Colonial Expansion: National Grandeur, Territorial Conquests, and Modernity
(1852-1870), in Robert Aldrich and Cindy McCreery, Crown and Colonies: European Monarchies and Overseas

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experienced difficulties in previous decades. However, rather than supporting the governor’s initiative, and while all colonies received financial assistance from the métropole, Paris reduced its aid to French India, thus continuing to signal France’s lack of interest in her old colony. Nonetheless, local revenues assisted with a vast programme of irrigation improvement, which, although Pondichéry never met all of its needs and continued to import rice from British India and Karikal, increased agricultural production in both Pondichéry and Karikal. The production of coconut trees, from which coconut oil was made for export, also increased in Pondichéry and particularly in Mahé.

In addition, the road network was extended across Karikal and Pondichéry, a pier was constructed in Pondichéry in 1865 to cope with a sandbar that had made access difficult, and a quay was built in Karikal. Nevertheless, ships still experienced difficulties anchoring at Pondichéry due to the prevalence of strong winds that regularly swept across the area, and the lack of improvement and high cost of transferring goods from ships onto smaller boats would later result in the loss of business to new port facilities in Madras, Culladore, and Negapatam. While in 1890 88% of groundnuts produced in South India was exported via Pondichéry (against 12% in Madras), for instance, the percentage in 1904-1909 would drop to 45% and continued to decrease thereafter.

Most sailing ships took between 100 and 120 days to reach India from Europe, via the Cape of Good Hope. From 1862 travellers could reach Pondichéry on the Marseille-Indochina line established by the French maritime company, Services maritimes des Messageries impériales (later known as Messageries Maritimes), although this was not a direct service as travellers had to change in Colombo (Ceylon) to reach their final destination. The introduction of


115 The success was such that the idea was modelled by the British Indian authorities in 1854, Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit., pp. 121-32.

116 Ibid., p. 133-44.

117 Coret, ‘La Cession de l’Inde française’, op.cit., pp. 598-9; Sri Soudjanarandjani, 8 December 1932; L’Inde Illustrée,
faster steamers and the inauguration of the Suez Canal in 1869 eventually reduced the journey between Marseille and Pondichéry to twenty-two days.\textsuperscript{118} The construction of a railway line to join the British railway network was discussed from 1858, but the difficulty in raising the necessary funds, and in obtaining approval from the British authorities reluctant to facilitate the transportation of goods to and from the ports of Pondichéry and Karikal, resulted in a thirty-eight kilometre Pondichéry-Villupuram junction line having to wait until 1879 to be inaugurated. Only a third of the railway was situated in French India, with the remainder in British India. The addition of a small railway at the pier helped the transfer of goods to the larger railway network.\textsuperscript{119} A thirty-three kilometre Karikal-Piralam junction line was established in 1898.

By contrast, no investment was needed in Chandernagor as the territory was already easily accessible by British rail. Mahé and Yanaon had no direct railway connection, probably because their small population and economy did not justify the large investment required to build a junction line to the existing British system.\textsuperscript{120} Although small, the Pondichéry and Karikal junction lines were the first of their kind in the French colonies. The Saigon line opened in 1899 (Indochina), and the Dakar and Saint-Louis railway lines (Senegal) were completed in the early part of the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{121}

The abolition of slavery by the French government in 1848 had also contributed to the prosperity of French India. The emancipation of slaves resulted in an increased demand for a labour force to work on the sugar plantations of Martinique, Guadeloupe, La Réunion, and Guyane, as well as in the British colonies of Mauritius, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, the small West Indies islands, Natal, and Ceylan. Prior to this period, a small number of South

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\textsuperscript{118} Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde, op.cit., pp. 185-6.
\textsuperscript{121} Maestri, op.cit., pp. 216-7.
Indians had migrated to work in these sugar cane fields, but since no accurate civil records existed only approximate figures can be provided. It is estimated that between 1842 and 1870 approximately 879,628 indentured Indian workers left India for this purpose. Most were not French Indians of course, but some of the British and most of the French trade in South Indian workers transited via Pondichéry, Yanaon, and Karikal, and contributed to the increased prosperity of local merchants. Between 1854 and 1885, 24,147 Indians were shipped to Guadeloupe, 43,326 to Martinique, 8,416 to Guyane, and 63,573 to La Réunion, a total of 138,462.

The apogee of French India came to an end with a number of commercial and financial events. The emigration of Indian workers had stopped by 1885 due to a number of factors that included a fall in sugar price, a decrease in the production of sugar in La Réunion due to the overexploitation of the land, and above all a restriction by the British authorities on Indian migration. Indeed, the development of the British Indian rail network, an increase in tea production in Ceylan and Assam, and the recovery of the textile industry in Bombay all required cheap local labour. This caused a severe slowdown in shipping and associated services in Pondichery, Karikal and Yanaon. In addition, natural disasters which affected the territories over a period of fifteen years – cyclones in 1871 in Karikal, floods in Pondichéry in 1872 and 1874, droughts in 1876-77 on the Coromandel coast followed by floods in 1884 – badly affected the reserve funds of French India and resulted in a deficit in the local budget.

The financial situation was worsened with the increase in expenditure incurred by the new administrative organisation introduced by the Third Republic, an increase that was concurrent with the depreciation of the rupee. Between 1870 and 1879, its value decreased from 

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124 Ibid., pp. 176, 180-1
125 Ibid., p. 270.
2.40 francs to 1.97 francs, which represented a decline by a fifth of its previous value. Although the French Indian local budget was established in francs, taxpayers remitted in rupees, while administrative personnel were also paid in local currency.\textsuperscript{126} The financial crisis led to the reduction of personnel and the establishment of a cadastre (land title register) by the colonial administration in 1913 in order to improve land tax collection. By contrast, British India had already finalised its own land register covering an area of three to four million square kilometres, by 1875; this compared to French India’s five hundred square kilometres. The financial crisis also triggered further resentment from Chandernagor and Karikal, whose residents complained that their local taxes were being used to support the administrative centre and demanded some form of decentralisation where local taxes would only be used for their own use.\textsuperscript{127} The financial crisis led to the indefinite postponement of important works of infrastructure, such as the improvement of the ports of Karikal and Pondichéry. The long-term impact of this delay was that steam ships in need of well-equipped ports for anchorage chose Madras, where facilities had been upgraded in 1876, over Pondichéry. In 1885 French trade with Madras reached 24 million francs compared with 18 million from trade with Pondichéry, and the trend continued to favour Madras over the French Indian port.\textsuperscript{128}

Most of the working population of French India was employed across four categories (Table 3). Agriculture was the primary activity in the French enclaves, with rice the most important product, followed by millet and coconut.\textsuperscript{129} Karikal was the main supplier of rice, with an annual exportable surplus of approximately 7,000 tons during good years. Pondichéry only managed a production of 8,000 tons, which nonetheless did not meet its needs. Pondichéry, Chandernagor, Mahé, and Yanaon thus depended on the import of British Indian rice.\textsuperscript{130} The

\begin{footnotes}
\item[126] Ibid., pp. 273-5.
\item[127] Ibid., pp. 276-7.
\item[128] Ibid., pp. 276-7, 281.
\item[129] Rajkumar, op.cit., p.8.
\end{footnotes}
production of rice became paramount in the years following the Second World War, as the shortages of rice in India put pressure on French colonial authorities to import an increased supply from Indochina.  

The second most important category of employment was in textile production, which included both workshops and factories. Jute was manufactured in Chandernagor by a British-Indian company, and cotton was produced in Pondichéry by three cotton mills, the Filature Savanna, the Pondichery Cotton Mill Limited, and the Anglo-French Beatle Company, which employed about 8,000 labourers and exported 5,000 tons of cloth.

The third category comprised fishermen, with the largest number found in Pondichéry, the most populous of the French Indian enclaves. Although a final category in employment, labelled ‘miscellaneous occupations’, does not specify the kind of occupations these persons were engaged in, we can assume that it included those working in administration, artisans, and servants. Suresh estimates that if in 1838 there were already 1,598 Indians and 113 Europeans employed in a wide range of government occupations in health, police, justice, and education services, their number would have increased markedly when municipalities were established in the 1880s, especially since 45 to 50 percent of the colonial budget was earmarked for civil servants’ salaries.

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Professional categories</th>
<th>Pondichéry</th>
<th>Karikal</th>
<th>Chandernagor</th>
<th>Mahé</th>
<th>Yanaon</th>
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<td>3,500</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>11,600</td>
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<tr>
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<td>600</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>300</td>
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<tr>
<td>Others</td>
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<td>1,200</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The French colonial administration required French educated clerks, hence there was a need to set up educational establishments that could educate the local population alongside children of the French. Traditional Muslim and Hindu education was already established when Europeans came into contact with India. From the seventeenth century, Western education in French India was closely linked with the proselytising activities of missionaries, including those from the Capucin order, the *Société des Mission Étrangères*, the Jesuits, and the Ursulines. Missionaries established schools to provide elementary education, including the tenets of Christianity, to children of converted natives as well as to those of French settlers and other Europeans residing in India.¹³³

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¹³³ Louis XIV authorised the establishment of missions in the French Indian territories. Schools were organised according to caste groups. The Capuchins were in charge of the Europeans while the Jesuits were responsible for the *créoles* and natives. Ursulines were the first to start the education of girls. In matters of employment, Christians were preferred over Hindus, hence the need to educate a group of natives to serve the *Compagnie*. Premavalli, *op.cit.*, pp. 118, 121-2, 128-9, 136-7.
The specificities of Hindu society yet again dictated the separation of low-castes and high-castes, with separate schooling provided for each group. These early establishments disappeared after the Revolution when French India was occupied by the British, but emerged again after the retrocession. Under the Restoration, state and Catholic schools came under the aegis of the local administration, which funded their ongoing costs from the local budget. Between 1826 and 1870, a number of religious, state, and private schools were set up across the five territories to provide primary schooling for the natives, créoles, and Europeans, in both French and native languages. Schools were again segregated according to caste groups and along gender lines. The Collège royal (renamed Collège colonial in 1848), founded in 1826 in Pondichéry, provided secondary education only to children of Europeans and créoles until natives were allowed to attend in 1879. It was nonetheless the first secondary school to be opened in the colonies. An École de droit (Law School) was founded in 1838, with courses taught by judicial officers, while an École de Médecine (School of Medicine) was created in 1863. Diplomas issued by these two specialised schools, however, were only valid within the French Indian territories. At the same time, a teacher training college was established. The setting up of schools marked a definite forward movement in the acculturation of French Indians, even if the effort was modest in view of the number of children who actually benefited from them. Indeed, on the eve of the Third Republic in 1870, only 2,277 pupils had access to public schooling while 7,805 were taught in private institutions. The figure represented only 10% of approximately 100,000 children under the age of fourteen.

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134 Ibid., p. 135.
135 Boarding schools were also set up, ibid., pp.161, 1655
136 The Collège colonial became the Lycée français in 1975, ibid., p.166.
138 Apart from teaching the basis of medicine, the Medical School was particularly geared towards the management of cholera outbreaks and vaccination, Premavalli, op.cit., pp. 193-5.
139 Ibid., p. 192.
Numerous efforts at extending public education were made under the Third Republic, including the secularisation of the Collège colonial, and two decrees, in 1893 and 1898, promulgated compulsory primary education. But several factors ensured there was little improvement. Funding was lacking, and traditionalists under the leadership of Chanemougam repeatedly obstructed the implementation of compulsory primary schooling on the grounds that it would have helped low-caste children to gain an education. Hence in 1922, the number of primary schoolchildren was 13,880, the same as in 1910.\textsuperscript{141} Apart from the fact that only 10% of children had access to primary education, most of their instruction was given in English or in the vernacular. The main reason provided at the time for this anomaly was that, compared to other French colonies such as the French West Indies or La Réunion, where ‘patois’ could not compete with the French language, French India had an old civilisation with traditions that had not yet been displaced by French colonisation.\textsuperscript{142} With regard to the increasing importance of the English language, it could be argued that the overwhelming presence of British India could already have constituted a deterrent to seeking an education in French. With little border control, work opportunities for educated French Indians would have been greater in British India than in the small and economically stifled French Indian territories. French language was so little known and practised that the administration was forced to allow local council meetings to be carried out in the vernacular, with a translation of the debates supplied for the administration’s records.\textsuperscript{143}

The failure of French education in French India demonstrates the strength of Indian civilisation, which could only with great difficulty be displaced by that of France, especially when a history of colonial neglect failed to provide sufficient funds to support the expansion of education mandated by the Third Republic. Finally, party politics helped maintain the particularities of French Indian society, which under the leadership of Chanemougam continued

\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., pp. 350-1.
to oppose the economic and educational improvement of the less advantaged socio-economic
groups. Quite paradoxically, the introduction of party politics in French India created a Hindu
movement that opposed French colonisation, since it was synonymous with economic progress
and societal changes.

Conclusion

French India originated from a series of trading posts established by the Compagnie des
Indes in the seventeenth century. While Dupleix managed to expand French influence over
South India for a short while, and without official support, his recall and the concurrent Seven
Years’ War marked the end of any dream of French territorial expansion in India. It also saw the
dismantlement of France’s first colonial empire. By 1814 French presence had been relegated to
five small, scattered, and defenceless Indian territories, while Britain increasingly asserted her
authority on the subcontinent. The territorial and economic restrictions imposed by the British
were designed to hinder any return to former French prosperity, and condemned the territories to
budget deficits until the 1850s, when tax reforms triggered a period of economic development,
including the improvement of port, irrigation, and road infrastructure. Steam-powered ships and
the opening of the Suez Canal also contributed to French India’s economic revival until the
1880s.

Until the 1840s, French India, as it was now commonly referred to, remained an old-
regime colony tightly controlled by the King’s governor. The concept of assimilation, a
revolutionary principle first exercised under the Second Republic and then reintroduced under
the Third Republic, granted the old colonies the right to representation based on universal
suffrage. But suffrage conflicted with the social organisation of French India. Social tensions

142 Ibid.
143 Ibid., p. 232.
between two Indian groups – the first comprising Hindu and Muslim conservatives, the second *renonçants* who supported the secular republican idea of assimilation – resulted in electoral irregularities and political abuses. Far from being rejected by the most conservative faction, French electoral politics were in fact misused and became an instrument of oppression with which to maintain the social status quo. Hence the communal politics that ensued from political manoeuvring and civil unrest provided at the same time the basis for the first form of an anti-French campaign.
Chapter 2

Territorial Particularities and Representations of French India

The cult of ancestors is the most legitimate of all. Our ancestors made us who we are. A heroic past, great men, glory, (I mean the real thing) that is the social capital on which a national idea formed….Yes, suffering unites more than joy. As far as national memories are concerned, mourning is more potent than triumph, because it imposes duties and dictates a collective effort. (Ernest Renan)¹

The territory ruled by the French is so small, smaller than a district that it does not deserve to be called a country. (Bombay Sentinel, 18 November 1946)

As outlined in Chapter 1, French presence in India originated with Louis XIV’s commercial aspirations and a desire to outdo the Dutch and then the British. The recall of Dupleix by the Compagnie ended all attempts at territorial expansion, and ensuing Franco-British conflicts between 1754 and 1814 established British supremacy on the subcontinent while reducing France to a subordinate colonial power. The Treaty of Paris (1814) ensured that France was relegated to her former small settlements scattered along the Indian coastline, hindering any hopes of a return to past economic prosperity. For France, the loss triggered the construction of a myth of French India that helped transform painful memories of colonial losses into that of triumph associated with French grandeur. Above all, the myth provided the space where France, as a

coloniser, still played an important role in India, and where criticism of the British administration could be expressed. It also provided a means for the historical legitimisation of French India.²

In order to evaluate the extent of this myth, this chapter will first explore the territorial and cultural particularities of French India, which with its Lilliputian size stood in stark contrast to the construction of a French Indian empire based on the former colonial glories of Dupleix. Through the analysis of maps, official reports, travelogues, and newspapers, I will examine how the concept of French India was shaped and promulgated, and how these representations exposed conflicting ideas about French India. A study of the French India pavilion at the Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris in 1931, where France showcased the benefits of her civilising mission, will demonstrate that India, whose image was encapsulated in the pavilion, still remained a source of fascination and historical pride, and a means for national aggrandisement.

The five comptoirs and the loges

In 1947, British India covered an area of approximately four million square kilometres and had a population of about four hundred million. It thus dwarfed France’s Indian territories, which were ‘small, scattered and undefended’.³ Chandernagor was located in the former British colonial state of Bengal, while the other four territories were situated on the seashore in the former British colonial presidency of Madras, in the south of India (Map. 2). The total area of the French territories at their greatest extent came to approximately five hundred square kilometres; Pondichéry was the largest with about 300 square kilometres, followed by Karikal with 160, Yanaon with 30, Mahé with only 9, and Chandernagor with a tiny 4 square kilometres. The total population, according to the census of 1948, was 362,045, which included a European population of 781 persons, as shown in Table 4.⁴ However, it is difficult to define who was a European, as

² Breuilly, op.cit., pp. 7-28.
³ Miles, op.cit., p. 5; The Leader, Allahabad, 21 December 1948, Nehru clippings, NMML, R8787.
this category could include a person born in Europe, a person of European descent, or a person of mixed European and Indian descent, as well as French Indians who had embraced French culture and thus considered themselves European. Unsurprisingly, most of that population was concentrated in Pondichéry, which, with three cotton mills, was the economic and administrative centre of French India. The most densely populated of the French Indian territories was Chandernagor, with 5,111 inhabitants per square kilometre, followed by Pondichéry with 782, and Karikal with 518. Mahé and Yanaon averaged over 300 inhabitants per square kilometre (Table 4).

Map 2: French Establishments and loges in India. The loges also include factoreries (warehouse) and terrains (land). Loges are shown on the Map with the letter L, while factoreries and terrains are shown with the letters F and T respectively. Source: Ministère des colonies. Agence générale des colonies, Les établissements français dans l’Inde.
Table 4. Population and number of communes in each Establishment in French India in 1947.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishments</th>
<th>Number of ‘communes’</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Inhabitants per sq.km</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>indigenous 1,000 inhabitants</td>
<td>Europeans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondichéry</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>654</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikal</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandernagor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahé</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanaon</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>367</td>
<td>781</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the five enclaves, France had trading rights over twelve loges called pettah (meaning market) or small patches of land scattered along the Indian coastline that were remains of earlier trading posts where warehouses had once stood. However, documents in the archives of the Ministry of Overseas France (known before 1946 as the Ministry of Colonies) as well as official publications available at the Bibliothèque nationale de France provide conflicting information on the exact location, number, and status of these loges. The discrepancy indicates that even the French authorities had difficulty in maintaining accurate records of pettah, which were increasingly being engulfed by the population of British India. Most of these loges were in fact only ‘dots’ on a map, with no official French representatives, symbols, or even a flag to give any indication that the land was French. At the time of the Indian independence there was one

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guard in Calicut, and in Masulipatam two orderlies who represented French power. A brochure produced by the French Ministry of the Colonies in 1932 mentions eight loges: Masulipatam on the east coast, Calicut and Soualy on the west coast, Patna, Dacca, Jougdia, Cassimbaza, and Balassore in Bengal (Map 2). The other patches of land are listed as factoreries and terrains, and comprise Goalpara, Sylhet (Silhet), Sirampour (Serempour), Chittagong, Goorpordha, Sola, Boinchua, Goretty (Geretti) in Bengal, and Chapra, Sorguia, Begoumsara, Pounareck, Fatoua (Map 3), and Surat on the west coast (Map 2).

However, when comparing the list of loges provided by the Archives Nationales d’Outre-mer, Surat is considered a loge while Soualy was considered a terrain. Distinguishing these pieces of land has been a difficult task, since ministerial records and publication do not provide a clear definition of what constituted a factorie, a terrain, and a loge, but instead describe outposts as remains of former warehouses and places of trade. Even Jacques Weber, the most distinguished contemporary French historian of French India, has been unable to provide clear information; on a map of the ‘loges, factoreries, terrains’ published in Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, Weber has omitted to specify that Fatoua and Goretty were terrains, while a map titled ‘possessions françaises’ shows Chittagong as a loge, which in fact, it is never referred to as such in the archives. The lack of clarity on this issue demonstrates that French civil servants were at pains to differentiate between France’s legal jurisdiction and the myth of the loges; the administrator of Chandernagor, a Mr Maureton, wrote with some sarcasm in September 1905 that the French loges seemed to be very ‘hydrophilic’, since Patna had been flooded by the Ganges, and Joudia by the sea. Georges Tailleur, the last governor of Chandernagor, rather apologetically mentioned that a ‘flou artistique’ (artistic blur) reigned over

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6 Combat: Tribune libre, 8-9 May 1954.
the Ministry’s service of maps and inventories.  


The issue of the loges reveals the role that map drawing and inaccurate reporting have played in acquiring and apportioning colonial space, and how these functions had become tools to legitimise land ownership. The need to formalise territorial legitimacy, which also included the enumeration of colonial inhabitants, triggered a ‘cartographic anxiety’ to transform ‘fuzzy communities’ into colonial subjects. While the Ministry needed neither accurate records nor maps to seize colonial space and project the extent of France’s colonial power, its lack of financial resources, staff, and general interest in colonial affairs aggravated its inability to improve

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9 de Dianoux, op.cit., p. 560; Tailleur, op.cit., p. 17.
the collection of precise information on the colonies. Appointment as Minister of Colonies (the
Minister of Overseas France from 1946) was not a highly coveted post, and when a new cabinet
was formed, the post was usually filled last and awarded to a person of mediocre talent. Poor
leadership accompanied serious understaffing at the ministry; the central administration, located
in the Rue Oudinot in Paris, had 133 employees in 1896. The number decreased in 1936 to only
129, despite increased administrative responsibilities with the territorial acquisitions of the League
of Nations' mandates of Lebanon, Syria, Cameroon, and Togo; at its apogee in the 1930s, France
and her colonial domain, referred to as ‘greater France’ (*la plus grande France*), was the second
largest colonial empire after that of Britain, and encompassed 11 million square kilometres of land
and over 100 million inhabitants. In addition, overseas administrators changed their post
frequently and usually paid little attention to the work accomplished by their predecessors.
Compared to British colonial administrators, who often stayed for their whole career in one
country, the policy of high turnover emanated from a fear that the administrator might become too
independent of superior authority, and resulted in a significant lack of continuity in the
administration of French overseas colonies.11

While the French government was struggling to list the *loges*, the most up-to-date
information was provided by France’s rival, in the person of Colonel Edward Walter Fletcher
(1899-1958), the British Consul-General in Pondichéry between 1945 and August 1947. During
the transition period leading up to independence, Fletcher liaised with Major Atta-ul-Rahman, an
Under-Secretary to the Government of India in the Department of External Affairs and
Commonwealth Relations. It is worthwhile reproducing part of a letter from Fletcher, in which he
provides a better description of the *loges* than the French civil servants themselves were able to
produce:

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From the voluminous files in the Consulate it appears that there are eight only viz, Calicut, Masulipatam, Balasore, Patna, Surat, Dacca, Kasim Bazar, Jugdea. Of the above Surat consists of two pieces of land and there is a French enclave named Geretti near Chandernagor but this, I believe, is recognized as part of Chandernagor. …Of the other Jugdea is under the sea and Patna has never been found. Dacca also consists of two pieces of land. The French maintain a police post, or rather shed, at Masulipatam and it appears that criminal matters are dealt with by the police who arrive first on the scene!! It is under the Administrator of Yanam and the Governor tells me that the Administrator visited it recently and was received with acclaim and a display of French bunting by the inhabitants. The serving of civil summons has led to endless squabbles in the past. There is apparently a French flagstaff and a minor French employee, known officially as the French Agent, but referred to by the Governor as the “concierge”. At Calicut there is a similar “concierge”. I do not know if there are any police at Calicut and I am finding out at Masulipatam there is usually one but I believe occasionally there are two. Calicut is dealt with by the Administrator of Mahé and Surat appears to be nominally under the jurisdiction of the French Consul, Bombay….Balasore is leased by the Government of India. No jurisdiction appears to be exercised by the French in Surat. In Dacca the French do not appear to have exercised any jurisdiction for over a hundred years. In Kasim Bazar the French have not exercised any jurisdiction [and]….the Iskitippah Islands are only sandbanks, which often change their position, are frequently covered by water, and have no value…¹²

In this letter, Fletcher confirms that some of the patches of land had disappeared while others had simply been the product of some colonial myth. He clearly questions France’s jurisdiction over still other patches, since the British police were involved in dealing with some of the criminal matters

in those places. Moreover, by likening the French colonial representative to a ‘concierge’, he undermines any kind of legitimacy France might have over the loges. Compared to some French civil servants’ blunt admission that ‘no one knew exactly where the loges were’, Fletcher’s report to the representative of the Indian Interim government (2 September 1946 – 15 August 1947) shows that Britain’s record system was by far more efficient and accurate, and could easily be used to challenge the right to sovereignty of Britain’s old rival. After all, Fletcher was sharing the information with the Indian government that would soon be called to negotiate the future of other colonial powers, that is France and Portugal, on the subcontinent. The British policy of assigning their colonial administrators to one colonial territory, or province in the case of British India, for their entire career thus had a definite advantage over the French, making their administrators more familiar with the area and better at collecting precious information over a longer period of time.

The loges provided few economic benefits for the French with the exception of Masulipatnam. In 1822, a bar was set up from which the French government collected a moderate amount of revenue from taxes on the sale of alcohol, but this revenue greatly increased between 1843 and 1851 due to a British regiment stationed nearby. The British authorities were concerned that ‘the French pettah …had become a refuge for dissolute characters of all descriptions’, and offered a yearly indemnity of 3,550 rupees (8,520 francs) in exchange for the closure of the bar and the cessation of alcohol production. The move was also part of an attempt to address the problem of intoxication in British colonial society which challenged the right of a superior civilisation to rule over Indians.

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14 The negotiations first involved the possibility of exchanging the loges of Masulipatnam for British-held land in Pondichéry, but the convention of 31 March 1853 settled on a yearly indemnity, Weber, Les établissements, op.cit., p. 447.
David Annoussamy mentions that the definition of a *loge* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, compared to *comptoirs*, which implied land ownership, was a commercial facility on an area for which no land transaction had occurred.\(^{16}\) This definition is challenged by More, who mentions that the *loge* of Masulipatnam had been purchased.\(^{17}\) In any case, it is not necessary for the purpose of this discussion to establish the distinguishing particularities and history of all these tiny pieces of land, since the French Ministry eventually bundled them up together and referred to them all as *loges* in the course of diplomatic negotiations. In total, these non-contiguous *loges* covered an approximate area of four square kilometers and, according to the Ministry of Overseas France, had a population of between 2,000 to 3,000 in 1947. But the *loges* were not the only territorial particularities of French India.

**A patchwork**

When observing the location of the five main territories on a map of the subcontinent, several issues become readily apparent. The distances between the other territories and Pondichéry, the administrative centre of French India, seem remarkable: Chandernagor was 1,905 kilometres from the capital, a distance similar to that between Paris and Algiers. To Yanaon, it was 840 kilometres and to Mahé, 635, while Karikal, the closest neighbour to Pondichéry, was 150 kilometres away.\(^{18}\) Such distances only helped deepen local resentment towards a colonial administrative centre that ‘paid little attention to them’, and this would eventually lead Chandernagor, Mahé, and Yanaon to rebel against the French authorities at the time of India’s independence and over the period of the Franco-Indian negotiations.\(^{19}\)

These distances made official travelling between Pondichéry and other far-flung territories difficult and infrequent. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century, it could

\(^{16}\) Annoussamy, *op.cit.*, p. 21.
\(^{18}\) Miles, *op.cit.*, p. 5.
\(^{19}\) David, *op.cit.*, pp. 90-1.
take up to three days to get to Chandernagor from Pondichéry by sea or by land. In 1950, to
travel from Pondichéry to Yanaon one had to take the Madras Mail and travel overnight to
Samalkot (Andhra Pradesh), then catch a train to Kakinada and cover the last few miles by car on
a dirt road. On the other hand, in 1958 the Représentant français in Pondichéry (the title of the
colonial administrator after 1954), Robert Morel-Francoz, described to his superior, the
ambassador Comte d’Ostrorog, how difficult it was to reach Yanaon from Pondichéry because of
the lack of bridges over the rivers Krishna and Godavery, probably swept away after the
monsoon; instead he had to take a rather long detour via Hyderabad. This paucity of official
visits only helped foment the general feeling of resentment from the local population, most
particularly the Chandernagorians who did not like being ruled by people from the South.

Viewing a map of the subcontinent also makes it abundantly clear that the French
territories were surrounded by British India, and had to rely on British Indian infrastructure for
transportation and communication. Under various agreements and conventions, and for an
agreed monetary payment, the government of British India provided access to major
communication services, the Post and Telegraphs, and the railways. Other essential services
and supplies were also available from British India at a cost, including paddy, wheat, pulses,
petrol, coal, kerosene oil, fuel oil, cloth, yarn, firewood, iron, steel, groundnuts, manure, fertilisers,
sugar, paper, molasses, road materials, electricity for lighting and industrial purposes, coffee,
cement, and machine parts. While this long list of supplies foregrounds French dependency on
British Indian products, it similarly highlights the level of control that could be exercised by the
British or, as would happen later, by the independent government of India.

20 Ibid., p. 89.
p.10.
22 Robert Morel-Francoz, Représentant Français à Pondichéry à Comte Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux
23 Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, Carnet de documentation sur l’enseignement dans la France d’Outre-mer,
24 Rajkumar, op.cit., p. 21.
Yet another aspect of this dependency related to defence. Since 1737, France had recruited local Indian men to form the armed forces, referred to after 1857 as ‘cipahis’ (sepoys), a name that was provoking to the English who had just faced rebellion from their own sepoy forces.25 Traditionally, most of these local troops were stationed in Pondichéry, Karikal, and Chandernagor, since Yanaon and Mahé were smaller villages and, it was believed, required less policing.26 Until 1885, decrees continued the tradition, initiated under the Old Regime, of allowing the recruitment of new sepoys from northern British India, a decision based on the smallness of the French Indian population. Not only was this custom introduced by Dumas, the governor of Pondichéry in 1737, an affront to the British, it also breached French laws stipulating that only French subjects or citizens could be accepted into the army.27 The difficulty in recruiting local French Indians to join the defence corps explains why no French sepoys were sent to France during the World Wars, with only volunteers joining the fight. However, French Indian soldiers were stationed in Indochina, probably to avoid the 1814 Treaty ban, and were used in 1918 and 1919 to suppress demonstrations in Indochina.28

In 1946, there were 672 French Indian non-commissioned officers and sepoys, and twenty European officers and non-commissioned officers.29 Since Article 12 of the Treaty of Paris (1814) had forbidden the erection of fortifications in all parts of French India and limited its defence ‘to only such troops as might be necessary for police purposes’, the lack of military defence, especially during the Karikal riot of 1845, had demonstrated the vulnerability of France’s position in India and her dependency on her neighbour to control the indigenous population.30

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26 Ibid., pp. 254-5.
27 Ibid., pp. 253, 255-6.
29 There were 447 in Pondichery, 153 in Karikal, 43 in Chandernagor, 15 in Mahé and 14 in Yanaon. Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 359.
30 Université de Perpignan, Digithèque des matériaux juridiques et politiques, created 1998, Traité de paix de Paris
The situation became quite peculiar after independence, when India continued to fulfil the same obligations as the former colonial authority. As the Indian Ministry of External Affairs remarked in 1949, ‘in case of civil commotion [in French India], the French government would have to rely on the government of India for military assistance’.\(^{31}\) Hence, in an unusual twist of fate, France, as a colonising power, would have to call upon the forces of the independent country that it partly occupied to defend her colonialist position. Nehru, however, questioned the conditions of the Franco-British treaty, noting the need to unearth and examine it and asserting that in any event this document could not dictate the new government of India’s actions.\(^{32}\)

Portuguese India shared similar territorial characteristics to French India. Georges Chaffard, a journalist who wrote extensively on the decolonisation of the French empire, states that Portuguese India, located on the west coast of the sub-continent, was made up of a ‘homogenous bloc of 500,000 inhabitants’.\(^{33}\) But this statement is incorrect. Goa was certainly the largest and most important territory of Portuguese India, with an area of 2,903 square kilometres, or ten times the size of Pondichéry, and a population of 548,000 in 1950. Portuguese India also included Daman, which was a little over 238 square kilometres in area with a population of 69,000, but the territory was made up of three separate pieces of land: Daman proper, Dadrà (a very small enclave), and Nagar-Aveli, which, with an area of 180 square kilometres, made up the bulk of the Daman territory. Dadrà and Nagar-Aveli were separated from Daman proper by a strip of Indian territory nine kilometres wide. Finally, Diu was an island off the Kathiawar peninsula and included the village of Gogola on the mainland and the fort of Simbur on an islet 22 kilometres out to sea. The total area was just over 32 square kilometres with a population in 1950 of 21,000.


\(^{32}\) Nehru, SWJN, op.cit., Vol. 5, p. 555.

\(^{33}\) Chaffard, op.cit., p. 200.
Compared to French India, Portuguese India had a long coastline and greater area, which allowed her to be less dependent on India for daily necessities.

Furthermore, in contrast to France, Portugal shared defence treaties with Britain, her long-time ally in the region, giving considerable leverage to the Portuguese in India. The Anglo-Portuguese Treaty of 1661, confirmed by a secret declaration of 1899, obliged Britain ‘to defend and protect all conquests or colonies belonging to the crown of Portugal against its enemies, ... future and present’. As such, Britain faced the singular situation that by facilitating India’s independence, it could at the same time drag itself into an armed dispute between India and Portugal. However the Legal Adviser to the British Foreign Office emphasised that ‘like every other State, the United Kingdom had the right to decide whether a casus foederis – case for the alliance – existed, and even if it existed the government might have other reasons, military or political, that would prevent it from giving Portugal material help’. Hence, Britain retained the right to not intervene should armed struggle between India and Portugal arise. The Anglo-Portuguese Treaty nevertheless reminded Nehru of the possible consequences that a forced intervention in Goa could trigger.

Another particularity of French India was its cultural diversity, and hence lack of uniformity or unifying French Indian cultural bonds, a situation similar to that found in British India. The population of Chandernagor was Bengali, and the city’s proximity to Calcutta, capital of British India until 1911, easily exposed this French enclave to Indian revolutionary activism, such as the Swadeshi movement (1905-1908). The aim of the movement was to reverse the British colonial administration’s decision to partition Bengal into two parts for administrative reasons, and their strategy involved the boycott of all foreign goods in favour of local products (swadesh means

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34 Parker, op.cit., p. 390.
36 Present position (December 1949) in regard to the Portuguese Possessions in India, NA, FO371/76089: Relations between India and France and Portugal.
37 Ibid.
of ‘one’s own country’).

Tensions between partisans of the Swadeshi movement and British Indian authorities resulted in political dissidents fleeing Calcutta and seeking refuge in Chandernagor, thus turning the enclave into a centre for the pro-independence movement. British authorities considered this French enclave to be ‘the most dangerous’ spot in Bengal.

Chandernagor also experienced a dramatic rise in refugees from neighbouring western Bengal during the communal unrest that plagued the region prior to partition, a development that further diluted French culture in the territory.

The two smallest French Indian territories are situated at opposite direction of each other. The inhabitants of Mahé, located on the western coast over six hundred kilometres from Pondichéry, are Malayalam speakers and had little in common with the administrative centre. Finally, Yanaon lies in a Telugu-speaking region of Andhra Pradesh, and had cultural ties with Hyderabad, a princely state that initially refused to merge with the Union of India at the time of independence. Only Karikal, situated one hundred and fifty kilometres south of Pondichéry in Tamil Nadu, shared cultural traditions with the administrative centre, even though it had a larger Muslim population than that of Pondichéry.

In addition to being surrounded, like all the French Indian territories, by British-held territory, Pondichéry, Mahé, and Yanaon were also composed of a number of small separate pieces of land, making the administrative management of the communes difficult. Indeed Pondichéry consisted of eight separate communes – Pondichéry, Ariankuppam, Bahoor, Mudaliarpet, Nettapakkam, Oulgaret, Tirubuvanai, and Villanoor – spread over twelve parcels of land crosscut by British-held land (Map 4). Tiny Mahé was made up of two parcels (Map 5), and

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40 Neogy, French Decolonisation: op.cit., p. 4.


while most studies do not mention Yanaon as being discontiguous, a close study of the map shows that a canal actually separated it into two distinct parcels (Map 6). Karikal consisted of six contiguous communes: Karikal, Grande Aldée, Nedungadu, Cotchery, Neravy, and Tirunallar (Map 7). Chandernagor consisted of one unified commune (Map 8). Nagoji Vasudev Rajkumar, the Foreign Secretary of the Indian National Congress, noted in his critique on French India in 1951 that ‘in several cases the front of [a] house is in Indian territory with the backyard under French occupation’, a situation which again pointed to the vulnerability of the French position in India. Some roads cut through the borders up to eight times, and the Ginjy river in Pondichéry crossed from French to British territory no fewer than nine times.

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43 Miles, op.cit., p.5; Rajkumar, op.cit., p.11.
44 Ibid., p. 12.
45 Établissements français dans l’Inde, service des contributions chef du service des contributions à Mr le Gouverneur des Établissements français dans l’Inde, Pondichéry, 30 Juin 1908, AOM, Inde, G38: Échange des territoires.
Hence, general daily activities carried out by both the local population and the colonial authorities involved trespassing onto British territory, a singularly peculiar situation. As outlined in Chapter 1, the curious territorial characteristics of the French outposts were the result of a number of struggles and various skirmishes between French and British ambitions on the subcontinent from the mid-seventeenth century until the Treaty of Paris, when France was handed back her Indian territories as they existed in 1792. This was a calculated decision by the British aimed at preventing the French from resuming their former economic prosperity in India and hindering any further economic development. However, despite many complaints from the French, the British did not return the entirety of the territories. In the case of Mahé, of the original 2,400 hectares under French control in 1792, only 900 hectares were reinstated.

Furthermore, according to French reports, not only did the British authorities retain some of the land, but they also further partitioned the original parcels. Such was the case, in 1895, with the sea access of the loge of Calicut. Even the British acknowledged that there were on both sides ‘constant bickering about boundaries and complaints of encroachment; whether the boundary of Chandernagor lay in mid-stream or on the other bank of the Hooghly river, whether alluvial islands, or the Godavari River near Yanaon were French or British and that such disputes were perennial’. Nonetheless, the overall policy of the British in regard to French India was encroachment and dismemberment of the French enclaves, which conflicted with a general French representation of French India as a grand colonial territory.

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47 Conclusions, AOM, Inde, H23: Délimitation du territoire de Mahé.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Confidential paper, South East Asia Department, 4 March 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
Maps and the Exposition coloniale as fictional modes of representations

French India was represented in different ways depending on the message to be conveyed. The lack of uniformity among the comptoirs led to some noticeable contradictions in the way they were depicted, and omissions often indicated a lack of familiarity with the particularities of French India. But the overall intent was to perpetuate the myth of French imperial grandeur in India, a campaign in which even the term ‘French India’ played a role. Although the official name for the five comptoirs and the loges was Les établissements français de l’Inde, hinting at the plurality and smallness of the territories, the French government usually referred to them as Inde française (French India), a designation that gave them a much more important and unified aspect.

Moreover, despite their cultural, historical, and territorial differences, the French government administratively controlled the comptoirs and loges as a single entity, a practice that was also applied to other small French overseas territories. The five archipelagos in the group that constituted the Établissements français de l’Océanie (EFO), for example, were similarly amalgamated to form one administrative entity. The EFO included the Marquisas archipelago in eastern Polynesia, Tahiti, Moorea and other smaller Society islands, the Gambier islands, the Tuamotu Islands, and finally the Austral archipelagos.51 Other such administrative arrangements included the Comoros Islands, which comprised the islands of Njazidja, Mwali, Nzwani, Mayotte, and Dzaoudzi. Likewise, the Terres Australes et Antarctiques encompassed various islands in the Southern Indian ocean and the Antarctic ocean, and Terre Adélie on the Antarctic continent.52 As with the comptoirs, the administrative organisation of these territories elided the cultural and religious diversities found in areas that were separated by considerable distances across land and ocean.53

Maps played a crucial role in the representation of French India and conveyed particular

51 Aldrich and Connell, op.cit., pp. 43, 35.
52 Ibid., p. 3.
53 Ibid., p. 242.
messages, especially to those who were unfamiliar with the history and particularities of the comptoirs. J. P. Harley mentions that ‘maps are not straightforward and express values while retaining ambiguities; they are indeed slippery witnesses’. French Indian names scattered along the Indian coastline offered an image of French India in relation to British India and to Asia. This had the effect of emphasising France’s physical presence in the region, as well as exaggerating the importance of French India on the subcontinent, since the non-contiguous and patchwork-like aspect of the comptoirs and their lack of uniformity was not revealed. For instance, a blotter produced in 1897 for customers of the department store Au Bon Marché in Paris presented the French empire in various small maps; it offered an image of Pondichéry (Map 9) as a contiguous territory only cross-cut by rivers and roads. While the unlabelled blank area surrounding Mahé (Map 9) could indicate to the uneducated viewer that the land was uninhabited, it was in fact densely populated British-held territory. Above all, this form of representation attempted to erase past Franco-British rivalries in India from the colonial memory, and shape ideas of the French colonial presence.55

55 Ibid. p. 4
The general map of the comptoirs depicted in the blotter is also revealing (Map 10). First of all, the southern end of the Indian peninsula is not labelled ‘British India’ – which would denote the rival administrative and colonial authority – but instead is marked as ‘Dekkan’, an Indian region historically connected to the ephemeral conquest of Dupleix in the mid-eighteenth century. The reference to Dupleix’s territorial exploits initiates colonial nostalgia for past French imperial
grandeur in India. However, while two French flags above the names of Pondichéry and Yanaon amplify French colonial presence, the absence of such national symbols next to Mahé, Karical (sic), and Chandernagor is rather misleading as it does not highlight their colonial status. Thus, ironically, while the map attempted to proudly depict France’s presence in India and serve as an educational or at best a marketing tool to promote colonial products available at the Au Bon Marché store, its omission of three of the comptoirs only resulted in reducing France’s position and demonstrates the unfamiliarity of what actually constituted French India.

Similarly, a pamphlet produced by the Ministère des Colonies in 1932 to promote travel to French India emphasised the size of the five French Indian territories on the maps, which are mentioned as large if not larger than the British Indian ports of Madras, Bombay, and Calcutta. The pamphlet also refrained from using the term ‘British India’, writing instead ‘Inde’ in the centre of the map, with probably again the intention of erasing a painful reminder of France’s subordinate status on the subcontinent.

Maps were also instrumental in portraying the loyalty of the empire during the Second World War, and helped boost morale after the German Occupation of France in June 1940. At the end of that year, France Libre produced a series of maps, parts of which have been coloured by hand with pastel sticks; names of towns and countries are also handwritten, suggesting that the authors did not have access to appropriate printing equipment to deliver a uniform document. The maps emphasise the number of colonies that had joined de Gaulle’s Appeal in contrast to those that had accepted orders from the new Vichy government headed by Marshal Pétain. The civil war that pitted de Gaulle against Pétain after France’s capitulation to Germany was also being played out in the empire, and the printed propaganda proudly listed the number of colonial inhabitants across the three continents that had ‘spontaneously chosen to continue the war for the liberation of the mother country’. A map of the world entitled Les territoires de la France libre (Map 11) depicted France and her colonial empire, which included as occupied Vichy-controlled territories Guyane, Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), Algeria, Madagascar, and Indochina. The West Indies, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, La Réunion, the Chinese territory of Quang-Tchéou-Wan, New Caledonia, and the territories in the South Pacific were not included in this list of French overseas territories.

Territories that rallied to France were represented in red, and included Congo, Gabon, Oubagi-Chari, Chad forming the Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF), and the protectorate of

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56 France Libre, Les Colonies libres [A.E.F., Cameroun, Nouvelle Calédonie, Nouvelles Hébrides, Établissements Français du Pacifique et de l'Inde], (circa 1940).
Cameroun. In Asia, four red dots represented the French Indian territories of Chandernagor, Pondichéry, Karikal, and Mahé. Yanaon was omitted. A second document comprising four maps and entitled Possessions francaises libres de l’Inde et d’Australasie shows a map of New Caledonia, one of the New Hebrides, another of Les Iles de la Société and Les Marquises (the Society and Marquesas Islands), and finally a map of Les établissements français de l’Inde (Map 12). Once again Yanaon is not mentioned as a French Indian territory.

These maps offered a vision that de Gaulle’s call had been heard by France’s far-flung territories, thus demonstrating the impact of his mission. The comments that supplemented the maps stated that

the colonies that rallied to Free France have an area of over 3 million square kilometres, or five and a half times the size of France, with a population of 6,237,000 inhabitants across three continents, that is in Africa, AEF and Cameroun, in Asia, the French Establishments in India, and in Oceania, New Caledonia, the New Hebrides, and the French Establishments in the Pacific.57

By providing a comparison between the size of the métropole and the colonies, and by mentioning colonies on three continents involving over six million inhabitants, the comments intended to amplify the importance of the colonies that had rallied to de Gaulle. The depiction of those overseas French territories links them to the plight of the motherland, even though these French colonies’ decision to rally was often based on a desire to support Great Britain and Allied strategy rather than to show unconditional allegiance to de Gaulle.58 Given the Lilliputian size of the French Indian territories, it was almost inconceivable not to follow British India. Thus, the territories were amongst the first colonies to rally, with Chandernagor on 20 June followed six

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57 Ibid.
58 Regnault and Kurtovitch, op.cit., pp. 74-5.
weeks later by the other enclaves. However, by omitting Yanaon on the two maps whose purpose was to highlight French overseas territories that had rallied to de Gaulle, one can deduce that the authors were unfamiliar with the fact that French India consisted of five distinct territories, not four. Furthermore, the French name of ‘Pondichéry’ has been written in its anglicised version, ‘Pondicherry’.

These oversights may well have gone unnoticed, since the audience for which the maps were intended was also probably unaware of the territorial characteristics of French India. And the spelling mistake may suggest that an English officer, perhaps from London where de Gaulle had escaped to and had sent his message from, might have been responsible for the creation of the French India map. In general, however, the maps discussed above provide an example of the type of information that was intentionally conveyed. They were not used to communicate meticulous facts about the territorial and cultural characteristics of French India, but to propagate specific messages that enhanced France’s colonial presence in India and perpetuated the myth of a ‘French India’ larger and more important that it really was. In particular, the maps of French India produced by *France Libre* helped reinforce a vision of French grandeur at a time of defeat and national struggle.

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Map 11: The French Empire in 1940. Areas in green represent France and its colonial empire under occupation and Vichy-controlled; the area and dots in red represent Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF) and the French Indian Territories that rallied to Free France. Syria and Lebanon are represented in grey with a red border, as they were both under mandate status. Source: France Libre, Les Colonies libres.
Map 12: Map showing that the Établissements Français de l'Inde had rallied to France Libre, circa 1940. Only Chandernagore, Mahe [sic], Pondicherry [sic], and Karikal are shown. Source: France Libre, Les Colonies libres.

French India was also characterised as speaking French, as shown on a map of La France, ses colonies et les pays de langue française. In the original document, the five outposts are underlined in red ink, a colour used to depict colonies or countries that speak French. Indochina was also included as a Francophone country (Map 13). The map was presumably intended to propagate the belief that, despite their lack of territorial homogeneity and the vast distances that separated the enclaves, the French Indian territories shared a cultural commonality, namely the use of the French language. This helped emphasise the success of France’s mission civilisatrice.

Claudius Madrolle, La France, ses colonies et les pays de langue française, câbles et lignes françaises de navigation (Berne: Institut géographique, 1894).
and provide a ‘cultural’ separation between French India and India, whether India was perceived as British or in more traditional terms. At the same time, the information embodied in the map promoted the omnipotence of the French language, bringing the colony closer to the motherland despite the distance between the two. Again, the role of the map was not to provide accurate facts, since French was never readily spoken in the comptoirs – in fact, less than ten percent of the population, residing mainly in the administrative centre of Pondichéry, ever spoke French – but to demonstrate the extent of France’s colonial power and cultural influence.⁶¹

Map 13: Map showing colonies and countries that speak French. Source: La France, ses colonies et les pays de langue française, câbles et lignes françaises de navigation, Claudius Madrolle. La France, ses colonies et les pays de langue française, câbles et lignes françaises de navigation (1894).

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⁶¹ Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, a/s communication d’une note de M. Gandon sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry, 22 Juin 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.
Another means of promoting the importance of French India was through the French Indian Pavilion at the *Exposition coloniale internationale de Paris* in 1931, which provided a specialised site that foregrounded a particular image of what French India was. The Exposition ran from May to November 1931 in the Bois de Vincennes, in the eastern part of Paris. The dates of the exhibition coincided with the centenary of the French conquest of Algeria (1830), as well as the finalisation of Gabriel Hanotaux and Alfred Martineau’s compilation of the *Histoire des colonies françaises et de l’expansion française dans le monde*. Martineau was a former administrator of French India, and the publication detailed France’s colonial exploits and the diversity of her empire.\(^62\) The exhibition welcomed over 8 million visitors, testifying to the success of the entreprise that had been orchestrated by Marshall Louis Hubert Gonzalve Lyautey (1854 – 1943), a French army officer and the first French Resident-Général in Morocco from 1921 to 1925.\(^63\) He was known as the ‘pacifier’ of Morocco, Madagascar, and Indochina, and his name resonated with colonial success. At the age of seventy-seven, when most career men enjoy retirement, Lyautey was appointed *Commissaire Général de l’Exposition* to coordinate this colonial celebration. The Exposition formed part of a French tradition of specialised fairs and carnival-like exhibitions, earlier examples of which took place in Rouen in 1896, Marseille in 1906 and 1922, Bordeaux in 1907, and Roubaix in 1911. More specifically, the Exposition of 1931 emerged out of the success of the *Exposition Universelle de Paris 1900*, which included a colonial section.\(^64\)

In contrast to previous eclectic and festival-like exhibitions, Lyautey wanted the 1931 Exposition to educate the French public as well as stimulate investment in the colonies. While the

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\(^{64}\) Morton, *op.cit.*, p. 71.
Exposition was aimed at enticing the interest of the business community and the general public, it was also intended to glorify the French civilising mission and highlight the colonial accomplishments of France. The challenge of the exhibition was to remain a coherent space that could entertain as well as offer the illusion of ‘an ordered domain in which every thing and every person had its proper place’; it had to incite curiosity and pride, not overwhelm or cause anxiety. With the Exposition, Lyautey offered a specific ‘colonial’ vision of the world organised along racial lines and modelled on a hierarchical order. Architecture was one of the primary means in which this stereotyped order was expressed and exemplified by the pavilions. Depicting the evolutionary progress of French colonies in architecture was a demanding task, and resulted in hybrid pavilions whose purpose was to appear primitive and exotic while complying to the imperatives of designing buildings appropriate for Paris and its public. At the apex of this colonial order stood European civilisation, as reflected in the impressive art-deco French pavilions of the Cité des Informations, the Section Métropolitaine, and the Musée des colonies, all of which represented French power, sophistication, technological advancement, and knowledge. The Cité des Informations provided education and information on the colonies, while the Section Métropolitaine exhibited goods and materials produced for export to the French colonies. The Musée des colonies was a ‘clearing-house for information on the results and techniques on French colonisation’.

The pavilions of Asian and African colonies were built to reproduce a certain image that was already present in French minds, and to enable a cultural objectification of the colonies. The vision of French India was reflected in the Exposition coloniale’s booklet entitled ‘L’Inde française’ (Fig. 1). The main themes of exoticism, voyages, commercial ventures, and history associated with French India were portrayed in a streamlined art-deco image that appeared on the front page of the booklet. The very simplified map shows, at the bottom left corner, a deserted winding road

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65 Ibid., pp. 73-7
66 Ibid., p. 79.
lined with coconut trees, an image that seems to symbolise long distances in an exotic environment. Located in the top left hand corner of the map, France is linked to India via the Mediterranean, the Suez Canal, and the Indian Ocean; here waterways play a crucial part, and help emphasise the technological success of the Suez Canal that allowed a quick link to the French establishments dotted all along the Indian coastline. Surprisingly, a sailing ship is depicted, which contrasts with the fuel-powered ships of the 1930s and seems, in such an instance, to recall and accentuate the era of earlier conquests and the pre-1814 French influence in India. While the depiction of waterways, roads, and a ship offers an image of transport links between France and French India, there was in fact, as mentioned later in the booklet, maritime communication only between Marseille and Pondichéry, not the other comptoirs.68 The scarce writing in the pamphlet consists of a very large title, ‘L’Inde française’ in the top third of the document, the names of the five comptoirs – with Pondichéry in larger characters demonstrating its administrative and economic importance – and finally, at the bottom, ‘Exposition Coloniale Internationale 1931’. The poster as a whole attributes to French India an important place in this impressive exhibition.

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Fig. 1: Cover of *L’Inde française*. A booklet printed for the occasion of the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale*, Paris, 1931. Source: Gallica.bnf.fr

The French India pavilion was located at the western end of the *Grande Avenue des Colonies Françaises*, near the *Route des Fortifications*, and was placed between the pavilions of
French Somalia and French Guiana, and across from that of New Caledonia (Fig. 2). There was no obvious geographical, historical, or political logic to the location of the various exhibition buildings; this was indeed an unusual organisation of French colonies, and pavilions were often inconsistent to the type of buildings originally found in the colony. Although French India, with its five hundred square kilometres, was the second smallest of the French overseas territories after Saint-Pierre et Miquelon at twenty-four square kilometres, the French India pavilion was given a prominent place in the Exposition, reflecting the long history with France of these tiny territories.

70 Ageron, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
The French India pavilion was represented by a mixture of Hindu art and architecture conceived by the architects Henri Girvès and René Sors; most of the professionals involved in the building and the decoration of the pavilion were French, and they probably had little experience of the ‘real’ French India.\textsuperscript{71} The artists worked closely with a committee made up of colonial officers, the mayor of Pondichéry, the presidents of the Pondichéry chambers of commerce and agriculture, and the directors of schools and public services in Pondichéry.\textsuperscript{72} Jo Ginestou, head of the political department at the Colonial Ministry, was Commissioner of French India at the

\textsuperscript{71} Exposition coloniale, \textit{L’Inde française}, op.cit., pp. 15-32.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 6.
Exposition assisted by a Mr Gaudart, an engineer in French India. The organisers admitted that the pavilion was not an exact replica of an actual building since it had to follow the stylised instructions dictated by Lyautey.

The French India pavilion fitted a particular, preconceived idea of glorification and exoticism. It was a large, square edifice with an elaborately-decorated turret on its flat roof. Surprisingly, no statue of Dupleix, the symbol of the French Indian empire, welcomed the visitor to the pavilion. Like the sphinx guarding the entrance of Egyptian temples, statues of two large elephants adorned the entrance of the pavilion (Fig. 3), even though this was not a feature seen in Hindu architectural styles. The image of the elephant was strongly associated with French India, and might also have epitomised the strength and durability of the French presence in the East despite British colonial rivalry and supremacy. (A stylised art-deco representation of an elephant was used to decorate the first page of one of the Exposition booklets (Fig. 4)). Just past the front entrance, visitors stood on a veranda decorated with Hindu statues and exotic plants (Fig. 5); a second entrance led to a courtyard, in the middle of which was erected a statue of Nataraja, a depiction of the god Shiva as the cosmic dancer (Fig. 6).

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73 Ibid., p. 18.
75 *Exposition Internationale Coloniale 1931*, AOM, EC1/145.
Fig. 3: The French Indian Pavilion at the Exposition Coloniale, Paris 1931. Source: Quand l'Inde Française était à Paris, Gouvernement de l'Inde Française et M. Jo. Ginestou, Commissaire de l'Inde Française.
Fig. 4 Cover of the booklet ‘Quand l'Inde française était à Paris’ for the *Exposition Coloniale Internationale, Paris 1931*. Source: Gouvernement de l'Inde Française et M. Jo. Ginestou, Commissaire de l'Inde Française à l'Exposition Coloniale et Internationale de Paris 1931, *Quand l'Inde Française était à Paris*. 
Fig. 5: External veranda of the French Indian Pavilion at the *Exposition Coloniale*, Paris 1931. Source: Gouvernement de l’Inde Française et M. Jo. Ginestou, Commissaire de l’Inde Française à l’Exposition Coloniale et Internationale de Paris 1931, *Quand l’Inde Française était à Paris.*
Fig. 6: Internal courtyard of the French Indian Pavilion at the *Exposition Coloniale*, Paris 1931. Source: Gouvernement de l'Inde Française et M. Jo. Ginestou, Commissaire de l'Inde Française à l'Exposition Coloniale et Internationale de Paris 1931, *Quand l'Inde Française était à Paris*.
The courtyard was surrounded by three rooms: on the left from the second entrance was a room devoted to commerce; opposite the entrance was a room devoted to the arts, and finally to the right was the history room. Two small rooms at the extreme left and right corners near the main entrance were allocated to a guard and also used as an office. Objects and furniture made by French Indian artisans, Hindu art works from private and state collections, and memorabilia from the French Indian archives helped furnish and decorate the three exhibition rooms. The main themes throughout the pavilion were daily life in French India, historical connection with France, the exoticism of India, and the fusion of India and France. Hence it presented a Franco-Indian cultural heritage that helped praise France’s overseas accomplishments. These themes were expressed through the display of numerous wooden and bronze statues of Hindu deities, Shiva, Ganesh, Rama, and Vishnu, reminding the visitors of the omnipotence of Hindu culture in French India, while omitting Muslim and Christian cultural aspects.

Other objects in the Exposition included cookware, jewellery, and utensils made of copper, silver, and wood, and wicker baskets. They all showcased local craftsmanship and gave an insight into the type of items used in everyday life such as for cooking, carrying food, and personal embellishment. French influences were felt in the heavily sculpted wooden home furniture: beds, dining tables, side tables, chairs, armchairs, mantelpieces, cabinets, wardrobes, picture frames, and mounted clocks. Panels and images carved on this wooden furniture represented Hindu scenes, Hindu deities, and exotic animals such as tigers and elephants. The association of Indian fauna and Hindu religious figures with European style home furniture demonstrated the fusion of French and Indian cultures. However, such furniture could only be accessible to Europeans, those of French descent, and a few French Indians such as renonçants or wealthy Indians who had adopted aspects of French lifestyle. Money and spacious homes were necessary to acquire such large and elaborately carved furnishings. To complete the

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76 Plan du pavillon de l'Inde française, AOM, EC1/145.
ensemble, the exhibition room walls were decorated with intricately patterned bed throws, carpets, and what seemed to be silk and cotton fabrics, a reminder that the Compagnie’s ships had travelled across high seas in pursuit of these sought-after products, while snake skins and turtle shells on display accentuated the exoticism of French India.\textsuperscript{78}

The painted murals ornamenting the three main rooms depicted Indian daily scenes. Hindu deities such as ‘Krishna asking the moon to his mother’, ‘Deliverance of Markanda’, ‘Krishna Leads the Chattel’, and ‘Shiva Watching over Parvati’s Sleep’ could be found in the Arts room. In the History room, the walls were adorned with scenes entitled ‘Friendly Meeting between the French and Hindu chiefs’ and ‘Naval Battle’ – supposedly between the French and the English. Finally, in the Commerce room one could admire ‘The Potter and the Sculptor at Work’.\textsuperscript{79}

The heavily adorned building and the use of Hindu objects helped expose the sophistication of the ancient Hindu culture, which still remained a source of fascination to the Europeans, while the murals depicting naval battles reminded visitors of the long Franco-Indian history. Following Lyautey’s instructions, the exterior of the French Indian pavilion attempted to remain as ‘real’ as possible, while the interior exhibits were meant to display French civilisation’s influence.

However, there were few similarities between the French India pavilion and the flat-roofed, traditional houses found in the Indian quarter of Pondichéry, which instead comprised a veranda with timber columns supporting a tiled, sloping roof. The entrance was from the street through a fine, carved, timber door and then through a main corridor. All the rooms opened onto this corridor, which led to a courtyard, where food storage, reception, and kitchen areas could be found. Affluent Indians mixed traditional Indian, primarily Dravidian, styles of architecture with colonial-style elements such as a French façade and windows with French shutters. The colonial style could also be noticed in the upper floors, where European decorative motifs were used on


wall panels. 80 Although the French Indian pavilion of the Exposition had a veranda, its Indian-style, decorated columns did not support a sloping roof, and the columned turret on top of the flat roof was uncharacteristic of French Indian architecture. In addition, the three rooms were only for the display of objects, and none of the rooms were dedicated to the kitchen and living quarters.81

Pursuant Lyautey’s instructions, then, the French India pavilion fulfilled its role, reminding the visitor of the long history that connected France and India and exhibiting the exoticism of India through the use of objects and symbols, all encapsulated in a mausoleum-like pavilion guarded by two oversized statues of elephants. Like the maps discussed above, the Exposition helped to manipulate and transform the insignificance of French India into a more important strategic colonial asset where French was spoken and French Indians rallied to the motherland at times of difficulty. These forms of representation also helped the ‘objectification’ of India to meet specific purposes of national aggrandisement.82 They projected an image of the success of the French cultural mission and the extent of the French colonial influence, while limiting the effect of l’Inde perdue (lost India) a concept highlighting Franco-British rivalries that was manifested more conspicuously in literary forms, newspapers, and official documents.

The myth of l’Inde perdue

As outlined in Chapter 1, Dupleix’s recall from India in 1754 and France’s defeat after the Seven Years’ War (1756-1763) marked the end of any dreams of colonial expansion in India, and the beginning of the construct of a French India myth. The myth helped transform the failure of French colonial expansion in India to that of a triumph associated with French imperial grandeur, even though Dupleix’s influence over the Deccan had been ephemeral. The myth provided the French with a colonial identity that had spatial, political, and cultural components. In this myth,

80 Weber, Les établissements, op.cit., p.1215 bis; The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, op.cit., pp. 91-2, 97-100.
81 The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, op.cit., p.128.
82 Cohn, op.cit.
India was given a dual role to perform; she became the site where colonial rivalries between France and Britain could be expressed, while at the same time she was the space to be conquered. The myth of *l’Inde perdue* elevated France as a liberating alternative to the colonial despotism of Britain, often referred to as ‘perfidious Albion’. By 1814, the reduction of France into minuscule and defenceless territories along the Indian coastline further cemented anti-British views first uttered by French philosophers such as Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and the Abbé Raynal, who had reacted to France’s defeat in India in 1763. Nonetheless, the colonial and historical particularities of French India provided a space where representations were fashioned within a triangular model that consisted of the colonised (India), the subordinate coloniser (France), and the dominant coloniser (Britain).

France’s colonial impetus under the Third Republic, combined with education and mass printing, facilitated the production of colonial novels. From the turn of the century, French travellers and writers contributed to this process by creating images constructed around the myth of lost India. Pierre Loti, the pen name of Julien Viaud (1850-1923), a French naval officer and in his time a celebrated bestselling novelist, wrote *L’Inde (sans les Anglais)* (*India without the English*) between 1899 and 1901 while on a mission for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His impressions of India provided a nostalgic image of Pondichéry. First of all, as indicated by the title, Loti intended to discover an India untouched by France’s colonial nemesis, and never once mentioned the British in this account of his Indian travels. While his Anglophobia was stressed in the book’s dedication to Boer President Kruger and the heroes of the Transvaal, regarded as the face of South African resistance to the British, he did not mind using British technology – such as

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84 Pierre Loti, *L’Inde (sans les Anglais)* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1903); Loti was sent to present a French decoration to the Maharajah of Travancore and to carry out some other minor commissions, Michael G. Lerner, *Pierre Loti* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), pp. 103-5; the title was suggested by his friend Emile Vedel, Loti had originally titled the book *Dans l’Inde encore Indienne*, Lemer, op.cit., footnote 16, p. 158.
trains – on his quest for a mythical India that had been unaffected by colonialism.\textsuperscript{85} Another example of his flawed search for an ancient India untouched by Western influence is his sojourn for ten days in Pondichéry to indulge in French colonial memories.\textsuperscript{86}

Loti described Pondichéry as a ‘vieille ville éteinte’ (old defunct colony) like Saint-Louis du Sénégal, another Old Regime possession.\textsuperscript{87} He relished Pondichéry’s old-fashioned buildings, which went back to a time when ships adventurously sailed to India via the cape of Good Hope, and Pondichéry’s old French charm that newer French colonies of the Far East – probably referring to Indochina – did not possess. He emphasised how Indians were proud to be French, signalling the civic ideal of ‘Frenchness’ that supposedly contrasted the lack of a similar ideal amongst British Indians. While Loti reminisced on his childhood dreams of exotic and far-flung French India before the Suez Canal considerably shortened the trip, he pointed out that the isolation of this ‘vieille petite ville’ (little old town) was due to its ‘hostile neighbours’. Although he again refrained from naming the British, he blamed them for the lack of port facilities and electricity, both of which resulted in few visitors or tourists disembarking on Pondichéry’s shores. Loti melancholically recalled that within Pondichéry’s walls existed ‘tout un passé français’ (an entire chapter of ancient French history), and that Dupleix’s statue reminded him of a ‘grandeur passée’ (bygone greatness) when France had broader influence in India.\textsuperscript{88} In this account, Loti longingly reflects on the former glory of French India, which the unnamed British had reduced to a few isolated and underprivileged territories that no one ever dared venture. It is as if, in the eyes of Loti, the British had dimmed the light out of Pondichéry but the place nevertheless remained a beacon of Frenchness, of exoticism, and of splendid memories.

In 1913, Marcel Genlis published \textit{Dans l’ incendie tropical}, a journal of his travels through

\textsuperscript{85} Loti, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 369.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., p. 224; for a discussion on Pierre Loti’s contradictions of writing sympathetically about the colonised while being a French naval officer, see Hélène de Burgh, \textit{Sex, Sailors and Colonies Narratives of ambiguity in the works of Pierre Loti} (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), Chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{87} Loti, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 213.
South and South-East Asia in which he similarly uses images of melancholia, exoticism, myth, and colonial success.\(^\text{89}\) He begins with the following:

> Pondichéry est exquis, c’est du Paul et Virginie le plus pur, c’est resté du temps où les oncles n’étaient toujours pas encore d’Amérique, mais des Grandes Indes, c’est charmant, un peu ridicule…. (Pondichéry is exquisite, it is pure Paul and Virginie, it has remained the same as when the uncles were not yet from America, but from Great India, it is charming, almost ridiculous….)

The author implies that the beauty and calm aspect of Pondichéry contrast starkly with the other places he had just visited in India. Genlis then moves on to compare Pondichéry to a 1787 romantic novel, *Paul et Virginie* by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, in which the author evokes an idealistic life where all races are equal and inhabitants live in perfect harmony with nature. With this reference, Genlis links Pondichéry with the Old Regime, thus establishing historical continuity between France and India despite the many losses and territorial retrocessions France had suffered in India.

Genlis’ use of the expression ‘l’oncle d’Amérique’, referring to a not-so-distant family member who has left for America and made a fortune there, evokes a bygone time when adventurers could be rewarded with fabulous wealth in the Indies well before America offered the same opportunities. However, although archival sources cannot confirm whether individual adventurers actually did amass fortunes in India, the reality most probably did not meet the high expectations of those who chose to disembark there in pursuit of such riches. For every successful person, many more would have died of disease or violent death, or just barely

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survived. Genlis’ use of such language nevertheless further contributed to the myth-making surrounding French India. Compared to Loti, who never once mentioned the British, Genlis almost apologises for such a charming town that still exists amongst a much more imposing and oppressive British India. He also mentions that, before reaching Pondichéry, he spent the long train journey conversing with a young British colonial servant, a reminder of the omnipresence of the British Raj.

Genlis uses all the standard markers of colonial commentary. He mentions the heat and the vegetation, the exoticism of India, colonial architecture, missionaries and nuns, the créoles, and the French flags. All of these features remind the reader of France’s colonial presence and bring all the elements into fusion to suggest the uniqueness of French India, and indeed the greatness of France. However the overwhelming tone of the depiction – although the author never uses such specific terms – is that of a dream from which the visitor can hardly awaken, a dream of the time when France’s Indian empire existed until the British stripped it away. He finishes by saying, ‘I feel nowhere else the past being so present, so tangible, more of a siren call than here’.

Epitomising past glories, French India is now portrayed as an alluring and dangerous woman who perhaps invites French patriotic heroes to reconquer India.

The author’s strong nostalgic sentiment for French India exemplifies a recurrent theme since the nineteenth century when India was formulated as an earthly paradise, and a belief developed that the French would have imposed their power across India if it were not for British interference. Representations of French India in French literature faced the challenge of writing about the loss of French India and about an India that had undeniably become a British India.

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91 ‘on sent monter une mélancolie poignante et douce, on a envie de sourire et la gorge serrée, on regrette un peu douloureusement, quelque chose, quelque chose… on ne sait plus quoi ! Je crois que nulle part le passé est plus présent, plus tangible, plus sirène que là.’ Genlis, op. cit., pp. 228-9.
Painful loss could be obliterated by creating cultural borders that emphasised the differences between French and British forms of colonialism, where French values offered a more ideal form of governance. Marcel Fauchois, for example, emphasised the dualistic opposition of the two European powers. His description of his visit to Pondichéry was reproduced in the monthly *L’Inde illustrée* in July 1933. He notes that the French town was not plagued with famine and filth like Madras, thus emphasising the virtue of French colonialism compared to that of the British. While Genlis uses French India to reminisce on a glorious past and a French empire ultimately crushed by the British, Fauchois brings French India into play in order to highlight Britain’s brutal administration and its consequences for the inhabitants.

In 1927, the American author Katherine Mayo published a polemical attack on India entitled ‘Mother India’; the response by French authors Romain Rolland and André Philip is illuminating. Mayo painted a picture of India as one of decadence, poverty, and dread, and pointed to the blatant inability of India to become an independent nation. Some suggested the book might have been commissioned by the British – after all, it was written as the nationalist movement was gaining momentum – and all means possible were used to undermine it. Mayo’s book title in French became *L’Inde avec les Anglais* (India with the British), probably a take on Pierre Loti’s *L’Inde (sans les Anglais)* (India (without the British)). In 1930 Philip (1902-1970), a French politician under the *Front Populaire* who would later become Ministre de l’Économie in 1951 and a professor of political economy, published his rebuttal, called *l’Inde moderne*. Rolland (1866-1944), a French essayist and Nobel prize laureate for literature (1915) who adhered to the principles of pacifism, responded in a preface to the French version of Lajpat Rai’s book, entitled *l’Inde malheureuse* (1930). Both studies were a counter-attack on Mayo’s work, which they denounced as evidence of the evil British exploitation of India. Philip confined his comments to

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93 Magedera, *op.cit.*, p. 66.
94 *L’Inde illustrée*, July 1933.
95 Ibid.
British India, omitting any mention of France as a colonising power in the same country, or any acknowledgement of the important French trade undertaken by the *Compagnie des Indes* in the eighteenth century. Instead, the author explained that the rise of Indian nationalism was a direct effect of British colonial presence, and that the determination of its leaders would probably lead India to independence.\(^\text{97}\) At no point does he question a similar scenario in French India or the impact that British Indian nationalism might have on French India. Rolland’s preface was a clear gesture of support for Rai’s criticism of Mayo’s propaganda, which he described as ‘so totally anti-Indian and so obviously pro-English’.\(^\text{98}\) Both authors’ blatant omission of French colonialism in India hints at France’s positive governance in India while condemning the British presence in the country.

Similarly, in *Désordres à Pondichéry*, written by Georges Lamare in 1938, French India is depicted as a haven of peace perturbed only by workers’ strikes for which the British are blamed. The author uses the growing nationalist movement in British India as evidence of British despotism; in contrast, France’s colonial righteousness is demonstrated by French India remaining untouched by nationalist troubles.\(^\text{99}\) Lamare’s focus on the dualistic opposition between France and Britain fails to acknowledge that the period of political and social unrest experienced by Pondichéry in 1936, which led to police repression, reflected a growing discontentment with French as well as British colonialism. Guidebooks also presented an idyllic portrayal of French India. In the *Guide des colonies françaises: colonies de l’Océan Indien et l’Océan Pacifique* (1931), Mahé is described as the ‘beautiful sleepy town …. and after admiring the beautiful monuments that manifest the richness of the Indian civilisation, one can understand the audacity of Dupleix and the greatness of his dreams.’\(^\text{100}\) Here the beauty of India is the justification for Dupleix’s attempt at conquering it, a task that, if successful, would have brought


\(^{98}\) Rai, op.cit., p. 311.

\(^{99}\) Kichenamourty, op.cit., p. 251.

untold prestige to France.

Official British and French reports too provided numerous examples of *l’Inde perdue*. The British viewed French India as an affront to their colonial power in India, an opinion expressed in rather derogatory ways. For them, French India was a perpetual irritant, a constant thorn, a ‘corrupt disease-ridden colony run by cheese-eating alcoholics, who did not care for latrines and policing, and who blamed the British for every ill-fate’. Reports from the British Consul-General in Pondichéry written in 1940 mentioned, with some sarcasm, the horrendous conditions the war had inflicted on the French in India:

A more serious situation [than keeping watch for German war ships] however has arisen in Pondichéry from the scarcity of the chief necessaries of life, such as camemberts, cheese, paté de foie gras, olive oil, and even certain wines, and important liqueurs such as Pernod. Happily at the end of January a French vessel arrived which remedied the serious conditions prevailing. So far as wine is concerned, the authorities in France have come to the rescue, and have allotted 85 hectolitres of Algerian wine to French India; a supply equivalent to 15000 pints, which should alleviate alcoholic distress for some time.

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101 Confidential Paper, South East Asia Department, 4 March 1949, NA, FO371/76086: *Relations between India and France and India and Portugal*.
102 5 July 1938 from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French Establishments in India, Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 6 January 1939 from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 28 February 1939 his Majesty’s Consul-General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 30 September 1940 Report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 29 July 1940 report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to secretary to the government of India in the external affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 30 September 1940 Report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*; 29 July 1940 report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to secretary to the government of India in the external affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*.
103 31 January 1940 from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: *French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945*.
Two months later, on 30 March 1940, another report stated:

A steamer has recently landed a fine cargo of booze, the enumeration of which proves how necessary alcohol is to the French constitution. Fifty-three barrels and 12 cases of vin ordinaire, 4 barrels and 90 cases of liqueur, 38 cases of Pernod, 74 cases of Rum, 51 cases of Champagne, 25 cases of Brandy, 15 cases of Vermouth, 20 cases of Dubonnet, 37 cases of wines. This is only one consignment of many ordered, and it is practically wholly for consumption locally by a small European population. The alcoholic outlook therefore is now less gloomy. In 1939 the consumption of Rum and Eau de Vie at Pondichéry came to the trifling figure of 44 casks and 1142 cases, which was 60% below the 1938 consumption. The figure of red wine was 730 barrels and 367 cases. It is difficult to say where it all goes to, but it is certainly not smuggled into British India.\(^{104}\)

The British Consul-General characterised French India as ‘the five tumble-down rotting French settlements [which] are a silent yet convincing proof of the incapacity of their owners to manage their territories’.\(^{105}\) The juxtaposition of British India and French India caused ongoing frictions, with the British accusing the French of Anglophobia: ‘The memory of the glories of Dupleix and the loss of a potential empire, as well as the contrast between the effective aims of British India and the gangsterism and corruption of these decrepit French territories still do not provoke neighbouring emotions’. In addition, the British believed that the June 1940 collapse of France only accentuated French resentment towards them: ‘The collapse of France has revived these anti-British, and anti-British Indian sentiments, as the French were disappointed that the

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\(^{104}\) 30 March 1940 from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945.

\(^{105}\) 30 November 1940 from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945.
entire British expeditionary force was not sacrificed to save their country, and they now insist that their calamities are our fault.¹⁰⁶

Indeed, the British Indian government regarded with suspicion the declaration of Louis Bonvin, Governor of French India, to rally to Free France in June 1940 as they believed the French Indian colonial authorities were pro-Vichy. The tension between tiny French India and British India following the June 1940 defeat is reflected in a number of newspaper articles and publications produced with the aim of eliminating any doubt as to French India’s loyalty and commitment. A file titled Inde – France libre, located in the archives of the Ministry of Overseas France, contains clippings from numerous British Indian newspapers that report, on many occasions, that French Indian colonial authorities refused to follow Vichy’s orders. The file demonstrates the importance the French attached to British Indian newspapers reporting on the way French India was rallying to the Allies.¹⁰⁷

A pamphlet written in 1942 attempted to diffuse any doubts the British authorities might have regarding the French Indian colonial government’s commitment to the Allies. The pamphlet reproduced a speech by Bonvin, in which it was emphasised that the Journal Officiel de la République et de l’Inde française (the local government official publication) was still being published with the letters ‘RF’, standing for République Française, and the motto ‘Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité’. Vichy publications on the other hand, the speech reminded readers, appeared under the title ‘État Français’ (French State) and with its motto ‘Travail, Famille, Patrie’ (Work, Family, Homeland).¹⁰⁸ The pamphlet also praised the loyalty of the whole French Indian population and its generous contributions to the war effort in the form of cash, food, and clothing. Finally, the governor proudly confirmed that seven hundred volunteers had been recruited and trained to fight

¹⁰⁶ 29 July 1940 report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul-General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/I/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945.
¹⁰⁷ AOM, Inde, G3: Dossier france libre
in the Middle East on behalf of Free France. Above all, these publications intended to depict the loyalty of the French Indian government and demonstrate that colonial rivalries endured even during the war. In June 1947, Col. Fletcher, the British Consul-General in Pondichéry, warned the Indian Interim Government that with the impending independence of India, the French were plotting to turn Pondichéry into a base for their new ambitions in India – a warning that Nehru totally dismissed. Fletcher’s statement expressed the anxiety that his government’s decision to withdraw would actually give the French the opportunity to fulfil their long-held dream of holding greater influence over India.

French officials adhered to the concept of *l’Inde perdue* because the five insignificant, impoverished pockets epitomised British perfidy and determination to annihilate any French effort in India. Despite the loss of power, the French frequently evoked the glorious past and saw ‘the five minuscule territories [with their 300,000 inhabitants] as a reminder of when France possessed all of India’, which of course was never the case. In 1942 a Mr Brutinel, *administrateur-adjoint de l’Inde francaise*, used this quotation for patriotic purposes and self-aggrandisement in the face of the hardship and the humiliation of the German occupation of France. The French liked to boast that their institutions, particularly the introduction of universal (male) suffrage, a higher standard of living, and free education, testified to the superiority of the French colonial system. French India provided a site for comparisons between the two colonial powers, and consequently for disdain of the British. However, a belief in democracy and in the role of France’s *mission civilisatrice* overlooked the fact that voting was denied to women until 1946, and that previous elections in the territories had resulted in violence and electoral fraud.

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109 Ibid, p. 3.
112 Brutinel, op.cit., p.1.
Moreover, French India was also plagued by outbreaks of cholera and poverty, and was subject to rice shortages, and education was far from free and accessible to all French Indian children.\textsuperscript{114}

Alongside this view of French India existed a counter-current within French India which challenged, but never fully overcame the myth. Some French officials, civil servants, journalists, and residents of French India provided an important variant on the theme of \textit{l'Inde perdue}. Although both the theme of ‘the beautiful dream of Dupleix’ and the slogan ‘French India is small in area, but great by her past’ persisted, many also moved beyond the mythical to view French India for what it really was, a neglected colony of the empire with limited budgets, few opportunities, and ongoing corruption.\textsuperscript{115}

Genlis’ lyrical description of Pondichéry, discussed above, was written only a couple of years after the territory had witnessed communal riots and political murders caused by brutal electoral corruption, a situation which saw the recall of Alfred Martineau, governor of the French Establishments in 1911.\textsuperscript{116} Such bloody events, likened to a civil war, were not uncommon, and stood in stark contrast to the righteousness of the French colonial administration depicted in the myth of French India.\textsuperscript{117} The assimilation policy that introduced universal (male) suffrage in French India had created havoc in the territories as it challenged the traditional Hindu organisation. Administrators even contemplated the possibility of disposing of some of the most troublesome French Indian territories in exchange for overseas British-held land.\textsuperscript{118} Martineau himself, whose extensive efforts to revive and preserve French India points to his vivid and long interest in French India and love for the country, questioned France’s colonial future there. The idea of exchanging territories exposes the readiness of some perceptive officials to dispose of insignificant and unruly territories, thus challenging the idea of a quiet and idyllic French India.

Curiously, Martineau’s experience of French India conflicted with his own belief in the

\textsuperscript{115} \textit{L’Inde illustrée}, September 1934.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., pp. 112, 114.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p.134.
myth of India. He became governor of French India in July 1910 – he occupied the position again in 1913-1914 and 1915-1918 – and while in the post, he dreamt of a quieter time before the assimilationists of the Third Republic tainted this ‘delightful and harmonious people’. Since the introduction of republican institutions had corrupted this ‘intelligent and peaceful people’, he suggested that suffrage, which in any case was not conducted freely, should be withdrawn altogether. His hope was that this strategy would help ‘return the colony to its previous state of calm and happiness’. But local politicians strongly opposed his stance, and he was recalled. In Martineau’s view, the constant state of civil strife was the product of zealous assimilationists unaware of the particularities of French Indian society. But in his attempt to turn back the clock to a more peaceful time, Martineau overlooked the fact that the introduction of democratic institutions had only accentuated tensions already present in French Indian society. His idyllic view of ‘gentle and peaceful’ French Indians, especially his underestimation of the skilfulness of local politicians in manoeuvring and influencing the Ministry, did not prepare him for the onslaught of opponents and his eventual recall. While Martineau lamented the difficulties in administering French India, he fell victim to his own interpretation of the French Indian myth in which the colony was inhabited by peaceful French Indians.

In contrast to Martineau, who contemplated exchanging French India for British-held territories while also dreaming of bygone times, in 1942, a Mr Josselin, Inspector of Public Education, commented that, with her 300 million inhabitants on a continent nine times the size of France, India generated a strong attraction onto France’s ‘five land scraps’. The civil servant noted that trade, culture, religions, language, and food were all conspicuously Indian. Similarly a report from the Ministry of Overseas France, written in June 1947, emphasised the difficulties that France would face should she decide to stay after the independence of India. It stated that, ‘to proclaim that we intend to remain is to proclaim the impossible, we cannot stay against the will of

120 Josselin ‘La difficulté de la culture française dans nos établissements de l’Inde: de quelques difficultés qu’elle y rencontre’ in L’Inde française dans la guerre, op.cit., unpaginated.
400 million inhabitants; this melodrama was only relevant during the time of Dupleix. With the ‘Quit India’ campaign gaining momentum in British India, Josselin’s comment indicates that the Indian space that had been so enduring in French and British colonial minds was rapidly becoming redundant, while the June report stressed the urgency of the problem that the impending independence of India would cause. France was now facing the ultimate territorial loss of her French Indian territories, a process that had begun in the 1756 battle against British forces. French India would soon be relegated to exactly what officials and travellers had continuously evoked: a mythical colonial past.

Commentaries by French Indian merchants and inhabitants provide a different slant on the vision of French India. In L’Inde Illustrée of July 1933, Fauchois offered the image of a pristine colony that was disease-free. But the same monthly magazine contradicted his point and implored colonial authorities to improve hygienic conditions in the territories, which were regularly struck by outbreaks of cholera and smallpox, and to tackle the issues of insalubrious housing and poor sewage system that contributed to the spreading of such diseases. L’Inde illustrée, a thirty-page magazine with a circulation of 300 copies, was launched in February 1933. The subtitle was Revue mensuelle de propagande et de documentation, and although its aim was to promote French India in France, overseas, and throughout the French colonies, it also included a section on British India. In October 1933, the magazine referred to the loges as ‘remnants of memory’, but also depicted French India as a place where economic opportunities still existed. Rather than blaming the British for French India’s economic stagnation, the magazine considered the myth of French India to be an unproductive pretext for administrative indifference. It therefore sought to replace the image of l’Inde perdue with one that could attract the interest of French

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123 L’Inde illustrée, October 1933.
business and parliamentary circles.\textsuperscript{124} In opposition to the general attitude of animosity towards British India, it advocated rapprochement with France’s colonial rival and criticised the French colonial administration for its apathy. In the same vein, the President of the Chamber of Commerce in Pondichéry, a Mr Colombani, commented that the bi-monthly maritime connection between France and French India had not resumed after the Second World War, and declared that ‘French Indians feel that they have been totally forgotten’.\textsuperscript{125} It was no longer a case of \textit{L’Inde perdue} as a \textit{mythical} construct, but rather its \textit{reality}, a point that did not go unnoticed by anti-colonial French Indians.

Given the encirclement of the French territories by the British, French India appeared to the most anti-French French Indians as a bulwark against British imperialism, at least until a louder nationalist voice emerged from India in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{126} For those French Indians who supported the freedom movement, French India provided the site for colonial criticism. While French novelists and travellers viewed French India as a peaceful haven spared from British colonialism, pro-nationalist French Indians used the Tamil and French publications of the satirical weekly \textit{Sri Soudjanaranndjani} to describe French India as being in a state of lethargy, in which ‘atavism of servitude has muffled any buds of freedom’. They advanced the views that only Gandhian strategy could help French India challenge French colonial oppression and corruption, that only colonial history separated French India from British India, and that their common nationalist aspirations would eventually bring the two together.\textsuperscript{127}

After the Second World War, the \textit{Trait d’Union} became the mouthpiece of the French educated elite. At this time a monthly, the paper displayed on its first page an iconography of Mother India (Fig. 7), first drawn in 1905 and inspired by Abanindranath Tagore’s (1871-1951)
portrayal of *Bharat Mata*, or Mother India. The four-armed Hindu goddess, who is standing on a pedestal with a lotus flower, is placed at the centre of the map of India; in her left hand she holds a banner on which is written ‘Swaraj’ (self-rule). The function of cartographically displaying the female body is to associate the notion of the nation as motherland. In addition, the use of this iconic representation in a French Indian newspaper helped promote the French Indian nationalist cause and connect it to the Indian independence movement led by Gandhi and the INC. The monthly was published in French by French-educated French Indians who understood that French India would eventually be part of India but campaigned for the maintenance of French culture. Yet in the April and May 1947 editions, the paper denounced French culture as an instrument of imperialism, and compared France’s internal political crisis with the ‘formidable political evolution’ of India that was rapidly evolving and growing from strength to strength on the way to independence. While India is represented as a young, vibrant, and determined nation on the way to becoming a great power, France is depicted as a decrepit and aging nation that needed to see the value of allying itself with India.

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128 According to the BNF catalogue, the newspaper reappeared in 1944 as a monthly but no copies are available before 1947; there is a reference to the earlier editions in *Trait d’Union* of November 1952.
130 Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.*, p. xx.
131 *Trait d’Union*, May 1947.
Indian newspapers regarded the five comptoirs and loges as 'foreign pimples on the back of Mother India', an image that presented the territories as infected and India as requiring to be cleansed of this colonial disease.\textsuperscript{133} In 1948, The Leader commented that, with a combined population of nearly one million inhabitants, the foreign territories were leeches clutching onto the newly independent Indian nation of 400 million inhabitants. The same article depicted them as 'many Gilbratars', and both remarks projected an image of French colonial strongholds that challenged the vigor of the new Indian nation. The negative imagery was aimed at French presence rather than French Indians, who were perceived as culturally and historically part of

\textsuperscript{133} Bharat Jyoti, no date, AD, Inde, Vol. 79: Presse et propagande; Sentinel, 18 November 1946 quoted in Consulat de France à Bombay, 19 Novembre 1946, AD, Inde, Vol. 79: Presse et propagande.
For Nehru, the means of incorporation were by far the most important issue, as he stated in a speech to the Jaipur committee in December 1948:

We have a large number of intricate problems before us, but this particular problem of foreign possessions within our territory is probably one of the smallest. It is inevitable that it has to be solved in a particular way. There might be a little delay or difficulty in its solution, but it is not in the larger context of India a really difficult problem. What is the major issue before us? It is quite inevitable that these foreign possessions should cease to be foreign and should be incorporated politically within the India union. That is a big thing. That is the policy which India must necessarily adopt because we cannot admit any foreign foothold on the continent of India. But to give effect to that policy, we have to pursue international methods. We have to deal with foreign governments. As a Government, and as a great organisation which is intimately connected with that Government, we cannot proceed in a non-governmental way. It is for the people of those territories to do what they like, but we cannot go about approaching this problem in a non-governmental way.\textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{135}}

Diplomacy and negotiations at governmental level would eliminate the foreign presence in India, and despite their anachronism, foreign possessions were not, in Nehru’s words, a priority since other national matters demanded attention. What Nehru exposed was that when Britain withdrew, and India became the new power, representations of French India could no longer be fashioned within a triangular model. This was now to be replaced by a dual model that consisted of India as an independent nation and France as a former subordinate coloniser. While the previous model focused on ‘India’ as the colonial space where two colonial rivals competed,

\textsuperscript{134} The Leader (Allahabad), 21 December 1948.
\textsuperscript{135} Nehru, \textit{SWJN, op.cit.}, Vol. 8, p. 425.
within the new model the attention had shifted to French India as a space contested by two entities. For the Indian government, French India had to be integrated, while France continued to claim legitimacy based on historical, political, institutional, and cultural factors that helped constitute a grand vision of French India. Above all, with Britain’s imminent withdrawal the perception that France’s model of colonialism was a better alternative to the British approach had become obsolete.

**Conclusion**

French India was a mere remnant of the former French trading outposts dotted along the Indian coastline. It had limited economic value, and territorial particularities that reflected the outcome of Franco-British rivalry for supremacy in India. The dependency of the enclaves on British India for the supply of basic necessities, the marginalisation of the territories, their disparate location on the subcontinent, and the lack of defence forces were all elements that defined French India as a subordinate colonial power in India. This adverse situation was redressed to an extent by the construction of the myth of a French Indian empire, a myth that was based on Dupleix’s ephemeral influence over the Deccan in the eighteenth century, and which served to provide historical continuity and stability in the face of political changes in the métropole and in the territories.

Although small and defenceless, French India was used as a prism through which various representations were projected. Maps, a major exposition, travelogues, literary accounts, official reports, and newspapers were used to produce images that exposed tensions between two colonial rivals, rising nationalist demands, France’s neglect for her tiny territories, and a space to reminisce on past imperial glory. With the imminent British withdrawal, colonial rivalries were replaced by national and colonial tensions.
PART TWO

COMPETING CLAIMS OF SOVEREIGNTY
Chapter 3

French India and India’s Independence

The British declaration of February 1947 that they would withdraw from India before June 1948 had nothing to do with French India, and the people of French India themselves would decide their fate and future to merge with the Indian Union or remain within the French Union…. The French Indian community of 300,000 souls will be lost in the fusion with the mass of four hundred millions people without benefit for anyone. (François Baron, French India Governor).\(^1\)

In free India there should be no such thing as French or Portuguese India, there should be no trace of foreign rule whatsoever. That is incompatible with the independence of India, which is one and indivisible. (Bombay Sentinel, 18 November 1946).\(^2\)

French India was small, defenceless and economically insignificant. Why, then, did France decide to retain her territories in the face of rising Indian nationalism and mounting anti-colonial criticism in the post-war world? The announcement in February 1947, by the British Labour government of Clement Attlee that Britain would withdraw from India brought into focus the presence of the two remaining subordinate colonial powers on the subcontinent, France and Portugal, and the difficulties the declaration of an independent India would have on their status.

\(^1\) Quoted in Geetha, \textit{op.cit}, p. 114.
\(^2\) \textit{Bombay Sentinel}, 18 November 1946 quoted in Consulat de France à Bombay, 19 November 1946, AD, Inde, Vol. 79: \textit{Presse et propagande}. 
The issue was exacerbated by the new French constitution, which made French India, like other French overseas territories, an indivisible part of the Fourth Republic (1946-1958) that could only secede via referendum. This chapter will argue that, because France certainly considered French India to be important, based on ideas of national grandeur, historical continuity, and a belief in the strategic value of the comptoirs in relation to the rest of the empire, this conviction did not prepare her civil servants to face the impending issue of India’s independence and the determination of her national leaders to finalise India’s nation-building process. I will also suggest that France’s decision to hand over the loges, considered as a gesture of goodwill, conflicted with her claim to maintain sovereignty over French India, and indeed had the unintended effect of supporting India’s legitimate demands for the repossession of all of French India. Finally, this chapter will examine the question of the Customs Union agreement of 1941, which initially represented an arrangement between two colonial rivals (France and Britain). When India exercised her right to denounce the convention, she signalled her confidence in using whatever means necessary to reach the goal of repossessing French India. By thus revealing and exploiting French India’s vulnerability, India weakened France’s case for retaining her colonial territories. As will be shown, while this situation greatly affected the local population, French metropolitan opinion seemed to remain unaware and indifferent to the fate of French India.

**French India will remain French**

A number of reasons can be advanced to explain why France chose to retain her small, discontinuous, and economically insignificant French Indian territories at a time when Britain was negotiating a withdrawal agreement with the Indian Provisional Government. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, France’s presence in India was historically associated with the memory of one of its most famous administrators. Dupleix’s territorial expansion in India, had the long-standing

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effect of evoking colonial nostalgia and admiration for French endeavours in India, and serving as an important historical point of reference for French officials. Maurice Schumann, who was sent to New Delhi in August 1947 as an emissary of French President Vincent Auriol, referred to the enclaves as ‘the heritage of Dupleix’. At the time Schumann was a journalist, but he would later hold various positions as minister between 1968 and 1973, including as Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs between 1951 and 1954. Similarly, Georges Tailleur, the last administrator of Chandernagor, emphasised the association of Dupleix and French India by writing an account of his posting entitled Chandernagore ou le lit de Dupleix. The title referred to the bed in which, it is believed, Dupleix slept, and which has since become a colonial relic on exhibition in the former French Governor’s residence – now a museum – in Chandernagor. This form of nostalgia provided a sense of stability, especially after the recent humiliation of France in June 1940 and the ensuing occupation by German forces. The loss of her freedom was perceived at the time as the most serious crisis for France in modern times. The new government, led by Marshal Pétain and operating from Vichy since the capital was under occupation, collaborated with the Germans, while General de Gaulle launched a resistance movement from London that epitomised defiance and the survival of a democratic France.

There was also a cultural reason for remaining in India. France’s belief in her cultural superiority had played an important role in her nineteenth-century colonial expansion, especially with the introduction of education, suffrage, and the debate over the citizenship of colonial subjects. These initiatives were all seen as proof of France’s destiny in propagating the universal principles promulgated by the Revolution.

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5 Tailleur, op.cit.
7 Déclaration du gouvernement au sujet de l’Inde française, lue à la Tribune de l’Assemblée Nationale par Mr Coste-Floret, Ministre de la FOM, 8 Juin 1948, AD, Inde française, Vol. 24: Chandernagor; Gildea, op.cit., pp. 139-56; Gabrielle Parker, ‘Francophonie et universalité: évolution de deux idées jumelles’, in Pascal Blanchard et al. (eds),
liked to remind opponents of the French presence in India that France gave universal suffrage to
French India while Britain did not, a fact that helped to demarcate French colonialism as a better
option to the British variety and to underline France’s colonial mission. Moreover, ‘superior’
French laws made French Indians ‘citoyens français’. But while the history of suffrage in French
India, starting with the right to elect a deputy, was linked to enlightened post-Revolution cultural
policy, Britain had been forced, following the nationalist uprisings that had erupted in Bengal in
1905, to introduce a series of constitutional changes granting limited male and female suffrage in
British India, a fact that was plainly brushed aside by the French.

The demarcation between French and British colonial policy was more complex than the
biased French commentaries allowed. Indeed, the 1909 Morley-Minto Reforms in British India
allowed a restricted suffrage for election to British Indian legislative assemblies. The electoral
base was limited to a small minority of Indian men who qualified for office on the basis of land
ownership and education. A decade after the Morley-Minto reforms, the Government of India Act
1919 removed the sex disqualification and awarded women with sufficient property the right to
vote and, later, the right to stand for election or nomination. Although this right was limited to less
than one percent of women, or about one million, who met the extremely restrictive property and
income qualification, British Indian women were introduced to suffrage well before French Indian
women, who had to wait until 1946. The female vote in British India was bound up with the
women’s suffrage movement in Britain, while during the same period French women’s suffrage
was less successful because maternalist French policies placed great emphasis on the pivotal
role of French women as mothers and wives, thus denying them a greater role in the public

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9 NRFOM, March 1953.
10 Gail Pearson, ‘Tradition, law and the female suffrage movement in India’, in Louise Edwards and Mina Roces (eds.), Women’s Suffrage in Asia: Gender, Nationalism and Democracy (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 195-219; Muthulakshmi Reddy from Madras was the first Indian woman to sit in an Indian legislature in 1921, Candy, op.cit., pp.192, 194. In Britain, only women over the age of thirty were given the right to vote in 1918, they had to wait until 1928 to be given the same right as men and be able to vote at the age of twenty-one, Sinha, op.cit., pp. 224-5.
Nehru campaigned tirelessly for the provincial assembly general elections of March 1937, asserting that thirty millions voters were needed to choose representatives. Although this number represented only a small percentage of the adult British Indian population, it was nonetheless far from being negligible.

In addition to the historical and cultural justifications for France’s determination to remain in India, the territories were also linked to France’s sense of national grandeur, prestige, and honour. The feeling was expressed clearly by Gaston Monnerville, who would become President of Council (the Senate under the Fourth Republic). He declared to the Constituent Assembly, “Without the Empire, France would only be a liberated country; thanks to the Empire, France is a victorious nation”. The statement stresses the importance of the overseas empire for the motherland, and the urgency for France in re-establishing sovereignty. Even though little material advantage was gained from such tiny territories, their existence contributed national grandeur and international prestige to a nation that had been diminished by German occupation and the Vichy collaboration. French India, as one of the oldest French colonies together with Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane, Senegal, and La Réunion, provided a sense of pride and historical continuity between France and her empire, and this connection was used as a historical resource to legitimate France’s renewed role in a post-war era.

In the view of French leaders, epitomised by General de Gaulle, reasserting France’s overseas empire and her colonial mission were still the best means to regain her national prestige and supremacy. Her revived colonial programme, discussed at the Brazzaville conference (30 January – 8 February 1944), resulted in a Gaullist declaration of France’s determination and

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13 Quoted in Raoul Girardet, L’idée coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962 (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1972), p. 196; Secret 17 May 1948 from Frank Robert to Sir Cecil Syers CRO Downing Street, London re: visit to French Ambassador in India (Mr Lévi), NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
15 Rajkumar, op.cit., p. 20; Gildea, op.cit., pp. 139-56.
16 Kaufmann, op.cit., p. 462.
ability to continue her role as a leading colonial power. Even though there were attempts at formulating a new colonial policy based on assimilation, this did not significantly differ from pre-war colonial policy or from Vichy’s colonial stand. Indeed, the Vichy government considered the empire an invaluable asset; not only did it continue to confer upon France an important political role, especially since Germany had no colonies, but it also helped propagate at home the myth that France was still an independent nation. Similarly, de Gaulle used the empire to boost France’s importance. He continued to express earlier paternalistic attitudes in order to meet nationalist ends, so that ‘France [had] a chance to count amongst the great nations’. While France was readjusting her colonial position, however, the Indian press was busy reporting the damaging effect the war had on France. The Hindustan Standard reminded its readership of the humiliation caused by the occupation of France by German armed forces, an important point for an Asian people seeking freedom from an occupying European power. The Indian Socialist Reformer noted that France was having difficulty adapting to the fact that she came out of the war a diminished nation. Above all, in Discovery of India, an essay written by Nehru in 1944 while in Ahmadnagar Fort prison (1942-1945), the future first Prime Minister of India exposed his vision and ideals for India, describing the invasion of France as ‘the astonishing collapse which produced a profound impression’. Nehru’s words revealed how France’s loss of sovereignty had a strong impact across the colonised world, especially amongst Indian freedom fighters.

Furthermore, any suggestion that France should follow the example of Britain and hand

17 Shipway, The Road to War, op.cit., p. 28.
21 Nehru, The Discovery of India, op.cit., p. 481.
over her Indian territories to a newly independent India could set a precedent whose repercussions would impact on the rest of the empire. After all, following the Brazzaville conference’s recommendations, the empire had just been reformed. The law Lamine Guèye of 7 May 1946 introduced the concept of a French Union citizenship while a law of 7 October 1946 had officially changed the former status of the French Indian comptoirs from colony to a French overseas territory. Later that month, Article 60 of the newly approved Constitution of the Fourth Republic had transformed the old empire into the French Union, comprising metropolitan France, the overseas Territories and Departments, and Associated Territories and States.22 The Union consisted of an association of ‘110 million citizens’.23 As such, French India had now become an integral part of the French Republic. In addition, Article 27 of the constitution stipulated that a territorial cession could not be granted unless the affected population had given its consent in a referendum, and that treaties involving territorial cession were only valid after a law had endorsed their ratification. When growing nationalist demands throughout the empire were already seriously challenging France’s reaffirmation of her colonial rights, any dismantlement was definitely to be avoided.24

Indeed, the civil war between the Vichy authorities and de Gaulle had provided a new context in which national movements in other colonies intensified demands for independence. Anti-colonial demonstrations erupted in Syria and Lebanon after French authorities there had rallied to Vichy in June 1940. Further anti-French attacks in May 1945 resulted in the French

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22 The overseas departments were Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane and La Réunion; the overseas territories were: eight territories of the AOF, four territories of AEF, Madagascar and islands, French Indian Establishments, Somalia coast, Comores, New-Caledonia, Establishments of Oceania, St-Pierre et Miquelon, the Associated Territories were the former mandates of Togo and Cameroon. However some exceptions appeared not to be covered by the Constitution such was the case of Algeria and the Franco-British condominium of the New-Hebrides. The multitude of statuses stood in contrast with the unitary concept of the new French Union, François Borella, L’évolution politique et juridique de l’Union française depuis 1946 (Paris: Pichon & Durand-Auzias, 1958), pp. 150, 154-5.


aerial bombardment of Aleppo and Damascus (Syria) on 20 May, and the eventual independence of these two mandates in 1946. On 8 May 1945, after the Algerian flag had been raised during a celebration marking the end of the war, the French administration responded violently, killing thousands of natives in Sétif and the Constantine region. The number of casualties, though difficult to determine, may have been as high as 45,000. Thus, on the very day that France was celebrating her recent liberation from German forces, she was carrying out a massacre in her Algerian colony of those professing the same privilege. Likewise, in Indochina, the nationalist movement had gained momentum during the Second World War. Particularly, the Vietminh, a broad-based organisation under the leadership of the Communist Ho Chi Minh, increased their popular support amongst the peasantry and the urban centres of Hanoi, Haiphong, Saigon, and Vinh. By 1945, France was experiencing serious difficulties in re-imposing her authority once her sovereignty had been compromised by the Japanese occupation of Indochina during the war. The French attack on the port of Haiphong, in November 1946, marked the beginning of France’s military involvement in Indochina, a ‘bloody’ war against a determined resistance movement that would last until July 1954, and an act strongly condemned by Nehru.

In contrast to the violence with which France attempted to control anti-French sentiment in Syria, Lebanon, Algeria, and Indochina, the Franco-Chinese convention of 18 August 1945


peacefully retroceded the tiny Chinese enclave of Kouang-Tchou-Wan (Quang Tchéou-Wan). The enclave had been administered by the French colonial Government of Indochina since 1898. Furthermore, in the treaty of 28 February 1946 France abandoned her rights to the French concessions of Shanghai, Tien-Tsin, Hankéou, and Canton, as well as all other extraterritorial French rights in China. Even though these concessions were not French sovereign territory, and because of the war France had lost them anyway, this ‘abandonment’ was nonetheless an incentive for the government of Chang Kai-Chek, leader of nationalist China, to withdraw Chinese occupying forces from Tonkin and the north of Indochina. Hence, the agreement signalled the readiness of the French government to give up colonial territories as long as the concession formed part of a more strategic post-war colonial plan to regain control over, in this case, Indochina.

Despite French India’s territorial particularities and its lack of economic benefits, remaining in French India also had an important strategic value to Paris. In April 1946, Christian Fouchet, French Consul-General in Calcutta, argued that with Britain gone, France had the opportunity to play a more influential role in India: ‘Indians would need to turn to “someone” other than Britain…. the spiritual and cultural influence of France will even find the approbation of Britain… it seems that before the end of the year, interesting possibilities of action will be offered to us’. Here Fouchet reiterates the old idea of ‘revanche (revenge) that the French fomented after their defeat at the hands of the British during the Seven Years’ War and that had contributed to the construction of the French Indian empire myth. The desire for ‘revanche’ for the loss of Alsace-Lorraine (1871) and the humiliation of 1940 had already been satisfied by France’s

29 Silbermann, op.cit, pp. 145-175.
31 Pitoëff mentions that French India had no strategic value, op.cit., p. 107.
33 Das, op.cit.; Gildea, op.cit, p. 140.
victories over Germany in 1918 and 1944.\textsuperscript{34} Now, French civil servants saw the possibility, although quite improbable, to overcome Britain, her long-time world rival, and fulfil her destiny in India by playing the influential role that politicians, writers, and commentators had dreamed of for nearly two centuries. Col. Fletcher’s later suggestion that the French intended to reinforce their position in Pondichéry was, it seems, not so far-fetched.\textsuperscript{35} Besides, the territories also possessed another form of strategic value; they happened to be invaluable bargaining chips that could be swapped for British-held land or other colonial territories.

\textit{Exchange of territories}

The Treaty of 1814 limited France’s defence force to the use of troops for the maintenance of law and order, and as such, it clearly established Britain as the main colonial power on the subcontinent. These restrictive conditions and the marginalisation of the territories have been described as a ‘paralysing system’, while N. V. Rajkumar, Foreign Secretary of the Indian National Congress, wrote that ‘French India was given the status of an honoured guest’ by the British.\textsuperscript{36} As such, since military means were out of the question, any territorial consolidation on the part of the French would need to be carried out via diplomatic channels. The French colonial administration attempted on many occasions to consolidate the Indian territories, with various suggestions about the exchange of some parcels of French Indian land for British-held territory, either in India or elsewhere overseas.\textsuperscript{37}

For the French, the consolidation of Pondichéry was undoubtedly the priority, as this would facilitate policing at a local level while also strengthening the French presence by reducing the need to deal with British Indian authorities. Furthermore, this territorial consolidation could be

\textsuperscript{35} Nehru, \textit{SWJN}, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 3, p. 140.
\textsuperscript{36} Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l'Inde après Dupleix}, \textit{op.cit.}, p.15; Rajkumar, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{37} For a list of negotiations between 1816 and 1915 see Weber, \textit{Les établissements}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 2959.
promoted as a diplomatic achievement and thereby further contribute to French prestige. From the point of view of the British, the French presence in India had been a constant irritation. Although the British had returned the territories in 1814, they had hoped the French would eventually leave or sell their territories, as the Dutch, Swedes, and Danes had done earlier. Not only did the tiny territories represent an affront to British supremacy on the subcontinent, but the smuggling of goods through the free ports of Pondichéry and Karikal had also cost British colonial authorities a loss in tax and customs duty revenue. In addition, exchanging Chandernagor or other enclaves where little French culture remained would eliminate the political asylum that Indian nationalists had enjoyed there. In comparison, Portuguese India, though described in similar terms by the British, was considered to be ‘slightly less a perpetual thorn in the flesh to the Government of India’, probably because the Portuguese territory was larger and had less British-held land cutting through it, and Anglo-Portuguese relations had been less troublesome than the Anglo-French ones. Although swapping territories would not altogether eliminate the French presence in India, it would at least reduce the number of French territories held on Indian soil and facilitate customs control and policing.

It had already been proposed in the nineteenth century that particular French Indian territories be exchanged. A convention project of 3 June 1857, drawn up by the French government, envisaged the integration of small British Indian parcels to consolidate Pondichéry in exchange for cession of all other French Indian territories (the loges, Mahé, Chandernagor, and Yanaon) with the exception of Karikal. However, the outbreak of the Indian Rebellion in 1857 brought the project to an end. In fact, the rebellion helped trigger French patriotism, revive old

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38 Pondichéry and Karikal were free ports before the First World War, Trait d’Union, July 1951.
40 Confidential paper, South East Asia Department, 4 March 1949, F5814, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
41 Ibid.
42 Pondichéry 23 Novembre 1854 à Ministère de marine et des colonies direction des colonies bureau du régime politique et commerce, AOM, Inde, G38, échange des territoires; Confidential paper, South East Asia Department, 4 March 1949, F5814, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
colonial rivalries, and increase Anglophobia, all of which led France to refuse any prospective transfer over to British authorities. At the same time, France viewed the rebellion as an opportunity to reduce British influence in India and regain some of her former colonial glory. A later exchange project suggested by Governor Bontemps (January 1863–March 1867, October 1867–June 1871) failed to materialise because of the outbreak of war in France against the Prussians (1870-1).

In 1914 the British offered ‘a generous territorial compensation in Pondichéry’ if the French administration agreed to maintain surveillance of the Swadeshi agitators who had found refuge in Chandernagor. If the French did not comply, the British warned, ‘there would be serious reprisals and the use of coercive measures.’ There is no evidence that a territorial exchange ever took place as a result of this bullish request. Georgette David notes that French authorities ceased providing assistance to the British in their pursuit of agitators in Chandernagor after the unlawful arrest in 1908 of Charu Chandra Roy, an activist living in Chandernagor. Chandra Roy, Deputy Director at the Collège Dupleix, was accused by the British of having participated in the fabrication of explosives that led to the assassination of Miss and Mrs Pringle Kennedy, two British citizens residing in India. He was eventually released, and resumed his duties.

In November 1938, a Franco-British conference was convened in which France reiterated her request for an exchange. In this proposal, the loges of Calicut, Masulipatam, Surat, and rights over the islands of Iskittipath off Yanaon, would be swapped for British-held land. However, the area offered by the French was much smaller than the area they were seeking to consolidate around Pondichéry. There were also strong concerns that Indian nationalist groups would react violently to the swapping of populations and land between two occupying European powers.

43 Durand d’Ubraye, governor of French India declared from Pondichéry, that the British will be unable to control the rebellion without the help of French forces, Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., pp. 931-41.
45 Le Ministre des colonies à Mr le Gouverneur des établissements de l’Inde, 15 Juin 1914, AOM, Inde, G38: Problèmes des frontières Pondichéry 1908.
Indeed, the proposal would have seen the transfer of 2,000 French Indians and up to 25,000 British Indians. The French Indian population had strongly opposed such proposals on two earlier occasions, in 1880-1884, when colonial authorities were contemplating the exchange of Chandernagor and the Bengali loges for British Indian-held territories, and in 1908-1911 when exchange of the loges was considered for British territories in Gambia and Nigeria. On both occasions, the population had called on local politicians to lobby the government in Paris. For British authorities, the one positive aspect of the 1938 proposal was a simplification of the customs area, as the border would now encompass a contiguous territory. The red line on Map 14 below shows the proposed new border, which would have incorporated the French areas indicated in pink and the British Indian areas proposed for exchange and marked in white. The outbreak of the Second World War, however, put an end to this proposal to ‘tidy up’ the maps.

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49 Ibid.
Map 14: Map of Pondichéry. The bold line surrounding the area was the proposed new boundary.
After the Second World War, the British Foreign Office agreed in principle to reconsider the possibility of a deal involving the exchange of French enclaves for some corresponding British territorial concessions, but this time in another part of the world. The proposal suggested a possible British withdrawal from the New Hebrides which, since 1906, had been run jointly as a ‘condominium’ under an Anglo-French agreement. However, the arrangement had proven cumbersome, so its exchange for the French Indian territories seemed a practical solution.50 If the proposal proved unfeasible, the British would consider ‘a more limited deal in which all the French loges, islands, and minor settlements, possibly including Karikal, would be exchanged for areas adjacent to Pondichéry’ in order to consolidate its area.51

But again, the exchange proposal was abandoned. It was considered that ‘the present moment was not suitable for considering the proposal’ in view of the withdrawal negotiations that were taking place between the Indian National Congress and the British authorities.52 It also threatened the British strategic position in the Pacific in relation to Australia and New Zealand. Moreover, the Foreign Office admitted that the French governor of Pondichéry had lost all hope of keeping the possessions if India were to become independent, which made the proposal inherently futile.53

The exchange of territories, however, was an idea whose scope extended beyond negotiating with the British, either in India or overseas. French and British colonial administrations tolerated the unusual territorial circumstances of French India, but once India gained independence French colonial authorities would face a new nation that challenged any foreign presence on the subcontinent. Beyond this time, territorial consolidation would be out of the question and the local French Indian population would be trespassing on Indian sovereign soil on

51 India Office, Whitehall 14 March 1946 to F.R. Hoyer Millar, FO, Z2567, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
52 25074/46, Colonial Office Downing Street, S.W.1, 26 April 1946, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
a daily basis. The surrender of France’s historical claims to the loges and other pettah, in a ceremony held in Masulipatam in October 1947, can therefore be regarded as France strategically exchanging territories in order to retain her position in India, just as previously she had granted concessions in China to regain influence in Indochina.

**Handover of the loges: the first misstep**

The handover of the loges was suggested by Nehru to French officials in the last week of May 1947, but the Orissa state government had already made the suggestion to the Interim government in April 1947. The French loge in the district of Balassore was creating administrative problems, and the Orissa state government suggested that it should be incorporated into their own province. Nehru agreed that the transfer should be made, as ‘the loges were of no particular use to France and had a certain nuisance value to the rest of India as they might be used for smuggling or other purposes’. The decision was eventually promoted by both parties as a gesture of goodwill to celebrate the independence of India. The British, however, dismissed the graciousness of the gesture, as they accused the French of handing back land over which they had no claim of sovereignty.

Territorial disputes had caused ongoing frictions between the two European powers, and even as India was about to reach her independence, European colonial rivalries were still at play. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Overseas France consented to the cessation of the loges because it was very much aware it had done little to economically enhance these parcels. In fact, the French government admitted it did not know the exact location of the loges; any claim to sovereignty, as the British had rightly pointed out, would therefore be difficult to defend. In some of the loges, the colonial administration kept only a minimum presence. In Balassore, a single French Indian gendarme represented the colonial administration, while in Calicut and Masulipatam was, in the

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55 Neogy, French Decolonisation, op.cit., pp. 43-5; Arpi, op.cit, p. 44.
56 Arpi, op.cit., p. 44.
words of Henri Roux, the French Chargé d’Affaires in New Delhi, ‘a local person’ (a designation that seems to refer to a person without official status) who was responsible for raising the French flag every day.57

Economically, the loges had value only in regard to the very modest revenue generated from a lease to the British in Balassore and in Masulipatnam, but diplomatically the loges posed a problem because they had served as refuges for British Indian tax evaders and criminals.58 As demonstrated by Akhila Yechury, the loges represented an alternative space for British colonial subjects in which colonial rivalries between France and Britain continued to be played out.59 Thus the handover could provide the opportunity for the resolution of tensions between India and France, or at least their minimisation, as France’s lack of interest in the loges could potentially provide an excellent opportunity for the Indian government to denounce France’s legitimacy over all of her Indian enclaves.60 Hence, by disposing of the superfluous loges, France hoped to appease India while retaining her entitlements over the larger enclaves.

Monsieur Tezenas du Montcel, Inspector at the Ministry of Overseas France, believed that by ceding the loges France would lose only an ‘illusory sovereignty’, and that the gesture would enhance India’s respect for France, especially after the recent incidents in Madagascar. As had happened in Syria, Lebanon, and Indochina, France had lost her control over the island when, during the war, it had been occupied by the British military from May to November 1942. A call for independence by Malagasies was based on the principle of the Charter of the United Nations, and culminated in the organisation in 1946 of two nationalist parties: the Parti Démocratique Malgache (PDM) and the Mouvement Démocratique de la Rénovation Malgache.

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(MDRM). While the PDM intended to use existing colonial institutions to gain independence, a section of the MDRM, which had a broader base across all levels of the Malagasy society, was determined to challenge French authority with more forceful means. The insurrection of March-July 1947, which was blamed on the MDRM, testified to the rising difficulties faced by the French colonial administration. As in other parts of her empire where demands for independence were defying French attempts to re-establish control, France retaliated by using military means to suppress the Malagasy insurrection.\textsuperscript{61} The violence of the repression was reflected in the death toll, which French authorities estimated at approximately 89,000, although this figure was probably inflated.\textsuperscript{62}

Du Montcel’s comment that France would lose only an ‘illusory sovereignty’ reveals the extent to which senior French officials relied on the myth of French India, a historic construct based on past imperial territorial influence. Despite the fact that French officials were very much aware of France’s erroneous sovereignty over the loges, it was thought the myth of French India would help France maintain her historical presence in India, and even increase her current influence in the context of Britain’s withdrawal. Indeed, du Montcel expected his Indian counterpart to concede the same belief in France’s bygone entitlement over French India. That expectation, as will be shown, was thwarted. The myth was a Eurocentric construct with some potency when Britain was in control, but with little relevance in the face of Indian nationalism. While India was masterminding the integration of former British India and the princely states, the amalgamation of these French loges was seen as part of the process of nation-building and independence.\textsuperscript{63} Nehru’s position regarding Portuguese and French India was extremely clear. In April 1947 he stated that ‘a free India is not going to accept foreign rule in any part of India’, and


that there was no doubt the loges would be unified with the rest of India at some point in time.\textsuperscript{64} The attitude of du Montcel, expressing a traditional belief in the role of France as a colonising force leading the less evolved peoples of India and elsewhere, hindered any coherent vision for the future of post-war colonial France.\textsuperscript{65} Hubert Deschamps summarised this policy by stating that colonial administrators who reached the top of the hierarchy had been ‘formed by tradition and worked to preserve it, arriving at a kind of fossilisation’ which prevented any forward thinking. Deschamps had first-hand experience, having formerly served as a colonial administrator of Madagascar for nearly nine years (1926–1935), an unusually long period in the French colonial service. He was a socialist who viewed his mission as the extension of European civilisation overseas but his career in the colonial administration was ended in 1945 due to his alignment with Vichy in 1940 while governor at Djibouti. He was rehabilitated in 1950, became a historian, and was appointed in 1962 as professor of history at the Sorbonne University. In 1975 he would become the first former administrator to write a full-length memoir of his colonial service, entitled \textit{Roi de la brousse: Mémoires d’autres mondes}.\textsuperscript{66}

Even though a larger number of the pettah were located in Bengal than in the rest of India, a reminder of France’s earlier colonial trade, the handover ceremony took place on 6 October 1947 in Masulipatnam (Andhra Pradesh), partly because this was the largest of the loges. It was attended by second-rank officials, P.A. Menon, Joint-Secretary of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, and Raschid Ali Baig, Consul-General of India in Pondichéry, as well as a representative of the government of Madras, Mr Fouchet, First Secretary of the French Embassy in India, Mr des Longchamps from the French Embassy in New Delhi, Mr Goumain, the Chief of Cabinet of the Administrator’s office in Pondichéry, and Mr Drouhin, the Administrator of Karikal. Similar ceremonies took place concurrently at all the other loges, attended by French

\textsuperscript{64} Nehru, SWJN, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 2, p. 559.
\textsuperscript{65} Cohen, \textit{Rulers of Empire, op.cit.}, pp. 134-5.
representatives and local Indian authorities. Fouchet represented the French government; it would have been embarrassing and compromising to have officials of the Ministry of Overseas France dealing with what really appeared to be the first official cession of a French Union territory. Clearly, issues affecting the French Union were not limited to the Ministry of Overseas France, and the division of responsibilities between the respective ministries – Foreign Affairs and Overseas France - remained blurry.

While the handing over of these parcels of land was promoted as a goodwill gesture initiated by both governments, Henri Roux, Ministre Plénipotentiaire and Chargé d’Affaires of France in New Delhi, complained in his report on the ceremony that Indian authorities did not express gratitude for the transaction. Indeed, Roux was offended by Menon’s declaration that ‘the handover of the loges marks the end of a long dispute but there is still the issue of the Establishments to be resolved’. The ploy to cede the loges in the hope of negotiating the survival of the comptoirs came tumbling down, testifying to France’s inability to gauge the determination of her opponent to remove all foreign colonial presence. The ‘illusory sovereignty’ to which du Montcel referred had no relevance to the Government of India; the loges were regarded as part of India, and so were the comptoirs. France’s decision to surrender her ‘illusory sovereignty’ over the loges in order to appease Indian authorities only resulted in opening the door to further territorial claims from the Indian government.

It is worth mentioning that some of these original loges – namely Dacca, Jougdia, the factoreries of Chittagong and Sylhet, and the parcels of Sirampour and Sola (Map 3) – were actually located in Bengal, which at the time of Britain’s withdrawal in August 1947 had become
part of the independent state of Pakistan. Hugues de Dianoux has explained that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs never listed the names of the loges in official correspondence, and since India had no jurisprudence in East Pakistan and was not granted the right to accept these loges on behalf of the state of Pakistan, the Bengali loges could still be considered the possessions of France. However, while de Dianoux is correct in stating that the French government committed an error when the agreement did not catalogue the loges, a memorandum from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ information and press service, dated 14 August 1947, lists ‘Calicut and Surat on the Malabar coast, Mazulipatam [sic] on the Orissa coast, Balassore, Goretti and Cassimbazar in the Gulf of Bengal’ as the loges that had just been handed over. It does not mention the ‘Pakistani’ loges.

Furthermore, contrary to Dianoux’s suggestion that the loges could technically still be French, the French government did in fact address the issue of the Pakistani loges in 1949, when they were exchanged for a building in Karachi to house the French embassy. While the Ministry of Overseas France insisted that the exchange should have been finalised under the same gracious conditions agreed on with India, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was delighted to receive in exchange of the Pakistani loges an asset in Karachi that saved rent expenditure for the Ministry. Except for this positive outcome of the Pakistani loges, the handover of the Indian loges nevertheless failed to fulfil France’s ploy to appease India, and France would have to consider alternative strategies in order to preserve her Indian territories.

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71 Dianoux, op.cit., pp. 574-82.


The British are leaving

Correspondence in the French and British archives shows that the French government was very much aware of the impact of the Second World War on Indo-British relations.\(^74\) The recruitment of Indians to fill the top ranks of the British Indian armed forces in October 1945 had already demonstrated British commitment to an eventual transfer of power, and the introduction of an interim government headed by Nehru in 1946 only confirmed the evolution towards India’s independence.\(^75\) In a November 1945 report from France’s Consulate-General in Bombay to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Georges Bidault, it was stated that the British intention to withdraw from India would have dire consequences for France and her tiny enclaves. In fact, the Consulate-General foresaw that, with the British gone, the merging of the French Indian territories into an independent India was a fait accompli, especially since Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950), the first Indian Minister of Home Affairs, had declared in 1945 that ‘it was useless to talk about the future of the French establishments as independence would automatically resolve their existence’.\(^76\) Not only does the statement emphasise the level of confidence the leaders of the Indian National Congress had in obtaining independence, it also highlights that the incorporation of other foreign territories, that is the French and Portuguese enclaves, was not seen as a separate issue to the integration of the British Indian provinces and the princely states that would form the Union of India.\(^77\)

Within twenty months Patel convinced the heads of the princely states to merge in order to form the Union of India. Indeed, unification was considered of the utmost importance, because Britain’s withdrawal exposed the country to balkanisation and even to the possible rallying of some princely states to Pakistan. It fell on Patel who embodied authority and the right-wing of the

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\(^74\) Consulat Général de France, Bombay 8 Novembre 1945, note politique – situation à la veille des élections, AD, Inde, Vol. 15: Situation intérieure.


\(^76\) Consulat Général de France, Bombay, 29 Novembre 1945, a/s situation politique de deux slogans, AD, Inde Vol. 15: Situation intérieure.

INC, as the first Minister of Home Affairs, to unify the 562 princely states with the British Indian provinces under the banner of a central government based in New Delhi. His fourfold policy consisted of persuasion (sam), money (daam), punishment (dand), and division (bdhed).\textsuperscript{78} In his mind, foreign territories needed to be dealt with in the same way: firmly and uncompromisingly.\textsuperscript{79}

The decision by the British Labour government of Clement Attlee in February 1947 to withdraw from India undeniably challenged France’s future in South Asia.\textsuperscript{80} While Britain acknowledged, even if reluctantly, that the time had come to leave, France’s post-war agenda focused on preserving her empire, despite growing nationalism throughout the colonial world and the opposition of the USA and USSR. In an attempt to overcome the changes taking place, vague plans for reform based on the British Commonwealth were considered, but Indochina was already thwarting this ideal, and the possible disappearance of the French Indian territories would only further challenge the new colonial framework.\textsuperscript{81} In an effort to convince the Indian government to allow France to maintain her Indian territories, President Auriol sent Schumann to India shortly after independence.\textsuperscript{82} Schumann remarked in his memoirs that the mission was doomed to failure since the Indian government, which had been founded on anti-colonialism, would not accept France’s demands to pursue her colonial ambition.\textsuperscript{83}

Nehru confided in Schumann that ‘it was obvious the comptoirs would come back to India’, insinuating that they had already been part of India in the past, but also that ‘there was no urgency as we have other problems to deal with’. The French therefore hoped that time was on

\textsuperscript{80} Attlee Statement on withdrawal from India was made in the House of Commons on 20 February 1947 and is reproduced in Harold R. Isaacs, \textit{New Cycle in Asia: Selected Documents on Major International Developments in the Far East 1943-1947} (New York: Macmillan, 1947), pp. 134-137.
\textsuperscript{81} Schumann, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 16-7.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., pp. 16-7.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 18.
their side. Auriol was very much aware of the impact that any demands for cession from the Indian government would have on the rest of the empire. France was reaffirming her colonial command in a changed world, and the growing opposition to colonialism was reflected both in Nehru’s correspondence to Marius Moutet, Minister of Overseas France, and in Indian headlines. Nehru mentioned that India was ‘following with grave concern the development in Indochina’ and that ‘the events were having a very unfortunate effect on Indian opinion’. Indian daily papers such as the Amrita Bazar Patrika, The Star of India, The Statesman, The Nationalist, and The Hindustan Standard regularly condemned the re-occupation of the East Indies (Indonesia) by the Dutch, and of Indochina by the French.

The increasing hostility towards European colonisers was described in reports from the consulates as ‘pan-Asian and xenophobic’, with Indian Muslims rallying to the Algerian national cause and the Hindus denouncing the French colonial presence in Indochina. These anti-colonial feelings had exploded as a direct reaction against the actions that had been undertaken in France’s two main colonies. The Sétif repression (8 May 1945) was criticised in India not only because of the level of military brutality, but also because it defied the Atlantic Charter of 14 August 1941, which supported self-determination. In a Joint Declaration by the United Nations (1 January 1942), representatives of twenty-six Allied nations, including the exiled governments of the occupied European powers and the Free French, pledged adherence to the Charter. The pro-India newspaper Amrita Bazar Patrika claimed on numerous occasions that it was high time the signatories of the Charter implemented its declared principles. The fact that the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs retained clippings from the paper in their archival files demonstrated France’s concern over India’s criticism of France and other signatories to maintain power over colonised

84 Ibid., p. 29.
nations. Numerous missives between Paris and her consulates in Bombay and Calcutta kept the Ministry informed about these and other anti-imperialist articles published in the Indian press.

Moreover, Hindus were rallying to the community of Indians in Indochina and denouncing the reoccupation of the colony by French armed forces after the Japanese surrender. While it is believed there were approximately 7,000 Indians living in Indochina during the peak period of the 1920s, the last census in 1937 indicated there were 6,000 ‘Asiatic foreigners’, mainly British Indians from the Coromandel coast. This figure included approximately 2,000 French Indians, 200 of whom were Muslims, while the remainder were Catholic renonçants, who lived mainly in Cochinchina (the southern tip of Indochina). This French Indian community consisted of Tamils and their Indo-Vietnamese descendants, the product of inter-marriage between French Indian men and Vietnamese women. Their economic power was much more important than that of the indigenous population, a situation that encountered growing resentment from the local Indochinese population. Indeed, dark-skinned Tamils challenged the established Vietnamese racial hierarchy, although they did not experience the violence that Indian communities faced in other parts of the Indian Ocean where there had been larger influxes of Indian labourers.

French Indians living in Indochina, however, were not wholly supportive of the nationalist movement in Indochina, nor were they confident that the effect of India’s independence on French India would be positive. Indeed, their positions in the French colonial administration and

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90 Pairaudeau, ‘Vietnamese Engagement with Tamil Migrants in Colonial Cochichina’, op.cit., p. 5; Claude Markovits’s research on Indian merchants networks outside of India estimates that a few thousands Indians were living in Indochina in the pre-war period; they were mainly found in the rice delta of the Mekong river and were involved in the financing of commercial agriculture as well as money lending, ‘Indian Merchant Networks outside India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Preliminary Survey’, Modern Asian Studies, Vol. 33, No. 4 (October, 1999), table 1b, pp. 888, 902.
91 Simon, op.cit., table 3, pp. 40, 130; Chanda, op.cit., p. 32
other auxiliary services, as well as their money-lending activities, had provided them with a privileged status.\textsuperscript{93} Commercial activities and employment in the colonial service, especially the police and military, positioned French Indians as intermediaries within the configuration of French colonialism, and this gave them the particular position of being both coloniser and colonised.\textsuperscript{94} Thus, the Vietnamese nationalist movement threatened their socio-political advantages, a development that could ultimately trigger violent repercussions from the local population who felt a strong animosity towards this ‘sub-imperial’ community that was perceived as just another colonial layer between them and the French administration.\textsuperscript{95} Furthermore, it was understood that the independence of India would most likely have an important impact on the future of French India, and could equally affect privileges enjoyed by those French Indians who worked in Indochina.

However, despite the local and regional turmoil, a few options were emerging and being considered by the French administration: either follow the British and leave India, or like the Portuguese, stay at any price.\textsuperscript{96} The first solution raised its own issues. The French authorities believed that the territories would be rapidly integrated into India and feared that very little or no French culture would be preserved on the subcontinent. Yet, contrary to official French beliefs, French culture in India was limited to a very small community of French-educated Indians, while the larger population of French Indians shared language, religion, and culture with their neighbours. A report on education in Overseas France, published by the Ministry of Education in 1946, noted that the native language was always present in French Indian educational establishments, even amongst those whose policy was to teach primarily in French.\textsuperscript{97} It was

\textsuperscript{93} Pairaudeau, ‘Vietnamese Engagement with Tamil Migrants in Colonial Cochichina’, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 5-7; Simon, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{94} Pairaudeau, ‘Vietnamese Engagement with Tamil Migrants in Colonial Cochichina’, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 3; Simon, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 130; Vidy, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 13.
\textsuperscript{95} Some French Indians would eventually return to India after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, and a second wave of French Indians will leave Vietnam between 1960-5, Simon, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 324.
\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Étude sur les possessions françaises dans l’Inde 24 Juin 1947}, AOM, Inde, H23: \textit{Études sur les possessions françaises}.
\textsuperscript{97} Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, \textit{Carnet de documentation sur l’enseignement dans la France d’outre-mer},
evident that the amalgamation of the French Indian territories would be facilitated by the economic, geographic, and cultural links that had already been established with India.

Furthermore, as noted above, any decision to leave India would set a precedent for the rest of the French empire, with potentially severe repercussions on the French position in Indochina, where hostilities between France and the nationalists had begun in late 1946. In post-war France, the focus was on preserving the empire at all costs rather than facilitating its dissolution. Finally, a docile departure from India could be viewed as a servile alignment to British colonial policy and the abandonment of a potentially important geo-political position in India, especially in view of the growing unrest in Indochina. Pondichéry was still considered as a possible stopover for military ships bound to Indochina, and as a region from which military volunteers could be recruited.

The second solution entailed following the example of the Portuguese, who had declared that since their Indian possessions were not colonial territories but an unalienable part of the mother country, they could therefore not be abandoned. However, even if reorganising the empire offered the potential to make French India an integral part of the French republic, this solution seemed risky. Colonial authorities acknowledged that French foreign possessions in India had only a tenuous cultural and moral link with France. Moreover, it did not make sense to stay in India against the will of four hundred million people, especially in the context of India’s long and successful fight for independence from Britain. Rumours in 1947 that Portugal was negotiating a railway agreement and the sale of its port, Marmagao, to the landlocked state of Hyderabad, only aggravated the positions of both Portugal and France, as the sale would jeopardise New Delhi’s integration plan. As a member of the Security Council at the UN,
France had to avoid the embarrassing UN intervention that India threatened to request. Such an intervention could be viewed by world leaders and the rest of her empire as proof of France's inability and unwillingness to negotiate.

Thus, neither leaving India nor staying at all costs, especially with the limited military forces available to France, presented as satisfactory options. An alternative solution had therefore to be considered, and the option that emerged would be closely linked to issues surrounding the Customs Union Agreement and a referendum.¹⁰¹

The Customs Union Agreement and the referendum

The Customs Union Agreement was introduced in 1941 as a wartime measure to facilitate trade between British and French India. The outbreak of the Second World War had impacted on maritime trade and slowed the transportation of goods between European powers and their empires. With shipments from the métropole reduced, French India was now, more than at any earlier time, dependent on British India for supplies. The British Consul-General in Pondichéry ironically suggested French officials must have suffered from a dearth of their usual luxuries due to the lack of maritime communication between France and her Indian territories (see Chapter 2), but in reality it was the livelihood of the local population that was more seriously affected, because it partly depended on the economic activity of the free ports of Pondichéry and Karikal.¹⁰² Since the disruption of maritime trade indiscriminately affected both French and British India, the colonial powers decided to enter into a Customs Union Agreement to facilitate the transfer of goods between the French Indian free ports and British India.

There were also political reasons for the arrangement. Since June 1940, the governor of

¹⁰² PZ1572, 31 January 1940, His Majesty's Consul-General in French Establishments in India, Pondichéry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs Department, New Delhi, IOR/1/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation 1938-1945.
Pondichéry, Louis Bonvin, had rallied French India to de Gaulle’s Appeal to Free France, affirming French India’s determination to fight alongside Great Britain and its faithful dominions. However, while the Customs Agreement testified to French India’s opposition to the Vichy state and German occupation, the British Indian government nevertheless looked suspiciously on French citizens in French India, whom they considered to be, as a rule, supporters of Pétain. Indeed, Governor Bonvin had first recognised Pétain after the 22 June armistice, but under British pressure he quickly rallied French India to de Gaulle. However, not all French diplomats in India had rallied to de Gaulle. A report published in 1942 stated that two French consuls, a Mr Sudreau in Bombay and a Mr Dubois in Calcutta, had made comments in favour of Pétain. It was nevertheless further noted that, since they had been put under house arrest in Dehradun (North India), no other Vichy diplomats were believed to be in office in India.

The Customs Agreement specified that the French would receive six lakhs twenty (a unit in the South Asian numbering system equal to one hundred thousand (100,000)), or 620,000 rupees, for losses in customs revenue, a figure the British believed was in excess of whatever revenue the French would have received from reduced maritime trade during the war years. The accord could be terminated by either party by giving notice to the other party on 31 March one year in advance of the termination coming into effect. French Indian goods, which no longer had an outlet overseas due to the war, could now be sold in British India without payment of customs duties. However, the British acted to protect their textile industry by restricting the volume of French Indian cotton products that could enter their market.

The overall result of the accord was two-fold: it tightened the economic links of the

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103 Brutinel, op.cit., p. 2; various newspapers clippings and messages, AOM Inde, G3: Dossier France Libre.
104 29 July 1940 report on local events from his Majesty’s Consul General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, Simla, BL, IOR/I/IPS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation 1938-1945; Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix , op.cit., p. 354.
105 Brutinel, op.cit., p. 3.
106 Territorial re-adjustment with the French in India, New Delhi, 10 November 1945, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
French enclaves to British India, and at the same time reduced smuggling, because French ports were now under the customs control of British India.\textsuperscript{108} For the British, the agreement was most welcome, as it solved a smuggling problem that had cost nearly a million pounds sterling per year before the war. In 1939, the British had even taken ‘the extreme measure of surrounding some of the French enclaves with barbed-wire fences in an effort to stop the leakage’.\textsuperscript{109} Customs control would also be facilitated by the fact that the same currency, the rupee, was used in both the French Establishments and British India. In sum, the agreement suited both parties: Britain was pleased that French Indian smugglers would no longer benefit from their illegal activities, and the French colonial administration and local traders were guaranteed revenue during wartime.

The Franco-British measure was originally introduced for the duration of the war and was an accord between two colonial powers, but with the war over and a transfer of power to a newly independent India potentially imminent, the stakes changed significantly. Concerns over the future of the agreement were being felt from all sides: the British colonial government of India, the Indian Provisional Government, the French colonial authorities, and the local population. The French were concerned that the agreement might become an impediment to their future on the subcontinent, as India could point out it had economically integrated French India into British India. Thus the merging of these territories could be a mere diplomatic formality in line with Nehru’s policy of incorporating the princely states and foreign territories to form the Union of India.\textsuperscript{110} The British had rightly noted that the agreement had ‘paved the way for an easier transference of political power from French to Indian hands’.\textsuperscript{111} However, the British were also aware that with the war concluded, normal maritime trade would resume, and French India could

\textsuperscript{108} 31 January 1941 from his Majesty’s Consul General in French Establishments in India, Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/IPS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation 1938-1945.
\textsuperscript{109} Confidential paper, South East Asia Department, FO, 4 March 1949, FS614, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
\textsuperscript{111} High Commissioner’s office in New Delhi following two-day visit in Pondicherry, 29 January 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
well return to being what the British had described as ‘a putrid pearl beyond all price’. They expected the French authorities to now denounce the agreement, since they would profit more from legitimate customs duty while smugglers would return to their previous habit of generating increased gains by taking goods into British India.

The British Foreign Office also foresaw that Indians would take this opportunity to increase economic pressure on the territories. Compared to the French, who thought they could withstand India’s pressures, the British anticipated that the French position could only be sustained with difficulty. Leading merchants in French India had been asked for their opinion as to the continuance of the agreement; feelings were divided, with some believing that the rapid gain from a free-port status would not outweigh the difficult position in respect to supplies. Amongst those in favour of the renunciation were the directors of the Anglo-French Textiles Company who, precluded by the terms of the agreement from selling more than their prescribed quota as well as from charging higher prices for their cloth, were confident that they could make better profits from overseas markets once the restrictions had ended. Apart from the obvious financial gain for some, renouncing the agreement could also be a smart tactical move on the part of the French authorities, as access to tax-free goods would give the local population the impression that the necessities of life were inexpensive as long as French India was not incorporated into an independent India. In addition, a return to smuggling would facilitate the increase in prosperity for some.

The Provisional Government of India, busily concluding the independence of India with

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112 30 November 1940 from his Majesty’s Consul General in French Establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/II/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation, 1938-1945.
113 Territorial re-adjustment with the French in India, New Delhi, 10 November 1945, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
114 Minutes dated 26 February 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
115 Report on local events – September 1946, British Consulate-General in Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India, New Delhi, 3 October 1946, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
116 High Commissioner’s office in New Delhi following two-day visit in Pondicherry, 29 January 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
117 Memorandum on behalf of the people of French India, 3 March 1949, NAI, No.15(11)EUR I/49: Situation in the French Establishments in India.
Britain, had more pressing problems to deal with, such as partition, the creation of the state of Pakistan, and the incorporation of princely states. Not only was it much easier to continue with the agreement than abandon it, but the interim government was even prepared to grant concessions to the French just as the British had done previously. Indeed, ever since the introduction of the agreement the French had made numerous complaints on behalf of the merchants’ lobby regarding its restrictive terms in regard to the import and export of cloth, but by 1946 the issue had become critical for the French colonial authorities. The cotton mills in Pondichéry were unwilling to supply cloth to the French army out of their own quotas as defined by the agreement. The cloth earmarked for the army stationed in Indochina would have been exchanged for very much needed Indochinese rice. Indeed, during a famine in the Madras region in May 1946, Governor Baron, pleaded with Admiral Thierry d’Argenlieu, who was sent to Indochina to restore French colonial authority, to urgently deliver 4,000 tons of rice to Pondichéry because ‘French India could not meet her basic foodstuff needs.’ However, a famine had also hit the northern and central provinces of Indochina in 1945, caused partly by the collapse of the market and transport network.

To add to French difficulties, the Viet Minh had strategically taken control of the granaries in order to relieve the famine, a move that gained them widespread support. Hence the supply of rice from Indochina to support other parts of the Empire, especially French India, was seriously compromised. A report submitted on the eve of the independence of India mentioned that the total import of rice to the French enclaves in 1946 amounted to 9,610 tons, more than half of which (5,700 tons) came from Indochina. The French authorities calculated at that time that any disruption to the supply of rice from British India would have dire financial consequences. In fact, France would most likely not be able to meet the extra costs, and her consequent inability to feed...
the population would jeopardise her claim over the enclaves.\textsuperscript{121} The issue of providing essential food to the local population would become a crucial point in the debate concerning the potential merging of territories.

Despite the shortages of cloth in post-war India, the interim Indian government agreed to grant increased cloth quotas to the French, and even added ‘quotas of wines, perfumes, silks and medical drugs, with a view to preventing the possibility of the agreement being denounced’.\textsuperscript{122} The rationale behind this decision was two-fold: first, as long as the agreement was maintained, smuggling was limited and customs revenue controlled. The smuggling had not been entirely eliminated by the agreement, as is revealed by regular notices in the French Indian official journal that listed, in English, the goods that had been seized by Indian customs officers and their value in rupees.\textsuperscript{123} The second reason for India’s desire to retain the Customs Agreement was that its maintenance allowed the interim government to focus on the pressing internal issues of merging princely states, dealing with the Muslim League, and managing the takeover from Britain. Furthermore, once home issues had been settled, the maintenance of the agreement could be used to demonstrate that French India was already economically incorporated with India, hence facilitating a political merger.

With regard to whether the agreement should be terminated or not, the local population in the French enclaves was divided into four groups: those who did not buy imported goods and therefore did not mind the current situation; a pro-Indian group who supported the Indian National Congress policy of merging foreign territories and therefore favored the status quo; merchants, business owners, and goods smugglers, who profited most from a return to pre-war conditions; and finally, the pro-French lobby that comprised administrative workers and French-educated

\textsuperscript{121} Étude sur les possessions françaises dans l’Inde 24 juin 1947, AOM, Inde, H23: Études sur les possessions françaises.
\textsuperscript{122} Note dated 20 May 1946, NAI, No124X (secret): Customs Union Agreement 1946; Her British Majesty’s Consul-General in the French Establishment in India, Pondichéry, 11 September 1946, NAI, No124X (secret): Customs Union Agreement 1946.
\textsuperscript{123} Journal officiel de l’Inde française, 1947.
natives who agitated to have the agreement terminated.\textsuperscript{124}

However, the future of the agreement became closely linked to France’s inability to offer a satisfactory course of action with regard to French India. Already the promulgation of the Fourth Republic had introduced changes to the structure of the government of French India as in the rest of the empire. A decree of 25 October 1946 created an \textit{assemblée représentative} to replace the \textit{conseil général}. It was constituted of 44 elected members from across all of the five territories. The \textit{assemblée}'s members were responsible for making decisions on social, economic, legal, and taxation matters, a much more important role than previously granted to the members of the \textit{conseil général}.\textsuperscript{125} In addition, as a response to the independence of India in August 1947, France, by a decree of 7 November 1947, took the measure of granting \textit{ville libre} (free town) status to its territories with full administrative powers independent of each other. An \textit{assemblée municipale} of 25 elected members was responsible for controlling the administration of the town. However this \textit{assemblée} was placed under the control of the \textit{conseil du gouvernement} in Pondichéry which was headed by the \textit{Commissaire de la République} (title given to the former governor), the representative of the French government.\textsuperscript{126} Despite the changes, the free towns were still under the control of the French authorities.

While in the past the five territories were administered as one unit, the decision to separate them had three goals. First, it intended to appease the Indian government, demonstrating France’s commitment towards a gradual autonomy to the territories, although no detailed programme or time-line was provided. This was nonetheless an unsatisfactory alternative to a complete French withdrawal and fell short of India’s objective of eliminating all foreign

\textsuperscript{124} Memorandum on behalf of the people of French India, 3 March 1949, NAI, No15(11)EUR I/49: \textit{Situation in the French Establishments in India}; Madras Mail, 5 June 1945; Extract for DO Letter from collector of central excise madras dated 28 January, NAI, No124X (secret): \textit{Customs Union Agreement 1946}.

\textsuperscript{125} Pondichéry had 22 members, Karikal 12, Chandernagor 5, Mahé 3, and Yanaon 2. Annoussamy, \textit{L'intermède français}, op. cit., pp. 128-9.

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., pp. 134-5.
presence on Indian soil.\textsuperscript{127} The second reason for the new administrative arrangement was to minimise the impact that a possible secession of Chandernagor, where anti-French unrest was most prominent, would have on the other four southern territories. Above all, the administrative change was a device to protect Karikal and Pondichéry, the more populous and what seemed to be the most pro-French of the five territories.\textsuperscript{128} Chandernagor had always resented being administered by people from the South, and its proximity to Calcutta exposed it to strong nationalist influences from the former British Indian capital. In addition, the partition of the eastern part of Bengal, which became part of Pakistan in August 1947, caused an influx of refugees into Chandernagor, further diluting the little influence France had in the area, and putting Chandernagor into the heart of communally induced fighting. The third reason was linked to the Comoros Islands where a referendum per island was being considered.\textsuperscript{129}

Already in 1946, the colonial authorities had described the Bengali comptoir as the Achilles’ heel (‘point névralgique’) of French India; Tailleur, the last administrator of Chandernagor, asserted in his bitter chronicle of the last year of Chandernagor as a French territory, that ‘Chandernagor no longer existed’.\textsuperscript{130} Unrest had been constant since the end of the war, official buildings had been occupied, and students had demonstrated with the aim of having the names of French colonial heroes removed from the school they attended.\textsuperscript{131} Shortly after the municipal elections of June 1946, the Mayor of Chandernagor hoisted the Indian National Congress flag.\textsuperscript{132} The gesture demonstrated not only that the nationalist sentiments being expressed in British India easily crossed over into French India, but also that the lack of interest shown by the French colonial administration had left a political and economic vacuum that

\textsuperscript{127} Hindustan Standard, 20 August 1947.

\textsuperscript{128} David Anoussamy, ‘The Merger of French India’ in K.S. Mathew & S Jeyaseela Stephen (eds), Indo-French relations (New Delhi: ICHR, 1999), p. 66.

\textsuperscript{129} Tailleur, op.cit., p. 21.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid., p. 39.


\textsuperscript{132} Tailleur, op. cit., p.22.
allowed the elected representative of a French colony to embrace the symbol of a nationalist movement without fear of reprisal.

Anti-colonial feelings continued with French Indian students organising a Vietnam Day on 21 January 1947 to show support to the independent struggle taking place in Indochina. A similar demonstration on 25 February 1947 caused serious altercations between the French police and students; other means used by Chandernagorians to demonstrate their allegiance to India included fasting and threats of hartal (general strike). After further unrest, the assemblée locale consisting of elected members responsible for local administration, decided to declare 15 August 1947 (the day India gained independence) a national public holiday in Chandernagor. The same assemblée in March 1948 voted on a motion proposing the immediate merging of Chandernagor with India, which prompted Paul Coste-Floret, Minister of Overseas France, to announce on 8 June 1948 that a referendum would be organised in consultation with the Municipal Councils of each of the territories. The decision was confirmed in correspondence, dated 29 March 1948, between New Delhi and Paris. As expected, in June 1949 7,500 Chandernagorian voters, comprising women and men above the age of twenty-one years, approved the secession of the French Bengali comptoir from the French Union, while 114 voters opposed the change. The overwhelming response led to the 1951 Treaty of Cession that finally sealed the demise of the French Bengali comptoir.

France proved unable, however, to organise a date to hold similar referenda in the other four territories, fearing perhaps the outcomes and the impact this would have on the French

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133 Trait d’Union, February 1947.
137 Chaffard, op.cit., p. 207.
Union. India responded by finally terminating the customs agreement in 1948 – effective as of 1 April 1949. By terminating an accord that had initially been brought into being by two colonial powers in India, this resolution strongly signaled the determination of India to use various means to increase diplomatic pressure until the French were compelled to leave. It also severed the economic bond that had linked French India to British India since 1941. This tactical move occurred within five months of the first stage of territorial restitution (the handover of the loges in October 1947), and announced that another serious step was being taken by Indian authorities towards merging the rest of French India. In a spirit of goodwill, India had offered to allow French authorities to continue the agreement if they wished, but France had failed to reply within the twelve months designated for their response. This failure to respond was due partly to France’s concern that continuing with the current agreement would signal their dependence on India, and hence demonstrate that they were unable to feed their own population at a time of severe rice shortages.

While France was unwilling to bow to India’s demands for a referendum, the British Foreign Office remarked that the French had made no plans for dealing with the kind of emergency they would face ‘if Indians really decided to turn on the screw’. The British Consul-General in Pondichéry had warned the French Minister for Colonies, Marius Moutet, during his visit to Pondichéry in January 1947, that ‘if the agreement were to cease French India would be surrounded by a customs barrier which would make smuggling almost impossible and that the amount paid by India to the French authorities for loss in customs revenue would be enough to defray the expense of maintaining a thoroughly effective customs cordon’. The statement was based on first-hand experience, since the British had erected barbed-wire fences in 1939 to prevent smuggling and the losses of revenue. India’s position was reflected by her Consul-

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138 Secret, From High Commissioner’s Office in New Delhi following two day visit in Pondichéry, 28 January 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.

139 British Consulate-general, Pondichéry, 12 January 1947, re: visit of Mr Moutet, French Minister for Colonies, NAI, No124X (secret): Customs Union Agreement 1946.
General in Pondichéry, Rachid Ali Baig, who was convinced that strong measures were necessary to get the French out. Baig did not believe the French would ever accept ‘a democratic solution to a problem of this kind, because if they did the whole basis of the constitution of Overseas France would collapse, and with it the frail structure of France’s Empire in Indo-China [sic].’ The British and Indian predictions indeed proved accurate.

The termination of the agreement triggered a sense of panic in the weeks leading up to 1 April 1949, as a local resident highlighted to the President of the Indian National Congress:

Hundreds of cartloads of rice, spices and firewood were flown into the French territories from the Indian Union by merchants and monied people, while dye stuffs, yarns and cotton goods were taken to the Indian Union by railway and lorries because after the first of April these goods may not be wholly consumed by the local population or purchased by the Indian Union merchants on account of customs barriers.

Apart from this temporary hoarding effect, the long-term impact of the agreement’s termination was quite significant. It severely hindered the transit of goods and people, and thus contributed to the worsening of Franco-Indian negotiations during the following years. Indeed, Indian customs authorities considered every single parcel of French Indian land as a distinct foreign territory, a particularly arduous practice for the residents of Pondichéry who lived in eight separate communes spread over twelve parcels of land crosscut by British–held territory. The practice forced local French authorities to lobby the Minister of Overseas France to request that the Indian government extend the customs cordon and allow all of the enclaves to be considered as one

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140 Secret, From High Commissioner’s Office in New Delhi following two-day visit in Pondichéry, 28 January 1949, NA, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
141 5 April 1949, NAI, 15(11)EUR1/49: Situation in the French Establishments in India.
single foreign unit, but this was rejected. Negotiations between the British and the French that had failed earlier to effect the consolidation of the French Indian enclaves was once again revived, but this time the French were dealing with a different type of opponent. As with previous French reactions to British attempts to tighten customs controls, the new Indian customs cordon was viewed as an economic blockade.

**The economic blockade**

The Indian government had simply reverted to the pre-war 1941 agreement and, like any other sovereign state, was enforcing and tightening customs and border regulations, but the effects of the new Indian customs regulation amounted to what the French called an 'economic blockade'. In reality, this so-called economic blockade was yet another phase in the series of economic restrictions imposed upon French India starting with the British Treaty of 1814, which had enforced the demilitarisation of French forces and the carving up of French Indian territories into non-contiguous parcels with the intention of preventing the regrowth of France's former economic prosperity in India. In 1816, for example, while Portuguese trade was subject to a single duty of 8 percent, a double duty of 16 per cent was levied on all French merchandise introduced into the Madras Presidency, as well as on all Anglo-Indian products entering Pondichéry. At the time, it was noted that the measure 'was tantamount to a prohibition'.

Moreover, Franco-British relations prior to the Second World War had continued to be plagued by customs issues, with France appealing to the British for concessions. The monthly *L'Inde illustrée* blamed the British for the impoverishment of French India caused by the loss of commercial trade in favour of British Indian ports, and pleaded for the French government to enter into discussions with Britain to have the economic blockade lifted or at least lightened.

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143 Ibid.
146 *L'Inde Illustrée*, April 1933, May 1933, July 1933.
The tightening of the British-Indian customs control policy in the late 1930s together with the effect of the war had eventually convinced the government of Pondichéry to accept the 1941 Customs Agreement. It was seen as merely a step further than the lifting of customs regulations, since French India had already transferred her customs rights to British India, with the effect of economically binding French India to British India. As such, the customs union agreement became a welcome respite in the long history of Franco-British customs relations.

This history, however, seems to have eluded the French press and other commentators, who now denounced the new regulations as an unprecedented ‘economic blockade’. Reactions to the move went from one of sympathetic support for the Indian nationalist cause to one of total dismay and condemnation. Above all, it highlighted the vulnerable position of French India vis-à-vis an Indian government that was determined to unify foreign territories and to gain international recognition. This period was marked by the introduction of coercive means referred to as the ‘guerre froide franco-indienne’ (Franco-Indian Cold War), a reflection of the American-Soviet tensions that were concurrently being felt at an international level.

The first to be surprised by the intensity of the new regulation were French officials in Pondichéry, who sent a telegram to Paris listing the new custom prohibitions in eight points.147 For the first time, Indian troops were deployed at the border of Pondichéry, a reminder that France was now dealing with a new kind of sovereign state determined to use all of its arsenal to convince a rival that it had overstayed its welcome. French civil servants in India provided an image of French India under siege, and were quick to emphasise that ‘India disposed of far greater means of pressure than France did; above all India could put an end to the air and maritime traffic to Indochina’.148 It is unclear how the civil servants imagined India could stop French ships bound to Indochina. Not only do the comments illustrate how Franco-Indian relations were now closely intertwined with the Indochinese conflict, but French civil servants also

recalled that Indian military forces, six months earlier, had invaded Hyderabad, a renegade princely state that had been unwilling to bow to New Delhi's pressures to join the Indian Union.\textsuperscript{149} Even if the invasion went against Gandhian ideals, Nehru had declared that the end justified the means, and French officials warned of 'the new habit that Indians have developed to use violence to resolve issues'.\textsuperscript{150} Daniel Lévi, the French Ambassador in New Delhi (1948-1951), described Patel's methods and intransigence as 'nazi-like'.\textsuperscript{151} Raoul Bertrand, the Chargé d'Affaires, informed Robert Schuman, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, that after Hyderabad, Portuguese India and French India were next on the new nation's list of territories that would be merged by force.\textsuperscript{152}

The colonial press also made generous use of a terminology and images that were familiar to a French readership and that aimed at provoking dread and outrage. Climats, a pro-colonial weekly magazine, in an article entitled 'De Gandhi à Hitler', likened India's coercive means to an 'Anschluss', echoing the forced annexation of Austria by Hitler's forces in 1938. It dismissed Indian nationalist claims and promoted instead the possibility of French India co-existing alongside a large and independent India, in the same way that tiny colonial states like Monaco, Liechtenstein, and Andorra existed in Europe.\textsuperscript{153} In addition, the newspaper drew on familiar European stereotypes, such as India's inscrutability; depicting India as a 'mysterious political adolescent', the paper suggested that her political inexperience had now led the new nation to make confused and irrational decisions. A post-war journalist who specialised in the

\textsuperscript{149} Note, a/s du conflit entre l'Inde et Haiderabad, 15 Septembre 1948, AD, Inde, Vol 37: Hyderabad; Mr Léon Marchal, Ambassadeur de France au Pakistan à Mr Georges Bidault, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, Karachi, 22 Juillet 1948, a/s les livres blancs de Hyderabad, AD, Inde, Vol 37: Hyderabad.


\textsuperscript{151} Mr Daniel Lévi, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr Robert Schuman, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, a/s opérations militaires à Haiderabad, 17 Septembre 1948, AD, Inde, Vol 37: Hyderabad.

\textsuperscript{152} Mr Raoul Bertrand, Chargé d'Affaires de France dans les Indes à Mr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, New Delhi, 1 Octobre 1948, AD, Inde, Vol 37: Hyderabad.

\textsuperscript{153} Climats, 16-22 October 1952.
Third World, Tibor Mende, had earlier expressed similar views to Mayo’s description of India.\textsuperscript{154} Representing the colonised country in this way perpetuated a familiar colonial discourse in which the superiority of the colonising power is promoted as the only means to preserve order and functionality,\textsuperscript{155} while the ‘feeble colonised other’ is construed as weak, evil, and perverted.\textsuperscript{156}

\textit{Marchés coloniaux du Monde}, a popular colonial weekly that had been created by René Moreux in 1945 to focus on economic issues, described the economic blockade as immoral. Starvation would force the population of French India into supporting the merger, the paper suggested, an action considered contrary to basic human rights and a denial of the French Indian population’s right to vote on their own future.\textsuperscript{157} The commentary also portrayed India as an insatiable giant who could go as far as claiming possession of any territory within the French Union where an Indian community existed, such as in the West Indies, Madagascar, Guyane, La Réunion, and Indochina. Not only trade by Indian merchants within the Indian Ocean arena had resulted in the sprouting of Indian communities, but the abolition of slavery had also lured indentured Indian labour to work on the French sugar islands, resulting in the introduction of new and larger communities as far as the Atlantic ocean. Between 1854 and 1885, 24,147 Indians were shipped to Guadeloupe, 43,326 to Martinique, 8,416 to Guyane, and 63,573 to La Réunion, although it is believed that the numbers were higher due to the clandestine migration that went unregistered by the administration.\textsuperscript{158}

Despite a high mortality rate due to difficult shipping and labour conditions, and a minor effort at repatriation, Indian communities remained in the sugar islands. Since French censuses do not include ethnic criteria, the number of people of Indian descent living in the French West Indies in 1946 can only be estimated, but a figure of 20,000 has been suggested.\textsuperscript{159} In

\textsuperscript{155} Homi K. Bhabha, ‘The Other Question…’, \textit{Screen}, 24.6 (1983), pp. 18-36; Said, \textit{op.cit}.
\textsuperscript{156} Bhabha, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{157} \textit{Marchés Coloniaux}, 17 and 24 December 1949.
\textsuperscript{159} Singaravelou, \textit{Les Indiens de la Caraïbe}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 9-34.
Madagascar, where Indian communities existed before the French established control in the 1880s, their number increased with colonial expansion to reach over 8,000 prior to the Second World War. According to the article in Marchés Coloniaux, France had now become prey to an uncontrollable Indian imperialist. The authors, André Schock and Georges Le Brun-Kéris, both advisors to the French Union, denigrated India by presenting a picture of an economically weak state that, headed by ‘a megalomaniac’, was desperately attempting to become a great power. Thus France had a moral duty to defend her population from a miserable future under the incompetent management of India. Portugal used similar imagery and themes to oppose any attempts by Nehru to negotiate the future of Portuguese India.

Climats provided a similarly paternalistic representation of Franco-Indian relations, using the phrase ‘grande famille’ (big family) to convey the idea that India still needed the advice and help of a politically mature state like France. The article also drew on familiar colonial myth to enhance the importance of French India, depicting it as a grand commercial trading centre, a crucial link with other French overseas territories, and a necessary stopover between the territories of the Pacific, Indochina, and Africa. The depiction was certainly an overstatement, since no ship had called at Pondichéry since the Second World War. Likewise, it was even suggested that an aerodrome might facilitate the transit of military planes bound for Indochina, but this remained a product of colonial fiction. Overall, the economic blockade caused the colonial press to propagate the old vision of a feeble and unstable India, unable to manage her own affairs, and to juxtapose this notion with the idea of a privileged and faithful French Indian population that enjoyed free access to education, better hygiene, civil rights, and larger rice

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160 1,200 labourers from South India were shipped to Madagascar to work on the railway line but the project was unsuccessful and the labourers either died or were repatriated, Hugh Tinker, A New System of Indian Labour Overseas: 1830-1920 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 291-2; there were 5,709 Indians in 1920, 6,791 in 1923, 8,224 in 1936 and 8,283 in 1937 or an increase of 45% over a period of seventeen years, Blanchy, op.cit., pp. 159.
164 Marchés Coloniaux, 17 December 1949.
rations.

The blockade also highlighted French India’s vulnerability and especially her dependency on Indian goods and services; commentators pointed to the urgent need to improve economic conditions and infrastructure in French India. Thus, the level of neglect that had negatively affected the territories was now conceded.\textsuperscript{165} This belated effort was first translated into the erection of a power station, since Pondichéry received most of its power supply from a station located in Mettur, which lay in Indian territory. Credit for the venture was made available from the \textit{Fonds d'investissement de développement social et économe} (FIDES), a fund to assist with the improvement of infrastructure in Overseas France. FIDES was a form of Marshall Plan aid for the colonies that demonstrated the Fourth Republic’s commitment to supporting the enhancement of overseas territories through grand-scale projects, an idea that originated from Albert Sarraut, a Minister of Colonies in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{166} In 1949, the colonial authorities decided to proceed with the dismantling of an old power station from the north of France, with the project to be completed within seven months. However, it took over eighteen months for the power station to be re-erected in Dupuy, south of Pondichéry, and cost twice as much as originally scheduled. Moreover, the station actually provided less power than had formerly been received from Mettur.\textsuperscript{167}

Similarly, the port of Pondichéry finally received attention from colonial authorities in order to counteract the effect of the economic blockade, and to show the population of French India, as well as of India, that France was dedicated to improving local conditions. The pier, which had been constructed in 1865 and then extended in 1881 and 1908, had been left unused due to the extensive corrosion that rendered the whole structure unsafe. While projects before the Second World War had focused on the erection of a new port further south than its location at that time, the decrease in maritime traffic made this solution too expensive. Hence, repairs to the

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Climats}, 25 – 31 March 1953.

\textsuperscript{166} Albert Sarraut, \textit{La mise en valeur des colonies françaises} (Paris: Payot, 1923).

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Trait d’Union}, August 1951.
pier were undertaken in early 1951, but they were not sufficient to allow large ships to moor, and in any case its use was impossible during the monsoon.\textsuperscript{168} Despite the realisation that eliminating dependency on India was paramount, and that infrastructure improvements would contribute to Pondichéry’s survival, these efforts were too modest and too late to reverse a trend that moved inevitably towards merging the remaining foreign territories with India.

While the economic blockade was seen as a vexatious measure to asphyxiate French India, Indian officials realised they were imposing too much hardship on the French Indian population, and were forced to withdraw some of the blockade’s prohibitions. Indeed, to facilitate the checking and detection of smuggling and other evasions of import and export control regulations, which had cost a great deal of revenue to the former government of British India, the Indian authorities introduced a permit system ‘under the provisions of Indian passport rules 1921 with effect from the first of April 1949’. The permit system was designed to control the movement of persons entering into India or the French Establishments of Pondichéry and Karikal, and in order to avoid inconvenience and expense, a special type of identify document was prescribed for which a fee of only one rupee was charged.\textsuperscript{169} But the permit system was eventually withdrawn, as it proved problematic to poor people living on the border.\textsuperscript{170}

The new customs regulations also led to a number of skirmishes on the borders.\textsuperscript{171} Files at the National Archives of India contain numerous reports by officials of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs as well as politicians’ notes that highlight the difficulties caused by the non-contiguous nature of borders and the trespassing of French Indian police.\textsuperscript{172} In sum, the introduction of a permit system designed to protect India’s national integrity was, as noted by the French authorities, also a means to turn an increasingly discontented population against France,

\textsuperscript{168} Trait d’Union, September 1951.
\textsuperscript{169} New Delhi, 29 March 1949, Communiqué, Imposition of permit system in case of Indian treaty between India and French government in India, NAI, 15(48)EUR1: \textit{Imposition of permit system in case of Indian treaty between India and French government in India}.
\textsuperscript{170} Rajkumar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 84.
\textsuperscript{171} Paris, le 21 Mai 1952, Situation des Indes françaises, AOM, G8: \textit{Note sur situation économique}.
\textsuperscript{172} NAI, No15(48)EUR1: \textit{Imposition of permit system in case of Indian treaty between India and French government in India}; NAI, FEII/54/17910/601: Regarding trespass into Indian Union territory by French police.
in the hope that this pressure would ultimately convince the coloniser to leave.

The most detrimental impact of the end of the customs union agreement was the reversal of the status of Pondichéry and Karikal as free ports, and ultimately the creation of an artificial prosperity, in the two largest French Indian territories. This occurred at the same time that referendum negotiations between India and France were taking place. The windfall benefited the pro-French lobby which opposed merging with India. However, Pondichéry and Karikal were not wholly free ports. A tax of three to five percent was added onto the value of all goods entering or leaving the two ports, as well as a value-added tax of one percent. Both these taxes were an important source of revenue for the local administration. According to Rajkumar, the cost of the same product in the Union of India was between fifty to sixty percent higher as a result of the difference in customs regulations between the two countries. Hence the disparity encouraged smugglers to bring in goods illegally despite the customs cordon erected by the Indian authorities. The main commodities included bicycles, silk, perfumes, fountain pens, and watches. It was the large amounts of smuggled gold and diamonds, however, that created a financial crisis in Pondichéry. With large stock of rupees leaving Pondichéry to purchase gold and diamonds in Hong Kong and the Gulf countries, the quantity of rupees in circulation in the French territories in 1950 was reduced, forcing French authorities to provide a credit of £50,000 to buy rupees from the Bank of India. This monetary crisis only highlighted the dependency of the comptoirs on India’s banking system.

The tax advantage afforded these two ports attracted goods carriers in search of large profits. Although the quantity of goods handled in Pondichéry in 1950 was half that of 1936, by comparison the volume of imported goods was noticeably greater. In 1936, 72,000 tons of goods were exported and 19,000 tons imported; in 1950 the figures were respectively 8,478 and

173 Trait d’Union, July 1951; Rajkumar, op.cit., p.85.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
177 Paris, le 21 Mai 1952, Situation des Indes françaises, AOM, G8: Note sur situation économique.
40,400. Two explanations could be advanced for this development. First, since the end of the customs agreement, Indian goods transiting via Pondichéry were subject to the two taxes mentioned above (a French customs tax of three to five percent of the value of the goods, plus a value-added tax of one percent), which made the use of the French Indian port more expensive than an Indian port. The second disincentive was that Pondichéry offered very basic port facilities that had not been upgraded adequately since the end of the nineteenth century. However, the inferior port standard did not deter the import of goods meant for smuggling into India.

By 1952, the contraband had such an adverse effect on both India and French India that they both contemplated a return to the pre-April 1949 situation. However, given the circumstances, it was impossible for India to concede a solution that preserved French sovereign presence in India, while for France the distress caused by India’s increasing withdrawal of its services and goods had resulted in significant pro-merger support which would have been difficult to reverse. In a note regarding the situation in French India dated May 1952, Comte Stanislas d’Ostorrog (1897-1960), the French Ambassador in India (1951-1960), admitted that ‘the time when the European countries imposed their law onto the world was over’.179

Born in Constantinople in 1897, Ostorrog represented the epitome of a man of French culture brought up in a country perceived to be the link between the West and the East. His name was Polish, but both his parents were French and worked in Constantinople. After service in the First World War and a brief return to the family home, he studied in Paris to prepare a career in the French diplomatic corps. His first posting was in China, followed by Turkey, Syria, and the Soviet Union. After the Second World War he was posted to Lebanon, and then to Ireland, his only European posting. He was ambassador to India and Nepal, a position in which he was responsible for diplomatic relations with both countries, from 1951 until his death in 1960.180

178 Trait d’Union, July 1951.
179 New Delhi, 2 May 1952, AOM, G8: Note sur situation économique.
While Ostrorog’s statement alerted his superiors to the demise of French India and the French empire as a whole, French public opinion seemed to show little interest in the future of France in India.

**French public opinion**

Indeed, apart from the litany of the *comptoirs*’ names repeated by generations of schoolchildren, who would anyway have found it difficult to identify their location on the map of the French empire, French public opinion showed little interest in either France’s colonial presence in French India or its nemesis, the Indian independence movement. The very few press articles and studies of Indian nationalism in the inter-war and post-war periods limited their accounts to reports on Gandhi. In 1924, Romain Rolland was the first to publish a biographical account of Gandhi and his non-violence movement, but *Mahatma Gandhi* conferred upon Gandhi a ‘messianic and prophetic characteristic with legendary dimensions’. While Rolland never went to India himself, he helped popularise the image of Gandhi as an Indian Christ. This mythical portrayal prevented the specific characteristics of Gandhi’s struggle from becoming familiar to the French public, who were in any case preoccupied by the rise of fascism in Europe. In addition, the press tended to discuss Gandhi using a French framework so that the man and his mission could be understood by French readers. He was sometimes seen as a follower of the French Revolution’s principles and a saint, while at other times his non-violence struggle was perceived to be in opposition to French revolutionary ideas. The attempt to understand an indigenous nationalist movement through a framework based on European values represented a misappropriation of the specific terms of India’s nationalist struggle.

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182 Latronche, *op.cit.*, p.47.
183 Ibid., pp. 40, 50.
184 Ibid., pp. 51-2; Marsh, ‘Gandhi and le gandhisme…’, *op.cit.*, pp. 33-47; Marsh, ‘Representing Indian colonization in the Parisian Press’, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-84.
After the war, French daily newspapers such as *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, and *L’Humanité* did not report extensively on Britain’s withdrawal from India, in part because they paid greater attention to the rise of the Cold War, to the hot spots of decolonisation in Indonesia, Palestine, Indochina, and North Africa, and to European affairs. When articles on events in India were published, they were often no more than reproductions of the British press, hence they rarely offered any in-depth analysis of the effect of British decolonisation on French India. Only a few journalists had read Nehru’s *An Autobiography* (1936) and his *Discovery of India* (1946) by the time India became independent. Most French reporters had little insight into India’s first Prime Minister and the potency of the Indian nationalist movement. Ostrorog remarked in 1958 that the inspirational work of Gandhi and Nehru remained unknown to almost everyone in France except for a few specialists. Indeed, the fact that Nehru’s *Discovery of India* was not translated into French until 2002 testifies to the continuing lack of appeal India’s first Prime Minister and his views on India have had in France.

In addition, few French people actually had firsthand experience of the relatively unimportant French Indian territories, and nor were they attracted to a life in French India where hardly any work opportunities existed. Incentives to join colonial troops in the colony included a taste for adventure, an accelerated career advancement, and a salary twice as large as that paid in the *métropole*, but since the Franco-British Treaty of 1814 had limited the number of troops that could be stationed in French India, the opportunity for new troops to be posted there no longer actually existed. Unlike Algeria and Indochina, which had welcomed a settler population, French India had no large tracts of agricultural land with which to attract a migrant population. It also lacked a mining industry, and the textile industry used cheap local labour. Teaching and

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186 Ostrorog, *op.cit.*, p. 159.
legal professions were the only occupations in which approximately one hundred French people had found employment, while fifty others were known to engage in some small commercial activities.\textsuperscript{189}

Furthermore, the most prestigious destinations for graduates of the École Nationale de la France d'outre-mer – formerly the École coloniale (1889-1934) – were Indochina and Africa.\textsuperscript{190} The best students chose to serve in Indochina because it offered higher salaries and faster promotion, as well as better transportation, schools, and hospital facilities, all important factors for those who were married or planned on having families. Most others chose to go to French territories in Africa, which included the AOF, AEF, and Madagascar. The focus of graduates on these two colonial regions was reflected in their school curriculum, which concentrated on Africa, North Africa, and Indochina. Nevertheless, topics were very general and lacked specialised subjects that would have better prepared graduates for a professional life dealing with overseas societies and with particular geographical regions.\textsuperscript{191} More importantly, the curriculum failed to provide serious courses on economic development, sociology, and contemporary political developments, studies that would have better equipped administrators to deal with the issue of decolonisation.\textsuperscript{192}

Despite the myth of the French Indian empire, French India occupied only a minor space in the École’s programme, which hardly inspired would-be graduates to consider a posting in French India.\textsuperscript{193} Even though it was mainly the search for exoticism, adventure, and a desire to

\textsuperscript{189} Marchés Coloniaux, 21 August 1954.
\textsuperscript{190} Not all colonial administrators were former graduates of the École Nationale, Cohen, Rulers of Empire, op.cit., pp. 97, 98.
\textsuperscript{191} Singaravélou, Professor l'empire, op.cit., pp. 50-1, 56, 207; the preferred African destination was AOF and Madagascar while AEF was considered the least desirable assignment, Cohen, Rulers of Empire, op.cit., pp. 46, 92.
\textsuperscript{192} Cohen, Rulers of Empire, op.cit., p. 153.
\textsuperscript{193} Jean Clauzel (ed.), La France d'Outre-Mer (1930-1960): Témoignages d'administrateurs et de magistrats (Paris: Karthala, 2003). Despite the title that mentions overseas France, the account focuses on former administrators and magistrates who were in post in Africa and Indochina. None of the eleven contributors to the manuscript ever spent time in French India. Africa seemed to have inspired the most interest. The students at the École coloniale had to submit a thesis at the end of their studies, most of them focused on France’s African colonies. Until the creation of Ministère des Colonies, overseas territories were administered by an under secretariat at the Ministère de la Marine. The foundation of the École coloniale in 1889 and of the Ministère des colonies in 1894 reflected the increasing need to establish a corps of administrators and a ministry responsible for administering overseas territories which had

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help spread French civilisation that motivated those who enrolled in the École, French India remained unappealing. It was, indeed, a sad reminder of France’s losses to her rival, Britain. Unlike other French overseas territories, French India offered few commercial opportunities and no possibility of economic expansion. Next to Britain’s Indian empire, described by the Association de Fonctionnaires of the Ministry of Colonies in 1911 as ‘the greatest colonial achievement in the world’, France was left to struggle as a mere subordinate coloniser in India. No graduate could pretend to become ‘roi de la brousse’, to use Deschamps’ later term, in French India.

In addition, French India was notorious for its political instability and frequent changes of governor. Local politicians, who were themselves frequently difficult to deal with, seemed to have little trouble convincing the Ministry of Colonies to recall recalcitrant governors, such as Théodore Drouhet in 1884 and Alfred Martineau in 1911. In 1954, the deputy Edouard Goubert tried unsuccessfully to have Governor Ménard recalled. The local French Indian magazine, L’Inde illustrée, described French India as ‘the sad colony that looked like a small boat that, without a skipper, was being tossed about by the waves’. While the high turnover of governors affected other parts of the empire as well as French India, the influence that local politicians played was certainly linked to the introduction of republican institutions and the party politics that French Indians enjoyed before other parts of the empire. By setting up local assemblies and by granting the right to send a deputy to the French parliament, the power of the local administration was weakened, ultimately creating a less desirable administrative post. While French India could not offer local administrators the possibility of acquiring the self-appointed title of ‘roi de la brousse’, the introduction of suffrage had provided opportunities for powerful upper-caste natives

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194 Quoted in Cohen, Rulers of Empire, op.cit., p. 60; Cohen, ‘Book review’, op.cit., p. 301.
196 L’Inde illustrée, September 1933.
197 Cohen, Rulers of Empire, op.cit., p. 123.
198 Ibid., p. 173.
like Chanenougam to become, in the words of the historian Weber, ‘King of French India’.\textsuperscript{199} Former governor Lemaire was so incensed by his recall in 1906, initiated by Chanenougam, that he resigned from his post in New Caledonia in order to run against and subsequently defeat his archrival in legislative elections in French India.\textsuperscript{200} Overall, for the average French person seeking career opportunities, French India was a singularly unattractive prospect.

This lack of interest was not limited to those looking for employment. Tailleur, the last administrator of Chandernagor remarked in his bitter chronicle of the last year of Chandernagor as a French territory, that Carrefour, a weekly colonial paper, was the only newspaper that dedicated an article on the ‘loss’ of Chandernagor.\textsuperscript{201} Similarly, the weekly colonial magazine, Climats deplored that one out of three Frenchman completely ignored the existence of the French overseas territories. It reported that, according to a poll carried out in 1949 by the Institut National des Statistiques, only 32\% of adults living in France knew anything about the French overseas territories, and only a fraction of them could actually name some of them. To the surprise of the author of the report, Corsica was mentioned as an overseas territory, while Syria, Lebanon, Thailand, China, Palestine, Brazil, and Canada were also believed by some to be part of the French Union.\textsuperscript{202} General knowledge about France’s overseas territories had hardly improved since March 1934, when the monthly magazine L’Inde illustrée despaired that some Frenchmen thought Yanaon was in Africa and Mahé in Japan.\textsuperscript{203} Similarly, in October 1949 Le Figaro asserted that education was urgently needed to improve knowledge about the French Union among French youth. Teachers were pleading for better school-books on the topic and the proclaiming need for the press, cinema, and radio to play a more assertive role in informing the

\textsuperscript{199} Weber, ‘Chanenougam’, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., p. 300.
\textsuperscript{201} Tailleur, op.cit., p. 15. Similarly, More states that the liberation of Yanam did not attract much attention in France, The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam, op.cit., p. 209.
\textsuperscript{202} Climats, 21–27 June 1951.
\textsuperscript{203} L’Inde illustrée, March 1934.
public about French Union matters. The school curriculum of the Third Republic exposed French adults of the post-war era to topics concerning the French colonial enterprise, the inequality of races, the *mission civilisatrice*, economic interests, emigration, the colonial army, and how to get ahead of other colonial powers. Although education proved to be a potent means of propagating a nationalist vision of the colonial past, French India’s small size relegated it to the margins of the curriculum in favour of more important parts of the empire, such as Algeria, Tunisia, Africa, Madagascar, and Indochina.

As a result of this situation, in 1951, the Minister for Overseas France, François Mitterrand, initiated the establishment of the *Comité d’information de la France d’outre-mer*. Its aim was to promote Greater France to the French public and business circles, predominantly by publishing relevant articles in the press. It was replaced in January 1954 by the *Service d’information et de documentation de la France d’outre-mer*. The broader aims and scope of the new body included the production of short films to promote commercial opportunities, the coordination of trade fairs and exhibitions, and the increased allocation of credit to both expand the catalogue of photographs relating to greater France and improve their conservation.

It is questionable whether these ministerial agencies actually accomplished their goals. Studies of opinion polls in France between 1946 and 1971 have shown that the French paid little attention to colonial matters. Concern regarding overseas France was triggered, however, by the Algerian crisis of 1956. Following guerrilla attacks by the Algerian *Front de Libération Nationale*, France increased her military commitment in Algeria; in less than two years, the number of troops mobilised in the region increased from 54,000 to 350,000. But despite the Algerian crisis,
issues of living standards and social justice dominated public opinion far more than those relating to overseas territories. This general attitude towards greater France accords with earlier studies of French public opinion in relation to the colonies between 1919 and 1939, which demonstrated that anti-colonialist groups managed to limit the effect of colonialist propaganda in the métropole. Hence, issues that emanated from the empire, and more particularly from French India and India, found little resonance amongst the French population, and contributed almost nothing to any form of mobilisation for or against French India.

It is worth pointing out that French scholars also showed very little interest in India and her independence movement. Coquery-Vidrovitch has estimated that between 1888 and 1960, French academic research on India – excluding French India – produced only sixty-one titles, including books, research articles, and magazine articles, of which only nine focused on Indian nationalism. Four of these nine studies were written between 1899 and 1911, three between 1919 and 1931, and two between 1935 and 1944. The next body of work relating to India’s independence was not published until after 1960, a period of intensive decolonisation of the French empire, and thirteen years after Britain’s withdrawal from India. It is clear that India’s claims for independence did not attract intense study from French researchers.

Coquery-Vidrovitch’s study accords with Mende’s comment that, when in the late 1940s he was about to embark on a work-related trip to India, French books on contemporary India were rare, a dearth that eventually led him to publish L’Inde devant l’orage (1950) and Conversations with Mr. Nehru (1956). On the whole, then, and for all the reasons outlined above – French India’s relative insignificance within France’s vast empire, the lack of scholarly debates and journalistic reports, the limited impact of the government’s propaganda agencies, and the fact that domestic affairs,

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the Algerian conflict, and Europe attracted more attention – the general French population seemed quite unaware of what was happening on the subcontinent.

**Conclusion**

The fact that France had a history of negotiating the potential exchange of colonial territories with her rival, Britain, facilitated the decision to hand over her three-hundred-year-old territorial rights over the *loges* to India. The transfer aimed to appease the newly independent nation, but India was determined to pursue a policy of territorial integration, and therefore viewed the handover as the first step in a process that would eventually lead to the surrender of all the other French Indian territories. The French belief in an ‘illusory sovereignty’, as well as the expectation that more unrest linked to partition would prompt France’s intervention and thereby extend her influence over India, encountered the Indian nationalist vision of state formation as well as the skills of her leaders. France’s decision to remain in India was based on past glories and the belief that national grandeur was associated with the reaffirmation of a pre-war empire, an approach that subsequently annulled the potential secession of even the smallest of the overseas territories. The British withdrawal from India, however, and the beginning of the Indochinese conflict eventually determined the future of French India. Although the end of the 1941 Customs Union Agreement proved to be favourable to the French, as it gave the impression of prosperity in the *comptoirs*, it also exposed the territories’ vulnerability. Indian authorities now had the means to apply enough economic and diplomatic pressure to force France to consider the inevitable. French public opinion, however, viewed this development with indifference.
Chapter 4

In the Name of Bharat: Indian nationalism and French India

‘Leaders of French India preferred to be the first ones in Pondichéry rather than the last ones in Madras or Delhi’. (Note concernant les établissements français dans l’Inde, Ministère de la France d’outre-mer)\(^1\)

A million Indians [French and Portuguese] are still subjects of foreign states and have no political freedom. The most astonishing aspect of the situation is that while Britain has relinquished her possessions comprising over two million square miles and containing a population of 400 million her two western allies should cling like leeches to a few hundred square miles of territory on the soil of free India. (The Leader, Allahabad, 21 December 1948).

During the last 150 years or so, the [French territories] have existed in India because of the goodwill of the dominant authority in India … which was the British power. These possessions can only exist through the goodwill of the dominant authority in India. There is no other way for them to exist. (Jawaharlal Nehru at a press conference in New Delhi, 12 November 1948).\(^2\)


\(^2\) Nehru, SWJN, op.cit., Vol. 8, p. 309. 
That the creation of Pakistan as well as that of India was established in August 1947 marked the failure of the Indian National Congress (INC) to form a greater post-colonial India. The rupture between Hindu and Muslim nationalisms was consecrated with the establishment of two distinct states, resulting in generation-long disputes over the state of Kashmir, and India's support in 1971 for the dismemberment of the eastern part of Pakistan to form the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Despite these traumatic developments on the subcontinent and the rise of hostilities between the new nations, the August 1947 event demonstrated the INC's achievement in unifying 562 princely states along with former British India into a new entity called India. The Constitution of the Republic of India (1950) referred to the new nation as Bharat, a concept based on a secularised form of nationalism. The decision was political, and aimed at reducing the effects of politicised religious identities that had already resulted in the split between the two main communities. Moreover, the unification of princely states had also brought into sharp focus the issue of foreign possessions on the subcontinent.

This chapter will explore the nature of Indian nationalism and the process by which the small, scattered, and geographically peripheral French Indian territories became an essential component of the imagined new Indian community. For India, the merging of the French Indian comptoirs was perceived to be a natural process based on ethnic and cultural factors that overrode French claims to the comptoirs as historically and constitutionally part of the French Republic. It is necessary first to examine the concept of Bharat, a notion that embraced a new form of loyalty based on territoriality and thereby closely linked India's claim over French India to the process of building the nation-state. However, this territorial claim also triggered a range of merger and anti-merger movements within French India that supported and challenged French and Indian nationalism.
The concept of Bharat

The post-colonial Indian nation-state that emerged out of British India and the autonomous princely states had a population of approximately 400 million inhabitants whose cultures, languages, and religions were very diverse. Such diversity challenged the definition of a nation-state based on shared myths, memories, and language, and common political rights. The standard differentiation between an ‘ethnic’ notion of nationhood, based on language and ethnic descent, and a ‘civic’ model, typified by the union of smaller and less heterogenous populations, only partially suits the specificities that led to the formation of India and Pakistan. Furthermore, Benedict Anderson’s notion that a nation is an ‘imagined community’, a social construct that helps bring a group of people together around the idea of a nation, has been challenged as has Anthony Smith’s theory of the transformation of ethnic states into territorial state. Indeed, much of British India’s vast population had been left unaffected by the various modern institutions, such as education and printing that contributed to the European process of nation-making and the creation of a national community, a point highlighted by Nehru in a speech celebrating excellence in printing and publications in 1958.

Instead, the idea of an imagined ‘Indian’ community was adopted and promoted by a group of Western-educated middle-class and mainly Hindu men who were members of the INC and who saw themselves as the ‘natural leaders’. They became the driving force behind the idea of the Indian nation, of which the most important element was the territorial unification of princely states and former British India, and the formation of the state as the authoritative Indian identity. Patel, who represented the right-wing of Congress, epitomised this determination to create an

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6 Corbridge and Harris, op.cit., p. 23.
independent and unified nation.\textsuperscript{7} Nehru and Patel were the creators of a party machine, the Indian National Congress, and the architects of the new state, while Gandhi provided its inspiration and dynamic leadership. But how did the concept of an Indian nation-state evolve and how did it impact on French India?

In 1949, the newly approved Constitution that was to be promulgated on 26 January 1950 defined India as \textit{Bharat}, a ‘sovereign democratic republic’.\textsuperscript{8} The use of the word \textit{Bharat} in India’s foundational document embodied a concept referring to Hindu culture and religion while designating a liberal nation-state that wanted to be socialist and secular by nature.\textsuperscript{9} However, William Gould mentioned that the European concept of secularism took a more fluid form in India and did not exclude religious connotations.\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, \textit{Bhārata-Varsha}, in the Brahmanical tradition, refers to a set of values, ideas, concepts, practices, and myths that denote the Indian subcontinent, and the term \textit{Bharat} was extended to refer to the Hindu culture that bound South Asia together.\textsuperscript{11} The inhabitants of India were known as the \textit{Bharati} rather than ‘Hindus’, a term that was coined by Muslim travelers and Arab geographers and derived from ‘Sapta Sindhu (the seven Indus rivers) via the Iranian equivalent, Hapta Hindu’.\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Bharati} did not refer to themselves as ‘Hindu’, but instead used their own socio-religious system based on castes to distinguish themselves from non-Brahmanical societies. The term ‘Indians’, which derived from the Persian language came into existence following the Mughal invasions in the early sixteenth century as a means to designate a Muslim born in the northern parts of India.\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{7} Krishna, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 517; Corbridge and Harris, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 43-4.
\textsuperscript{9} Corbridge and Harris mention that the words ‘socialist’ and ‘secular’ were only introduced into the preamble of the Constitution during the period of ‘Emergency Rule’ of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{10} Gould, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 5-9.
\textsuperscript{12} Ray, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 538.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 55, 538-9; Masselos, \textit{Indian Nationalism, op.cit.}, p.3 mentions that Islam from the eighth century was limited to the Indus Rivers area, the establishment of Muslim kingdoms around New Delhi expanded the religion to a wider area of the subcontinent by the end of the eighteenth century it had become the second largest religion in the
*Bharat* as a political and cultural concept was used by an anti-colonial movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Its purpose was to restore the glory of the Hindu past, and to purge Indian society from foreign presence and influences. The movement promoted the superiority of Hinduism over other religions, thus providing a religious and cultural component to an emerging Indian nationalism. This early form of nationalism was created within a spiritual and religious framework that could infiltrate all levels of popular consciousness, while also reclaiming a glorious Hindu past that stood in contrast to the more recent history marked by Mughal (Muslim) and British intrusions. It also provided some of the elements involved in the modern nation-building process, especially the use of Hindu symbols to reinforce the legitimacy of this particular cultural form of nationalism. For example, the iconography of *Bharat Mata* or Mother India, which was first drawn by the Bengali artist Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) in 1905, depicted a four-armed Hindu goddess clad in an orange sari holding a book, sheaves of rice, a mala (a rosary), and a white cloth. These items were probably intended to represent knowledge of the classics or education, agriculture, religious devotion, and industry, respectively (Fig. 8) while the goddess would later be used to adorn maps of India becoming the territorial deity.

area. Masselos also adds that *jati* is more accurate that the varna system in describing one’s place in Hindu society, p. 7.


15 Bandyopadhyay, *op.cit.*, p. xxiii; the concept of an old Hindu civilisation that transformed into the Indian nation has been challenged by Bayly, *op.cit.*, pp. 98-132; Anthony D. Smith, *op.cit.*, pp. 200-2.

16 Ramaswamy, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
Hindu slogans were also used. For example, the word swaraj, from the Sanskrit swarajya meaning ‘own kingdom or dominion’, came to mean ‘self-rule’ by the time of the Swadeshi movement in 1906. In January 1930 Gandhi made a declaration of purna swaraj (total self-rule), and later referred to independence as Ramrajya, or the rule of Rama, an incarnation of the Hindu

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17 Heehs, Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism, op.cit., p. 3.
protector God Vishnu.\textsuperscript{18} Above all, Hindu religious symbolism offered a universal system that brought the wider religious communities of India together with the aim to gain political legitimacy.\textsuperscript{19} While Nehru rejected this kind of attachment to tradition and preferred to constantly look towards the future, he did, in fact, make reference to the past on occasion. Linking India’s eventual independence to the historical and cultural might of India’s civilisation, in December 1946 he declared: ‘We are at the end of an era and possibly very soon we shall embark upon a new age; and my mind goes back to the great past of India, to the 5,000 years of India’s history, from the very dawn of that history which might be considered almost the dawn of human history’.\textsuperscript{20} Gandhi continued to support Brahmanical tradition stating that Hinduism had enough space to accommodate Christianity and Islam, while others like Rabindranath Tagore and Nehru viewed India in more modern terms and promoted a new vision that would transform the authority of Hindu traditions into a neutral form of nationhood that signaled progress.\textsuperscript{21}

While the concept of a nation constructed within a heterodox cultural framework that had sufficient potency to infiltrate all levels of Indian popular consciousness, this form of cultural nationalism could not successfully encompass all sections of such a heterogeneous society.\textsuperscript{22} The challenge of unification was exacerbated by the political alienation of Muslim Indians in 1940, who unable to access power in the legislative assemblies, began agitating for their own nation-state based around their identity as Muslims. The increasing antagonism between the two communities eventually led to the partition of India and the creation of two states. British decision-

\textsuperscript{18} Sinnappah Arasaratnam, \textit{History, Nationalism and Nation Building: The Asian Dilemma} (Armidale: University of New England, 1974), p. 11; Gandhi initially thought of a confederated state of Hindus and Muslims but changed his vision by emphasising ‘Indianess’ which facilitated the incorporation of all religious groups within the one nation of ‘India’ no longer determining it along religious lines, Bandyopadhyay, \textit{op.cit.}, p. xxiv.

\textsuperscript{19} Gould, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 5-14.


\textsuperscript{22} Chowdhuri, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 212.
making played a part in the partition, but in any case it was seen that Muslims had a legitimate political claim to nationhood, based on religious, cultural, and political factors distinct to those of a predominantly Hindu Indian state and led mainly by Hindu Congress members who were perceived as the new ‘Raj’. While some members of Congress accepted the concept of a Muslim Pakistan, within the party a faction emphasising the particularity of the new Indian state that welcomed various religious groups, worked to undermine the claim. Nonetheless, the fulfillment of partition together with the later assassination of Gandhi triggered a change of policy, which now focused on the promotion of ‘a new Indian identity based on territorial loyalty and the authority of the state over and above the particularisms of religion, ethnicity, language and caste’.

In addition, the death of Gandhi brought closure on the nationalist struggle which had had been associated with the leader, and acted as a unification moment during the postcolonial process.

The result of this new imagining of the nation was twofold. Firstly, an increased emphasis on the territorial boundaries of the country meant that further balkanisation of India had to be avoided. The merging of recalcitrant princely states and the foreign possessions thus became an even more essential component of the nation-building process, which now went beyond cultural references to Hinduism and demonstrated the sovereignty of the state as a unifying force. Secondly, more neutral national symbols, borrowed from a past with which neither the Hindu nor the Muslim communities could strongly identify, were adopted in order to bring together numerous cultural, linguistic, and religious communities under the banner of a single, unified nation. For example, the Buddhist wheel of law emblazoned on the national flag was inspired by the Sarnath Lion Capital of Ashoka (third century BCE), the Mauryan Emperor who had brought large parts of the subcontinent under his leadership. The Indian flag consists of three coloured, horizontal stripes – saffron, white, and green – and the dark blue wheel of law sits in the centre of the white stripe. Congress intended that the flag’s colours would remain neutral and have no communal

23 Arasaratnam, op.cit., p. 12; Roy, Beyond Belief, pp. 17-21.
significance; saffron represented courage and sacrifice, white represented peace and truth, and green stood for faith and chivalry. But the colours were nonetheless associated with religious communities: saffron with Hindus, green with Muslims, and white with all the other communities, including Parsis, Jews, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs, and Jains.  

While the song Bande Mataram (Hail Mother), based on a poem from the Bengali novel Anandamath (1882) written by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, had earlier been a national symbol of the struggle for independence, it was replaced by Jana Gana Mana written by another Bengali poet, Rabindranath Tagore, in 1896. In 1937, the All India Committee Congress (AICC) remarked on the potency of Bande Mataram:

During the past thirty years, innumerable instances of sacrifice and suffering all over the country have been associated with Bande Mataram and men and women have not hesitated to face death even with that cry on their lips. The song and the words thus became symbols of national resistance to British imperialism in Bengal especially and generally in other parts of India. The words “BM” became a slogan of power which inspired our people and a greeting which ever remind us of our struggle for national freedom.

But after independence, non-Hindu religious communities objected to the use of the old fighting song because it referred to the notion of ‘Mother’ as divine motherland and the mother-goddess Durga. The republican anthem, Jana Gana Mana, was chosen because it mentions peoples

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28 Chakrabarty and Pandey, op.cit., p. 32.
and regions of India in a neutral way and makes no use of religious symbols.\textsuperscript{29} As Tagore had noted in his 1917 study of Indian nationalism, the number of different ‘races’ found in India made it difficult to rally so diverse a people around the idea of social communality. Hence, geography became primordial, since India could easily be defined as a nation by means of her ‘fixed’ geographical particularities, including the Himalayas mountains, the coastline, and her great rivers.\textsuperscript{30}

In \textit{Discovery of India}, written while in prison in 1944, Nehru similarly recalls that in his 1936-7 electoral campaign for the provincial assemblies, he asked the many people he encountered how they perceived India. They expressed their concept of India in geographical terms that also encompassed her inhabitants: ‘the good earth of India, mountains and rivers of India and forest and the broad fields which gave us food were all dear to us’. Nehru added that ‘what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over the vast land. \textit{Bharat Mata}, Mother India, was essentially these millions of people. You are part of this \textit{Bharat Mata}.\textsuperscript{31} Later, Nehru conveyed his own view of India in similar terms, recalling his experiences

of broad fields dotted with innumerable small villages, of towns and cities I have visited; of the magic of the rainy season into a glistening expanse of beauty and greenery of great rivers and flowing water; of the Khyber Pass in all its bleak surrounding; of the south tip of India, of people individually and in the mass and above all of the Himalayas snowcapped or some mountain valley in Kashmir in the spring covered with new flowers and with a brook bubbling and gurgling through it.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} Arasaratnam, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 12; Masselos, \textit{The City in Action}, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 350-1.
\textsuperscript{30} Tagore, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 114.
\textsuperscript{31} Nehru, \textit{Discovery of India}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 56.
The benefit of such an image was that it set the origins of the nation in a very distant past, and guaranteed the inclusion of the whole population, hence circumventing social-political and religious divisions found in Indian society at the time.\textsuperscript{33} In addition, such natural features could be perceived in national consciousness as part of the cultural heritage that needed to be defended and preserved.\textsuperscript{34} The partition of the subcontinent into India and Pakistan, however, defied this version of India based on geography. Hence, the rise of independent India was more than ever before reliant on the notion of a secular state that rallied its citizens around neutral, non-religious symbols. Above all, in the aftermath of partition, loyalty to the territory became an essential component of national identity, and was synonymous with national unification.

\textit{The Indian nation-state and national territory}

In a speech to the Constituent Assembly in December 1946, Nehru defined the forthcoming nation as consisting of ‘British India, the Indian [princely] States, other parts of India as are outside of British India and the States, as well as other territories as are willing to be constituted into the Independent Sovereign India.’\textsuperscript{35} While this definition does not seem to have anticipated that the north-western and eastern parts of India would become Pakistan in August 1947, it allowed for the future inclusion of other territories into the new Indian nation (Map. 15). Indeed, by 1948 the new Indian state was organised as follows: ‘Part A’ states’ comprised the former ‘British’ provinces and those states that had been merged into the adjacent former ‘British’ provinces; ‘Part B’ included the former princely states or groupings of states; ‘Part C’ states represented all the centrally-administered areas, while the tribal populations of the northeast frontier of India were given special status as the ‘autonomous district’ of Assam.\textsuperscript{36} Nehru’s 1946 statement implied that the foreign possessions would be welcomed should their populations

\textsuperscript{33} Kaufmann, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 452.
\textsuperscript{34} Lowenthal, ‘Identity, Heritage, and History’, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 44-5.
\textsuperscript{35} Nehru, \textit{India’s Foreign Policy: Selected Speeches, An Independent Sovereign Republic}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{36} Furber, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 352-371.
desire to join India, but that the decision ultimately rested with local populations rather than any governmental authority. His statement underlined India’s intention to resolve any territorial issues by peaceful means.

In 1950 India adopted a constitution that specifically allowed the incorporation of other states, such as Kashmir-Jammu and the French and Portuguese Indian possessions, whose future status was not yet determined at the time of the constitution’s promulgation. However, no alternative to joining the Union could be contemplated. In a speech in Bangalore in 1948, Nehru warned that ‘separatism or disruptionism’, which he likened ‘to an evil monster raising its head in India’, would not be tolerated as he believed that separatism would give foreign powers an opportunity to undermine the unity of the nation. In Nehru’s words, ‘disruptionism’ of the territorial unity of India was as big a threat as politicised religious identities. While the former suggested separation based on regional, cultural, and political differences, the latter was a politicised and religious conflict. In Nehru’s view, both would lead to the balkanisation of India.

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It is worth pointing out that Patel, who as India’s first Home Minister masterminded the integration of princely states, was in favour of amalgamating the foreign possessions as part of the broader integration scheme. Patel considered French India a domestic issue that should be dealt with the same way as the Indian princely states, that is, firmly and resolutely. Hence, his view did not rule out the use of armed forces. In comparison, Nehru was more sensitive to France’s position and the international implications of the future of French India. He did not want ‘to fall out with France’, and therefore favoured a diplomatic path to obtain the same objective, even though this ran the risk of taking longer and becoming entangled with other international issues such as Indochina.\footnote{Furber, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 352; Nehru, \textit{SWIN}, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 2, p. 527, Vol. 4, p. 644, Vol. 5 p. 338; More, \textit{Freedom Movement in French India}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 121.} Furthermore, Nehru’s approach was to deal with French India in a way that induced the more intransigent Portugal to enter into negotiations.\footnote{Bègue, ‘La valeur de l’«exemple français »’, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 317.} The two leaders’ divergent views with regard to the foreign territories reflected their political differences.\footnote{Zachariah, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 180-7, 185.} The integration of the princely states remained mainly a ‘Home’ issue, although with the added problem that some states physically located at the heart of the nation might choose to align with Pakistan. Foreign possessions, being for the most part territorially scattered and confined to the periphery, presented a lesser danger than the larger princely states.

By the Second World War, the foreign possessions had already been described by the Indian press as ‘foreign pimples’ disfiguring India, and denounced as anachronistic and ‘incompatible with the [upcoming] independence of India which is one and indivisible’.\footnote{Eharat Jyoti, no date, AD, Inde, Vol. 79: \textit{Presse et propagande}; Sentinel, 18 November 1946, in Consulat de France à Bombay, 19 novembre 1946, AD, Inde, Vol. 79: \textit{Presse et propagande}.} It is revealing that Indian nationalists used the term ‘one and indivisible’, a French republican principle dating back to the Revolution which was similarly used by the French to argue against the secession of the Indian territories from the French state. The main issue was that both countries considered French India to be an integral part of their polity. The Indian government emphasised...
the cultural links between India and the comptoirs, and regarded France’s refusal to cede the enclaves as politically provocative in the context of the government’s very recent unification of the princely states and British India to form the Union of India.43

If India had been unable to negotiate the incorporation of the French possessions, her international status, as well as the future incorporation of Hyderabad and, in particular, of Kashmir-Jammu, would have been jeopardised.44 At the time of India’s independence, the Nizam (Muslim ruler) of Hyderabad had challenged India’s unity by refusing to join the new state. Since Hyderabad comprised a territory of 215,000 square kilometres –almost the size of the United Kingdom – inhabited by 17 million people and located in the centre of the subcontinent, the Nizam’s claim to independence resulted in the ‘belly [of India] being cut off from the main body’. An added danger was that Pakistan, an ally of the Nizam, could potentially exercise influence over an area positioned in the heart of the Indian nation.45 India eventually settled the issue with a five-day, armed campaign in September 1948, which resulted in the Nizam’s capitulation. This action had, in Nehru’s words, ‘a good communal effect’; it established the supremacy of the new central government in New Delhi and sent a warning to anyone wanting to challenge its power and determination.46 Nevertheless, it was not convincing enough to resolve the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, the princely state located in the far north-west corner of the territory, on the border of the new state of Pakistan.47 At the time of partition, its Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh, who ruled over an overwhelmingly Muslim majority, had not decided whether his state would join Muslim-majority Pakistan or Hindu-majority India. His fateful indecision resulted in decades of boundary

43 Annoussamy, ‘The Merger of French India’, op.cit., p. 70; some of the princely states were larger than certain European nations in area and population, and all enjoyed various degrees of local autonomy. Furber does mention the cases of French and Portuguese possessions, op.cit.
44 The Leader, 7 March 1948, NMML, Nehru’s clippings: R8787.
45 Jinnah had made claims over Hyderabad on the basis of its people being predominantly Muslims, Krishna, op.cit., pp. 355, 398.
46 Zachariah, op.cit., p. 215.
disputes, rival territorial claims, mounting tensions, and even wars between Pakistan and India. Indeed, the boundary issues remain unsettled today.48

The Indo-Pakistani dispute influenced Nehru’s negotiations over the future of French India. Indeed, India agreed to resolve the issue of accession of Kashmir-Jammu and French India via popular vote. In the case of Jammu and Kashmir, a plebiscite was suggested, while in French India the French Constitution (Article 27) required that a referendum be held to decide whether or not cession would proceed. When India realised that a plebiscite in Kashmir-Jammu could actually lead to its independence, the idea of a popular vote to decide the future of any territories, including Kashmir-Jammu and French India, was abandoned.49 The situation in Kashmir-Jammu, however, was not unique. On the west coast, Junagadh (5,370 square kilometres with a population of 670,000) witnessed scenes of disruption in the summer of 1947 when its Muslim ruler refused to accede to India. The population rebelled and forced him to seek refuge in Pakistan. A referendum held in February 1948 supported merger with India.50

Apart from territorial entitlements, the building of the Indian nation-state was associated with a foreign policy that included four platforms: a position of non-alignment, which India hoped would serve as a role model for others; a role as mediator (which Indian leaders would fulfill at the end of the Korean and Indochina wars); leadership of Afro-Asian co-operation; and finally, a position against any form of colonisation.51 In 1946 Nehru drew on the full extent of his diplomatic ability to negotiate India’s independence and assert India’s leadership in Asia and organised the first Asian Relations Conference which was held in the capital city in March-April 1947; representatives of twenty-eight countries from the Middle-East and across all of Asia attended. Observers from Australian, Soviet, and American research institutes were also welcomed, as

48 Robert G. Wirsing, India, Pakistan, and the Kashmir Dispute: On Regional Conflict and its Resolution (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1998), pp. 1-6,
49 Ibid., pp. 54-9.
50 Furber, op.cit., p. 359.
were representatives of the United Nations. The conference’s purpose was to assert Asian unity rather than discuss specific individual political issues linked to independence. The conference was part of Congress’s broader foreign policy ‘based on the elimination of political and economic imperialism everywhere, the co-operation of free nations... [to] develop relations with all neighbouring countries’.52 The first instance of such gathering of delegates from colonised countries had taken place in Brussels in 1927 under the aegis of the European League Against Imperialism and for National Independence, which had evolved from the Second Congress of the Communist International in July 1920. This first Afro-Asian conference welcomed 175 delegates from thirty-seven countries and territories.53 Already in Brussels, the seed of a common cause and the need for solidarity was expressed.

Topics for discussion at the 1947 conference included defence and security, racial problems, intra-Asian emigration and the status and treatment of immigrants, the transition from a colonial to a national economy, agricultural and industrial development, public health, nutrition and labour welfare, and cultural co-operation.54 The All India Congress Committee (AICC) report, dated 22 August 1946, had made clear the extent of the wider region that India would be called on to exercise influence in Asia, the East African coast, New Zealand, and Australia. In the view of the AICC, India had become a beacon for colonised countries seeking independence. The vision of India as a confident and true leader was summed up in a phrase underlined in the

52 Nehru, Discovery of India, op.cit., p. 459.
54 Participating countries were Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Burma, Cambodia, Cochin China and Laos, Ceylon, China, Egypt, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Korea, Malaya, Mongolia, Nepal, Palestine Jewish Delegation, The Philippines, Siam, Tajikistan, Tibet, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vietnam, and observers from the: Arab League, Cairo; Australian Institute of International Affairs, Sydney; India Institute, London; Institute of Pacific Relations, Moscow; Institute of Pacific Relations, New York; Royal Institute of International Affairs, London; United Nations, New York. Asian Relations Organisation, Asian Relations: Report of the Proceedings and Documentation of the First Asian Relations Conference, New Delhi, March-April 1947 (New Delhi: Asian Relations Organisation, 1948), pp. 3, 263-4;
original report: ‘Let our fear yield place to confidence without pride, and let our suspicion give in before trustfulness without credibility’.  

This gathering of Asian and Middle-Eastern countries was unique because, for the first time, it was held in a country that was about to gain its independence from a European power. It emphasised the achievement of India’s freedom movement and provided inspiration for the delegates of nationalist movements who were invited to attend. Hence it is not surprising that the conference triggered a series of anxious communications from the French colonial administration in India to the British Foreign Office. French authorities feared that ‘unwelcome subjects might be discussed’, hinting at their level of concern that a conference of colonised countries, including Vietnam and newly independent Syria and Lebanon, were discussing the means to achieve the independence of French colonies. Moreover, the French were offended that, while representatives of their colonies and former mandates were welcome to attend, they themselves were not invited. As India’s leadership grew, so did her criticism of European colonialism, as revealed in Nehru’s speeches. More importantly, in his inaugural address to the Asian Relations Conference, Nehru denounced European colonialism for having severed the old ties that had linked Asian countries, and invited ‘peoples of Asia, to meet together, to hold together and to advance together’. His inference was that unity and collaboration amongst former colonised countries and those seeking independence would be the force that would ultimately defeat imperialism. The declaration reiterated Nehru’s earlier statements, and his call for Asia to look back and be inspired by her own past, a time when she enjoyed superiority while Europe remained in the darkness: ‘For a thousand years or more, while Europe was backward and often

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56 Secret cypher telegram from High Commissioner for the UK in India to Cabinet Office 21 December 1946, NA, FO371/5472: Inter-Asian conference at New Delhi; note 13 November 1946, NA, FO371/5472: Inter-Asian conference at New Delhi.
57 AD, Inde, Vol. 56: Conférence pan-asiatique.
engulfed in its dark ages, Asia represented the advancing spirit of man. Epoch after epoch, a brilliant culture flourished there and great centres of civilization and power grew up.\textsuperscript{59}

The Asian Relations conference was followed in January 1949 by the Inter-Asia conference, once again held in New Delhi, at which the independence of Indonesia was discussed, and India helped organize the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference held in Bandung, Indonesia. Twenty-nine countries from Asia, the Middle-East, and Africa participated in the Bandung conference, at which colonialism was condemned.\textsuperscript{60} The Bandung conference highlighted the stalemate of the Cold War between aligned and non-aligned countries.\textsuperscript{61} This series of conferences marked the rise of a new post-war world order that included new states emerging out of former European colonial empires. The conferences helped establish the idea of a regional identity and promoted economic and political co-operation amongst former colonised countries. Above all, it strengthened the role of India in international relations.\textsuperscript{62}

Although Nehru had insisted that the first Asian Relations Conference would not address issues of national independence, the official position of Congress towards foreign territories in independent India was asserted the following year in the Jaipur Congress resolution (19 December 1948), which stated:

With the establishment of independence in India the continued existence of any foreign possession in India becomes anomalous and opposed to the conception of India's unity and freedom. Therefore it has become necessary for these possessions to be politically incorporated in India and no other solution can be stable or lasting or in conformity with

\textsuperscript{59} Nehru, \textit{Discovery of India}, op.cit., pp. 609-10.


\textsuperscript{61} Bhagavan, op.cit., p. 116-21; Zachariah, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 216-7, 220.

\textsuperscript{62} Zachariah, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 155.
the will of the people. The [Indian National] Congress trusts that this change will be brought about soon by peaceful methods and the friendly cooperation of the governments concerned. The Congress realises that during this long period administrative, cultural, educational and judicial systems have grown up in these foreign possessions which are different from those prevailing in the rest of India. Any changeover therefore must take these factors into consideration and allow for a gradual adjustment which will not interfere with the life of the people or those who desire a measure of autonomy to be granted, wherever possible so as to enable the people of those possessions to maintain their culture and institutions within the larger framework of free India.63

This statement raised several issues. First of all, while it implied that foreign possessions would be incorporated according to the ‘will of people’, the ‘people’ were not clearly defined. Were they those living in the foreign territories, or those living in India, or perhaps an aggregate of both? In addition, the statement did not specify the means by which the will of the people would be assessed. Would this be via a referendum or plebiscite, or would elected representatives be called on to make the decision? Finally, the peaceful means and friendly cooperation being referred to stood in stark contrast to the sending of troops into Kashmir in October 1947 and the violent manner by which Hyderabad had been incorporated in September of 1948. Despite India’s determination to merge the foreign territories, Congress was nonetheless ready to acknowledge their cultural heritage and to grant them the right to maintain their culture and institutions within the larger framework of an independent India. In the case of France, Nehru had earlier expressed his wish that the French enclaves be a ‘French window in India for the interpretation of French culture to the Indians and vice versa’.64 However during the same Jaipur conference, the Prime

64 British Embassy, Paris, dated 2 November 1946, to Western Department, NA, FO371/60041: French Establishments in India.
Minister admitted that India was facing ‘a large number of intricate problems… but this particular problem of foreign possession was probably one of the smallest’. Hence it did not, for the time being, require immediate attention.65

For France, retaining the comptoirs was linked to the belief that the extent of her empire enhanced France’s international prestige. Moreover, agreeing to a cession of the French Indian territories could set a precedent to the rest of the empire, as well as put at risk military access to Indochina.66 Both France and India rejected separatism or cession as an option, but while they chose diplomatic channels to decide the future of French India, they underestimated the voices that came from the French Indian territories.

**Emerging anti-colonial movements in French India**

Christopher Bayly argues that nationalism in India was built on the basis of a pre-existing sense of territoriosity, and that it evolved despite European influence.67 It is necessary to add, however, that anti-colonial movements in French India emerged more specifically as a response to the process of French colonisation. J.P. More has argued that, by introducing new land revenue policies and a legal system that transformed common property to individual land ownership, the French colonial enterprise displaced old property relations.68 In the same vein, studies by Weber and A. Suresh have demonstrated that it was the introduction of French political institutions in 1840, involving the nomination of notables on the basis of land ownership that triggered the first opposition movement organised by rich local landowners sitting as nominated members in the local assemblies. These members objected to the under-representation of local French Indians in these assemblies on the basis that French Indians contributed in larger

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65 Nehru, *SWJN, op.cit.*, Vol. 8, p. 425
66 Secret copy of report dated 27 June 1949 from superintendent of police Special branch CID madras, NAI, 15(11)EUR1/49: *Situation in French Establishments in India*
67 Bayly, *op.cit.*
numbers than French residents to the payment of local taxes. As such, it was argued, they should be given a larger number of seats. Although it is tempting to describe these landowners, as Weber and Suresh have done, as embryonic nationalist factions, it is preferable to refer to them as early forms of anti-French or anti-colonial groups. Indeed, it was not until the twentieth century that a comprehensive nationalist movement, based on an ‘all-India’ program of mass mobilisation encompassing British India, the autonomous princely states, and the foreign possessions, came into being.

The uprising of 1857, also referred as the Sepoy Rebellion, provides evidence to substantiate this argument. While the Rebellion is commonly viewed in Indian historiography as the first war of Indian Independence, it did not generate a sense of solidarity with French India or a spontaneous condemnation of European colonialism. The Rebellion was triggered by the refusal of Indian sepoys to obey their officers when ordered to bite open the paper of the Enfield Paper Cartridge, because the paper had been covered in tallow made of beef and pork fat. Obeying the order would have constituted a religious infringement for Hindus and Muslims alike. The Rebellion was quashed, but it led the following year to the formal takeover of the East India Company (EIC) by the British government, which had the further consequence, nineteen years later, that Queen Victoria was given the title ‘Empress of India’ (1877). Interestingly, this first war of Indian independence had an adverse effect on French Indians, who responded by writing to the French governor to reaffirm the population’s support for the French colonial administration. Indeed, the letter raised the issue of religious interference in British India, and thanked French officials for respecting local usages and customs, in contrast to the actions of the EIC’s administration, which had bluntly interfered with local customs. Hence, the Rebellion provoked

71 Weber, ‘*L’Inde française de Dupleix à Mendès France*’, op. cit., p. 213.
the leaders of the local French Indian population to officially endorse French colonialism as a better option to British colonialism.

This stand changed little until the twentieth century because no ‘nationalist’ organisation had been able to gain sufficient influence over all regions and territories, including British India, the princely states, and the foreign possessions. In fact, the expansion of education and political institutions in French India under the Third Republic only helped reaffirm that French Indians enjoyed colonial benefits, even if these benefits were limited. Women, for example, did not vote until 1946, and free education did not mean that all children were educated. Nonetheless, it was believed that similar benefits were out of reach for British Indians. In addition, given the encirclement of French India by British India, any form of nationalism or separatism emanating out of French India would have been futile, for not only would it have faced the challenge of overthrowing French colonial authorities, but ultimately British authorities as well. Hence, the particularity of French India and its status as a subordinate colonial power limited the scope of any potential nationalist movement in French India until new conditions emerged after the First World War.72

The extremist politics of the Swadeshi movement (1905-1911) in Bengal had a greater influence on the French Indian territories, especially Chandernagor, than the INC partly because the Swadeshi militants choose violent means of action and were inspired by Western revolutionary principles in opposition to the Gandhian ideology of satyagraha.73 Agitation against the colonial administration was strongest in Calcutta because the British had ruled longer in Bengal than in other parts of India. Between the INC’s creation in 1885 and 1920, when Gandhi rallied a wider range of support to create the beginning of mass political participation, the INC

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73 Extremists politics were also found in Maharashtra and Punjab, Bandyopadhyay, op.cit., p.xxx; Chatterjee, op.cit., pp. 103-7.
promoted a moderate form of nationalism led by a British-educated Indian elite whose efforts were limited to improving the conditions of Indians within the British colonial framework. The INC did not contemplate the overthrow of the British colonial rule, nor at this stage was it mobilising non-elite groups. The British decision to partition Bengal in 1905, however, prompted the Swadeshi movement which called for the production of home-made goods and the boycott of British goods. It was a landmark in the history of Indian nationalism as it involved all sections of the Indian people who rallied around a national cause.

Because of its proximity to Calcutta, the political activists of the Swadeshi movement used Chandernagor as a safe political shelter, and the French territory became the heart of the movement. Other British Indian political dissidents in the Madras Presidency also found refuge in Pondichéry. The Franco-British Treaty of Paris (1814) and its subsequent amendments provided conditions for the extradition of persons who had found refuge either in British India or in French India, but neither colonial power respected the agreement. Instead, they used their own discretion in matters of extradition, and the more important and wealthier the refugee, the less likely it was he would be arrested and handed over to the rival colonial authorities. Displeased with the French for allowing dangerous political rebels to find shelter in the French Indian territories, the British attempted to convince the French to spy on the ‘manufacturers of bombs’ in exchange for

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75 Chowdhuri, op. cit., pp. 2-4.
swapping territories around Pondichéry. If the French refused, the British warned, they would use reprisals and coercive measures such as the re-establishment of the customs barrier.\footnote{Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères à Mr le Ministre des Colonies, le 7 mai 1914, AOM, Inde, G38: Problèmes des frontières Pondichéry 1908; Le Ministre des Colonies à Mr le Gouverneur des établissements français de l’inde, 15 juin 1914, AOM, Inde, G38: Problèmes des frontières Pondichéry 1908.}

The French did not give in to British threats, however, and there is no indication that reprisals were initiated.\footnote{David, ‘Chandernagore’, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 102.} Besides being a safe haven, the French Bengali territory offered other advantages to political refugees: the French post was used to receive seditious political literature banned in British India; the purchase of firearms was free because it was believed the police force was too small to protect the population; and newspapers intended for illegal distribution in British India were printed in Chandernagor and later Pondichéry.\footnote{Gaelic American, \textit{Indian Sociologist, New York Call, Evening Post} from London, Paris and New York found their way in French India, so did Egyptian, Pan Islamic papers, \textit{The Moayyad and Luna}; Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 62; Suresh, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 227; David, ‘Chandernagore’, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 89-103; Chapman, ‘The Origins of a Public Voice for Marginalised …’, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 3-4.} In fact, followers of the \textit{Swadeshi} movement who had found asylum in Chandernagor left a legacy of using print communication to promote anti-colonial sentiments, a practice later followed by French Indians to voice opposition to their colonial masters.\footnote{Chapman, \textit{Gender, Citizenship and Newspapers, op.cit.}, pp. 101, 106; Suresh, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 64.}

One of the most famous leaders of the extremist branch of the \textit{Swadeshi} movement who found refuge in Chandernagor was Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950). Born in Calcutta, Aurobindo (who was referred to by his first name), was the product of the British system. His father had earned a medical degree at the University of Aberdeen and subsequently worked as a physician and health officer for the British Raj. Determined to maximise his children’s chances of passing the Indian Civil Service examination, he sent his three sons – the youngest, Aurobindo, was just six years old – to Britain to receive an education. Although a bright and promising student, Aurobindo grew to despise British imperialism and decided against pursuing a career in the
Indian Civil Service.\textsuperscript{81} He returned to India in 1893 greatly inspired by European thinkers and the principles of the French Revolution, which he said ‘in just five short years had done more to change entirely the political and social exterior of that country that seven centuries of parliamentarism in England.’\textsuperscript{82}

The anti-partition movement in Bengal gave Aurobindo the opportunity to engage in political activism. In contrast to Congress members, who saw Swadeshi as legitimate only within the limited context of Bengal, Aurobindo perceived the movement’s wider application.\textsuperscript{83} In 1906 he founded the newspaper \textit{Bande Mataram}, the voice of opposition to Britain that was published in English from August 1906 to October 1908. The title was the symbol both of devotion to the motherland and of defiance of the British authorities.\textsuperscript{84} Following the assassination of a police official in the Calcutta High Court by revolutionaries indirectly connected with Aurobindo, a warrant for his arrest was issued, causing him to flee to Chandernagor and then Pondichéry, where he resided in exile until his death in 1950.\textsuperscript{85}

Like others from the 1870s onwards who had found national political consciousness through the Hindu revival movement, Aurobindo started his own journey of spiritual renewal through the study of Hindu texts and the practice of yoga, neither of which he saw as contradictory to his fight against British imperialism. On the contrary, he believed his interest in the Hindu classics converged with and supported his commitment to Indian nationalism. At the beginning of his stay in Pondichéry, he remained a role-model of Indian nationalism and kept in

\textsuperscript{81} Out of respect to his father, Aurobindo could not reject joining the ICS but ensured that he would not successfully pass the last ICS examination, Heehs, \textit{Sri Aurobindo: A Brief Biography} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 3-18.
\textsuperscript{82} Quoted in Heehs, \textit{Sri Aurobindo, op.cit.}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., p. 39.
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., p. 41; Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee, ‘\textit{Bande Mataram} and Indian Nationalism’ (Calcutta: K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957).
\textsuperscript{85} Sri Motilal, another extremist, had fled to Chandernagor and founded an ashram where revolutionaries from Calcutta, and Aurobindo himself, could find refuge, Suresh, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 222; other famous refugees included the poet C. Subramanya Bharathi, the Tamil writer V.V.S Aiyar, and other nationalists like V. Ramaswamy Iyengar, Subramanya Sivam, Vanchinathan and Madassamy, some of whom returned to British India after the 1920 amnesty, Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix}, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 327.
contact with fellow revolutionaries. From 1920 until his death, however, despite many attempts by Congress members to lure him back into politics, and to the great disappointment of Nehru, he ceased to engage in political activities, devoting himself instead to the creation of a spiritual centre, the Aurobindo Ashram, with the assistance of a French devotee, Mirra Richard (née Alfassa), called the Mother.

By circulating their nationalist sentiments around French India, the political dissidents who found refuge in Chandernagor contributed to the rise of a political consciousness in the city already shaped by resentment at being administered by people from the South. Chandernagorians never accepted orders from Pondichéry, the colonial centre located almost two thousand kilometers south of the Bengali territory. The cultural abyss between them could be measured by the three days it took to reach Chandernagor from Pondichéry, and the lack of interest from a colonial administration that gave the Bengali enclave the status of a ‘colony of the colony’. Chandernagor’s resentment was increased by the fact that before the Seven Years’ War it had been an important commercial colonial centre, and because it felt a sense of importance from being associated with nearby Calcutta, the commercial and political capital of British India until growing Bengali nationalism compelled the British colonial administration to relocate the capital to New Delhi in 1911. In addition, an inadequate knowledge of French amongst educated Chandernagorians barred them from positions in colonial administration, thus causing further resentment. The fact that numerous French visitors and administrators commented on how few people spoke French in Chandernagor strongly suggests that both the administration and the local population were rebelling against French colonial authorities. It seemed that they were willingly allowing themselves to be influenced and even absorbed by their

87 Mirra Richard and her husband Paul Richard had interest in spiritual matters. Paul, a lawyer, had first met Aurobindo in Pondichéry in 1910 during a visit related to French Indian elections. He had acted on the advice of his friend Alexandra David-Néel. He returned with his wife in 1914, and again in 1920, Heehs, Sri Aurobindo, op.cit., pp. 78-80, 133.
British neighbours. The extent of the revolutionaries’ influence on Chandernagorians is tellingly demonstrated by an unsuccessful attempt, at the end of 1908, to assassinate its mayor, Mr Tardival, by throwing a bomb at the window of his house. Indeed, it was in Chandernagor that the Swadeshi movement made the most impact, with elected members using French institutions to request greater financial autonomy and to demand that local taxes be used for the development and welfare of the enclave’s population rather than continue to be transferred to Pondichéry.

Economic difficulties and the rise of organised revolutionary movements because of the impact of the First World War provided the right conditions in the French comptoirs for more insistent demands for better governance. Ensuing labour unrest, encompassing an array of strategies such as demonstrations, workers’ walkouts, shop shutdowns, and fasting – all commonly referred to as hortal or strike action – developed into the most powerful driving force challenging French colonial authorities. These methods were widely used by growing leftist groups and Indian nationalists; with his 1919 Rowlatt Satyagraha, Gandhi had succeeded in launching a mass movement that made him a dominant figure in Indian politics. An increase in the price of basic commodities in 1919 had worsened the working and living conditions of approximately 10,000 labourers employed in the French Indian textile mills and a further 10,000 in the traditional handlooms.

Shortages of cotton during the First World War had resulted in the import of poor quality cotton from India and consequently also an increase in the number of damaged cotton products. Fines introduced by the management of French Indian mills further contributed to the hardship of workers, who already faced poor working conditions, long hours, and minimal pay. A series of strikes organised in the 1920s pressed for an increase in wages, a reduction of working hours,

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89 Ibid., pp. 89-91.
90 Geetha, op.cit., p. 63.
92 R. Kumar, op.cit., p. 4; Sri Soudjanarandjani, 26 May 1932.
weekly holidays, and improved sanitary conditions. Under pressure from colonial authorities, the mills’ management agreed to improve wages and suspend fines, and a labour fund was organised to assist the welfare of workers. But misappropriation of the labour fund and political rivalries within the mills resulted in more strikes, lockouts, and police repression.

This already incendiary labour situation in French India was worsened by the worldwide economic crisis of the 1930s. French Indian textile mills were affected by the establishment of customs barriers, increased competition, and a decline in the overseas market for textile products, all of which led to a decrease in demand for cotton cloth from Pondichéry. The mills’ management reduced production costs by retrenching some of their workforce and cutting wages, which not surprisingly led to labour action such as walkouts, strikes, and demands for better working conditions and the right to form a workers’ union. Labour unrest in Pondichéry coincided with similar developments in British India, where a new surge of nationalist sentiment generated a wave of strikes affecting the major industrial sectors of Bengal, Bombay, Kanpur, Ahmedabad, and Jamshedpur. When the strikes reached their peak in 1938, Congress reacted. Presenting itself as the party of all classes, Congress restrained the labour movement and brought it under its own leadership.

During this decade, Indian nationalist politics and various forms of leftism spread to French India giving rise to new methods of organising. In 1931 the French Indian communist Varadarajulu Subbiah founded the Jeunesses de l’Inde française modelled on the Workers’ and Peasants’ Party’s (WPP) Naw Jawan Bharat Sabha (New Youth Indian Association). The WPP was created in 1927 by the Indian Communist party to represent Indian peasants and workers with the aim to put pressure on the INC. The youth organisation was dedicated to education and

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94 Suresh, op.cit., pp. 240-53; French Indian labour worked between twelve to fourteen hours a day while in comparison in Madras or Bombay the workforce rarely worked more than ten hours a day, Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 333; first strike was in 1908, Chapman, ‘The Origins’, op.cit., p. 4.
political activities amongst the most disadvantaged people in the French territories. It was run by French Indian working class youth who campaigned for the departure of the British and the French. In parallel, Gandhi’s Civil Disobedience Movement, launched in 1930 with the *Salt Satyagraha* – a defiant march to the sea in protest at the British monopoly - helped create the *Harijan Sewak Sangha* (also spelt as *Harijana Seva Sangh*) of Tamil Nadu, a group that linked French India to the nationalist cause in British India.96

The *Harijan Sewak Sangha* was constituted after Gandhi had maintained a historic fast, during the last days of September 1932, in protest against the British Indian government’s intention to organise a separate electoral system based on castes. In essence, the *Harijan Sewak Sangha* was dedicated to improving the conditions of the underprivileged and campaigning for the abolition of caste, but above all its ideology promoted non-violence, harmony amongst classes, and arbitration between the British and dissidents.97 It organised social services that included education of *Harijan* boys and elders – *Harijan* meaning ‘Child of God’, a term used by Gandhi for Dalits or Untouchables – improving sanitation and water supplies.98 On 17 February 1934, on the invitation of the *Harijan Sewak Sangha*, Gandhi visited Pondichéry and then Karikal and invited his audience to fight against politicised religious identities and caste segregation. Two years later, he delivered a similar message during a visit to Mahé.99 It is worth mentioning that at the time French authorities had banned the public gathering of more than twenty people, but to the great surprise of the *Harijan Sewak Sangha*’s organisers, the French Governor, Georges Bourret,

99 Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix*, *op.cit.*, p. 332; although public meetings were banned in French India during this period, the colonial authorities granted permission for the meeting to proceed, Subbiah, *op.cit.*, pp. 32-3.
granted permission for the meeting of Gandhi, expressing in his letter his glowing tributes and respectful homage.\textsuperscript{100}

In his speech translated in Tamil by his friend and fellow-freedom fighter Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, often referred as ‘Rajaji’, Gandhi ensured to link the French ideals of equality and liberty with the end of politicised religious identities and caste discrimination. Besides providing education to illiterate workers, the Harijan Sewak Sangha of Pondichéry also set up illegal unions in 1934 to organise the mills’ mainly outcast workforce.\textsuperscript{101} The introduction of Gandhian social reforms into French India, via the Harijan Sewak Sangha, assisted with the political awareness of unorganised labour and set the scene for the evolution of the Harijan Sewak Sangha into a more powerful group ready to undertake the next level of labour unrest.

The events in Pondichéry found their echo in a specific wave of strikes in France triggered by the May 1936 victory of a new coalition government dominated by Socialists, the Front Populaire. The strikes led to the Accord Matignon (June 1936), a set of agreements which included the legal right to strike, the right of workers to organise in unions, wage increases, holiday pay, a reduction of the working week to forty hours, and collective bargaining.\textsuperscript{102} On 25 and 26 July 1936, French Indian workers went on strike demanding the same rights that their fellow-workers in France had recently obtained. Negotiations between workers’ delegates, the Governor and the Mayor Joseph David who represented the mills owners’ interests came to no fruition. The French authorities decided to end the strike by using repressive methods that involved cordonning the three mills under occupation with armed police to prevent the access of the striking workers to the leaders outside, only permitting relatives to make food deliveries. On the morning of the 30 July the police armed with machine guns marched onto the mills triggering a shooting referred to as la fusillade de Pondichéry (Pondichéry Shooting Day). Police repression

\textsuperscript{100} Subbiah, op. cit., pp. 24, 33
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., p. 333.
resulted in twelve dead and twenty injured.\textsuperscript{103} The colonial administration was opposed to trade unionism because it considered it a seditious British import.\textsuperscript{104} Labour agitation continued until new labour regulations were introduced by the decree of 6 April 1937, making French Indian workers the first in Asia to enjoy labour laws granting workers a forty-hour working week and the right to strike and organise in unions.\textsuperscript{105}

This period of labour unrest and its subsequent organisation of legal unions provided the ideal conditions for political activists to promote anti-colonial feelings by means of print media such as the newspaper \textit{Soudandiram - La Liberté} (also spelt \textit{Swandanthiram} and \textit{Sundandiram}), which published articles both in French and in Tamil. It was founded by Subbiah in June 1934 and was published monthly from Pondichéry. It was linked to the setting up of Trade Union Committees in July 1934 and rapidly acquired a reputation as a propagator of anti-colonialism. Contributions included stories by leading writers in Tamil Nadu and unpublished stories by the poet Subramaniya Bharathi (1882 – 1921). The newspaper had a circulation of 8,000 copies which reached Tamil people beyond Indian borders, in Ceylon, South Africa, Malaya and Burma. The success of the paper was reflected in the British authorities banning its entry into British India and British overseas territories leading to the termination of the paper until January 1935 when it resumed as a weekly whose circulation remained limited to Pondichéry.\textsuperscript{106} \textit{Soudandiram} did not limit its criticism to the French Indian authorities, but also denounced the British Customs regulations and their effect on the French Indian population. It vociferously attacked colonial authorities for supporting business owners and for making a mockery of the electoral process.\textsuperscript{107}

Indeed, the labour agitation that occurred between the two world wars demonstrates that antagonism between French Indian workers and French colonial authorities had now reached a new level. Nineteenth-century opposition to French colonial authorities had been limited to a

\textsuperscript{103} Subbiah, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 82-3.
\textsuperscript{104} Chapman, \textit{Gender, Citizenship and Newspapers, \textit{op.cit.}}, p.111.
\textsuperscript{106} Chapman, \textit{‘The Origins’, \textit{op.cit.}}, p. 5; Subbiah, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 46-7.
\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Soudandiram}, 3 March 1938, 2 April 1938, 20 May 1938, 15 December 1938, 18 February 1939.
small group of landowners, and later to those who, having benefited from a French education, used institutional means – such as putting pressure on illiterate voters and manipulating party politics – to maintain their economic and social advantages. The labour unrest of the 1920s and 1930s, however, marked the spread of political consciousness across less advantaged socio-economic groups, who made significant use of non-institutional means to press for change. The labour movement and its leaders had clearly benefited from the legacy of the Swadeshi movement revolutionaries, as well as from the mounting influence of the international left, and of a nationalist movement in British India that helped politicise a poor, illiterate, and socially excluded group of French Indians. However, it is important to point out that, while the successful introduction of labour laws in French India certainly provided a means to measure the success of labour unrest, the effects remained limited to the workforce of the textile mills of Pondichéry and Chandernagor. Actions such as these had not yet reached the large agricultural working population found in rural areas of French India, who were less organised and still bound to their landlords.\footnote{Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 338.}

Besides social conflicts, unrest was also felt in the French Indian political scene with the formation of a new party in 1937. The reign of Chanenougam, ‘The King of French India’ who had ruled for over a quarter of a century, had come to an end in 1907. After being accused of electoral fraud, Chanenougam found refuge in British India, where he died the following year. For the next thirty years, French Indian politics was dominated by continuing antagonism between Hindu traditionalists and supporters of the French ‘idea’. Hindu traditionalists under the leadership of Sadassivanaiker, also known as Sadassiva, held power until 1914, when they were replaced by their opponents, headed by Henri Gaebele, an Alsatian and Pondichéry textile mill owner. In 1927 Gaebele’s former collaborators founded the Franco-Hindu party, and maintained control of the colony until 1937 when a new party, the Mahajana Sabha, contested its hegemony and
demanded the removal of the two-list system in favour of a unique college of electors. Branches of the party were founded in Karikal and Mahé, and its activities were monitored by representatives of the INC, including Varahagiri Venkata Giri, a close associate of Nehru who would become the President of India in 1969. The party’s formation and demand for fair and non-violent elections was inspired by the victory of the Congress Party in the Madras provincial elections in February 1937. The municipal elections of 2 May 1937 in French India provoked an usual amount of violence, but this time the fighting took on a new dimension: the population clashed over the issue of a ‘French India’ versus an ‘Indian India’, demonstrating that the visits of Indian nationalist leaders, the influence of political refugees, and the organisation of labour unrest under the aegis of the Indian nationalist movement had firmly infiltrated French India.

Political concepts had now changed. French Indian issues were no longer perceived in an exclusively French colonial context, the ‘European’ borders that separated French India and British India were becoming more blurred, political awareness had sharpened, and a sense of common socio-political purpose had emerged across the region and socio-economic groups. Nonetheless, it is important at this juncture to emphasise that even though a sense of political unity was being felt during this period amongst the people living in and around the French Indian territories, the idea of an ‘all-India’ nation was not yet fully expressed in any political program advanced by the INC. It would take until the outbreak of the Second World War and the 1942 ‘Quit India’ campaign for the nationalist movement to gain mass participation, and until the round of talks with Britain regarding its withdrawal as the war ended to concretise the idea of a new nation that would include the foreign possessions in India. Furthermore, the INC’s viewpoint

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111 Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 335 ;
112 The Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, declared on 3 September 1939 that India was at war without consulting the legislative assemblies. While the Constitution did not oblige him to seek approval, his decision was received with shock by Congress and the population. Congress agreed to give support to Britain on the conditions that the British government considered independence for India, but this was utterly rejected. However, the fall of Singapore in early 1942 which weakened Britain’s position as a colonial power, and the failure of the Cripps Mission, which was charged with the task of exploring an accord between Britain, the Muslim League, and Congress, gave a new
regarding the future of foreign territories always took second place to the issue of partition and the task of merging former British India and the princely states into one political entity. However, once these issues were settled, the task of determining the future of French India became imminent, and India would now need to negotiate with France and French Indians over the merging of French India with the Indian nation.

**The merger and anti-merger issue in French India**

Political and social unrest in French India was allayed by the impact of Second World War, and while the overseas market became inaccessible, the establishment of the Customs Union Agreement in 1941 between the British and French governments provided an outlet for French Indian textile products in India. Concerns over the continuing world conflict took precedence over local issues. As had happened during the First World War, French Indian volunteers joined colonial forces to fight on behalf of their colonial masters; the colonial administration reported that they numbered seven hundred. Despite difficult economic conditions, French Indians organised and generously contributed to a fund to support the war effort. Money was allocated for food and clothes parcels, and assistance given to refugees and prisoners. French Indians also became involved in the printing of war propaganda and liaising with similar relief groups across the major British Indian cities.\(^{113}\) Despite this display of support, anti-colonial feelings were increasingly stirring, and the war provided a new context for an Indian nationalist upsurge that spread to the French Indian territories.

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113 Annoussamy, 'L'Intermède', op.cit., p. 137; by 1942, 120,000 rupees were collected, 105,000 of which was transferred to Beyrouth and London; 170,000 francs and 637 British pounds were sent to prisoners, while 5,000 rupees had been earmarked for French refugees in Britain, Brutinel, op.cit., p. 3.
As the war neared its end, the British were conscious that they could not remain in India. A series of round table conferences finally led to India’s independence and the creation of Pakistan on 15 August 1947. While Britain was negotiating her withdrawal, France was gathering representatives of her empire to discuss the future of her colonies. For the first time an indigenous person, Deiva Zivaratinam (also spelt Zivarattinam), a lawyer who trained at the École de droit in Pondichéry was elected by the conseil général in 1943, to be the French Indian delegate to the Assemblée constituante provisoire in Algiers (3 November 1943 – 25 July 1944). He then went to Paris where the Assemblée relocated (7 November 1944 – 3 August 1945) after the liberation of the capital, and participated in the debates surrounding the new Constitution as a member of the Commission de la France d'outre-mer.¹¹⁴

During the debate on colonial matters that took place in the Consultative Assembly in Algiers in January 1944, Zivaratinam criticised the French government for treating French India like ‘a poor member of the French family’ (parent pauvre). In a speech on 14 January 1944, reproduced in the Journal Officiel de l’Inde Française,¹¹⁵ Zivaratinam pointed out that the current system, which had remained virtually unchanged since the early days of the Third Republic, allowed the conseil général to have only an advisory role. He condemned the dual-list system of elections in which the first list was reserved for French citizens residing in French India, their descendants whether white or of mixed race, and the indigenous people who had opted for ‘renunciation’, while the second list consisted of indigenous French Indians who represented 98% of the electorate. The French Indian delegate argued for the implementation of universal suffrage, greater decision-making power for the conseil général and conseils municipaux in regard to tax and revenue matters affecting each commune, and free, compulsory primary education for all.

children. In other words, he argued for the introduction of a system of fair and equal representation similar to the one in place in the métropole. But he also asked that education should be conducted ‘in the native language’, a practice opposed by French assimilationist principles, which called for the promotion of French culture and French language. Some of his demands were satisfied when a decree of 23 August 1945 removed the two-list system and introduced a ‘universal’ suffrage that, for the first time, included women. But in conveying the need for social and political reform to bring French India into line with the métropole while upholding her cultural characteristics, Zivaratinam’s speech precisely expressed the conundrum that continued to face India and France from the time of India’s independence until France’s withdrawal in 1954. On the one hand, France had a history of introducing political institutions, law, justice, and education, while on the other hand India had an ethnic, social, cultural, and economic affiliation with French India. While both countries claimed territorial and moral sovereignty over French India, French Indians joined the dispute and became divided along the merger/anti-merger lines.

It is not my intention to chronicle the step-by-step evolution of diplomatic negotiations between France and India in this period, as this has been extensively covered by Ajit Neojy. Moreover, S. Geetha has focused on the merger and anti-merger groups, while More has analysed the situation in Mahé and Yanaon. Drawing on these studies, my interest here is to highlight the fact that, within the context of the merger/anti-merger and national/colonial debate, there existed a number of conflicting groups operating at two distinct levels, and that each of these groups used various means to achieve its aims. Most interestingly, while pro-merger groups supported the INC and perceived that merger would be a form of ‘liberation’, a means to

116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
118 Anoussamy, ‘L’Intermède’, op.cit., p. 120.
overthrow another European colonial power, the anti-merger factions were divided. Those who were pro-French campaigned to maintain the status quo, but a new separatist voice also emerged to undermine the arguments of both nation-states. Indeed, for this faction, neither merging with independent India nor remaining part of the French Union was an option. While Indian nationalist leaders promoted a vision of national community based on historical, linguistic, religious, cultural, and political factors that extended to include French India, this new French Indian lobby group perceived that within the integration conflict created by the independence of India there existed an opportunity to create an independent polity, an option that, clearly, was not countenanced by either India or France.

A different set of players acting at two distinct levels can be identified within the Franco-Indian merger debate. At the international level, two nation-states claimed sovereignty over the peripheral territories of French India within a post-war context influenced by nationalism and decolonisation. Of most importance for the region – and of most relevance for this study – were the dispute between Pakistan and India over the future of Kashmir-Jammu, and the growing conflict in Indochina, both of which affected the Franco-Indian negotiations. At this level, heads of government and state officials laboured to defend a particular set of national policies that had been engineered in the capital cities, and which centred on territorial sovereignty and national pride. Although standing in opposition to one another, the two nations shared the same determination to avoid balkanisation, which would have jeopardised, on the one hand, the Indian nation-building mission and, on the other, the recently transformed French colonial framework called the French Union. In addition, while Nehru followed a foreign policy of non-alignment and saw France as part of the American bloc using Marshall Plan aid to continue her colonialist influence in Indochina, he was aware that in order for India to maintain her independence and gain recognition as an international influencer, she would need to access nuclear knowledge,
hence the importance of maintaining good relations with France, that was already renowned for her atomic research.\textsuperscript{120}

Despite Nehru’s condemnation of French action in Indochina, and promoting a foreign policy supportive of neighbours who fought for the attainment of internal peace and freedom, issue of home affairs always took precedence over the independence movement of a colonised country. When the Vietnamese requested that India stopped French military aircrafts flying across India on their way to Indochina, India only limited their number, aware that a total prohibition could have repercussions on Franco-Indian relations and the future of the French Indian territories. Shortly after the bombardment of Haiphong by the French in November 1946, Nehru responded to a letter to Marius Moutet, Minister of Overseas France, to congratulate him on the opening of diplomatic contacts between France and India.\textsuperscript{121}

The choice of each state’s representative was also strategic. Daniel Lévi, first French Ambassador (1947 - 1951) to independent India, was nominated on the basis that he was the son of the renowned Indologist, Sylvain Lévi (1863-1935). Nehru mentioned that the appointment had been intended ‘specially to please India’.\textsuperscript{122} He was succeeded in 1951 by Comte d’Ostrorog, a man whose birth and upbringing in Constantinople was seen as bestowing upon him a comprehensive understanding of the East. India dispatched Rachid Ali Baig as Consul-General to Pondichéry in 1947. He had previously held the post of Consul-General in Goa for one year, during which time he had demonstrated great activism.\textsuperscript{123} His nomination was viewed as a kind of ‘Trojan horse’ that would trigger some kind of action from within Pondichéry; indeed, he showed a great capacity for mobilising anti-French factions, organised protests and demonstrations. He initiated the economic blockade and the introduction of travel permits to impair the movement of populations and goods between the French Indian enclaves. He was commended for his abilities

\textsuperscript{120} Note to the Cabinet, 22 May 1948, Nehru, \textit{SWJN}, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 1., p. 262, Vol. 6, p. 349, Vol. 8, pp. 381-2.
\textsuperscript{121} Nehru, \textit{SWJN}, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 1, pp. 262, 493, 558, 560, 584-5; IOR/L/PS/12/2051: \textit{Aircraft and aviation flights by French military over India en route for Saigon}.
\textsuperscript{122} Nehru, \textit{SWJN}, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol. 4, p. 644.
\textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 644.
by Nehru, but also reprimanded on the grounds that his excessive zealosity could ‘cross the
diplomatic frontier and create new problems for India’. In 1949, after many complaints from the
French government, he was sent to Batavia (Jakarta). The other important Indian Consul-
General was Raj Krishna Tandon (1951-1953), who similarly managed to organise a network of
anti-French operations that operated from the borders of the Madras Presidency.

At the local level, which in the case of French India was spread over the five distinct
territories, four main groups emerged that were likewise headed by dedicated men: those who
favoured merging with India, those who were opposed to merger and wanted to maintain the
current association within the French Union, and those who claimed autonomy within the French
and Indian Union. This last group comprised two factions, the supporters of the Dravidian
movement and the Communists. It is important to indicate that the positions of these factions
were not fixed but rather oscillated depending on the political and economic circumstances that
developed over the following seven years.

Those who fought for merger with India, and who advanced their political program as one
of liberation from colonialism, were represented by the Parti du Congrès de l’Inde Française,
which was formed in 1946 and included the Mahé Socialist Party and other wings of the Indian
National Congress. Their claims belonged to the broader movement taking place in India.
Although support for the merging of the territories with India was welcomed, New Delhi did not
encourage spontaneous liberation movements and the use of popular agitation or satyagraha, as
Nehru was determined to follow a diplomatic path and keep the situation under control within the
broader policy of state integration. A demand for immediate amalgamation with India could just as
easily have triggered the opposite effect, that is, a demand for greater autonomy, or merger with
France, or even separatism, which would have thwarted any effort to integrate the French Indian

\[125\] Geetah, op.cit., pp. 144-5; G. Chandhrika, 'Intellectual origins of Nationalism in South India' in K.S. Matthew (ed.),
territories, with negative repercussions for the Kashmiri situation.\textsuperscript{126} Thus, local disruptions in favour of India had to be contained, as they could cause the diplomatic negotiations to deviate and subsequently reflect poorly on Nehru’s ability to deal effectively with an issue that affected both home and foreign affairs. This point is highlighted by Nehru’s correspondence with Rajendra Prasad, Congress President and later India’s First President in 1950, and to India’s Consul-General Baig and other high-ranking Indian officials, in which he requested that his subordinates use all of their skills to smother any direct action movements emerging from the territories, and to convince their leaders of the benefits of a course of action based on diplomacy.\textsuperscript{127}

The second group consisted of those in favour of remaining within the French Union, although as I will demonstrate shortly, the ideological position of those belonging to this group changed over the period of the Franco-Indian negotiations from maintenance of the status quo, to autonomy within the French Union, to integration with the Indian Union. This group encompassed the \textit{Front national démocratique} (FND, hereafter referred as the Front), founded in 1944, and the \textit{Parti socialiste de l’Inde française} (PSIF), founded in 1948. The Front provided the first post-war generation of French Indian politicians. It grouped together the Communists, Socialists, and small left-wing parties such as the former Franco-Hindu party.\textsuperscript{128} Municipal elections in June 1946 confirmed the popularity of the Front, and a Front member, Lambert Saravane, was elected to the \textit{Assemblée Nationale} in November 1946.\textsuperscript{129} The municipal elections were important not only because they were the first since the war, but also because for the first time eligible women participated and a single electoral list was organised, signalling the end of two prominent Third Republic policies.\textsuperscript{130}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 109; Note dated 26 April 1949, NAI, 15(11)EUR1/49: \textit{Situation in French Establishments in India}.
\item \textsuperscript{127} Nehru, \textit{SWJN, op.cit.}, Vol. 5, pp. 553-5.
\item \textsuperscript{128} More, \textit{The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam, op.cit.}, p. 150; Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 99, 101.
\item \textsuperscript{129} Weber, \textit{Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit.}, pp. 359-61.
\item \textsuperscript{130} Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 98, 173
\end{itemize}
Just as French India experienced the impact of the Indian nationalist movement and other left-wing groups, the Front was influenced by the evolution of French politics in the post-war era, and similarities between the tripartisme in France and the alliance of the Front emerged. When French Communist deputies in Paris refused to support the military budget for Indochina in May 1947, and a few days later the Communist ministers were dismissed – marking the end of the alliance between Communists (Parti communiste français, PCF), Socialists (Section française de l’Internationale Ouvrière, SFIO) and Christian Democrats (Mouvement républicain populaire, MRP) – the French Indian Front also split into two factions in July 1947.\(^{131}\) The most conservative members formed the PSIF, which was led by Saravane and his long-time friend Edouard Goubert, who had become ‘the number one of Pondichéry’ by heading the Conseil du gouvernement.\(^ {132}\) The Communists, headed by Subbiah, founded the Parti communiste de l’Inde française (PCIF). As in France, the ideological split reflected the issue of French imperialism.

Despite its name, the PSIF was not Socialist; in fact it was strongly associated with the colonial administration, which preferred the PSIF over the Communists. The members of the PSIF strongly campaigned and plotted in favour of remaining within the French Union. Its leader, Edouard Goubert, was born in 1894 in Pondichéry of a father who belonged to an old French family and a mother who was an outcast from a village of French India. At a young age, he witnessed the violence that regularly affected the administrative centre around election time. The fact that he served the mother country for three years during the First World War gave him prestige and respect amongst the French Indian population and the colonial administration, which perceived him as a trustworthy veteran. After his demobilisation, he completed studies in law and entered the colonial service as a tribunal clerk. He started his political career in 1945 with a pamphlet in which he accused local politicians of supporting the colonial system for their sole

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\(^{131}\) Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 361; Arpi, op.cit., pp. 28-9; Geetha, op.cit., p. 111

\(^{132}\) Praja Socialist Party, op.cit., p. 7; Chaffard, op.cit., p. 206.
personal benefit. He joined the Front, headed by Saravane, and remained until the two men founded the PSIF in 1948.\textsuperscript{133}

Saravane was, in a sense, the epitome of a French Indian politician, a man in whom French and Indian influences had come together. He regarded himself as Indian by birth and French by culture and education. At first he supported the maintenance of French India within the French Union and worked in collaboration with the colonial administration. However, he was influenced by the deputies representing Algeria and Madagascar, and witnessed the French government refusing their claim to the status of Associated State, a provision of the 1946 constitution. In view of the independence of India and the growing conflict in Indochina, he believed that French India was an anachronism. He favoured the transfer of the comptoirs as the least troublesome option, and one that could provide the basis for a true alliance between India and France. Most of his proposals, however, were dismissed by the Ministry of Overseas France and at home.\textsuperscript{134} He eventually left the PSIF to form the \textit{Parti Republicain} in 1950. He campaigned in favour of merger with India, and even proposed the solution of transferring the administration of French India in the same manner that the customs administration had been handed over in 1941.\textsuperscript{135}

Goubert initially had the full approval of the French administration, which saw him as a determined ally, even though his methods of persuasion were likened to gangsterism, or as it was locally called ‘goondaism’ – ‘goonda’ meaning hired thugs. With the assistance of the local administration, which turned a blind eye to the violence and political irregularities undertaken by Goubert and his gang, he eliminated all political opposition, including Subbiah and his old friend Saravane, and played the French administration against the Indian authorities and vice versa.

\textsuperscript{135} Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 161, 166, 190-1, 222, 227.
Goubert first wanted French India to remain within the French Union, and then advocated autonomy and used it like a bargaining chip. He dominated the political life of Pondichéry, and was later accused of corruption and of amassing a personal fortune. An arrest warrant was delivered against him in March 1954 for misappropriation of administrative funds, causing him to flee the French territories for independent India, from where he organised an anti-French front. Goubert represented a small elite group of French-educated French Indians who controlled the political situation for their own benefit. They manipulated New Delhi and Paris, and their stand vacillated between the maintenance of the status quo, greater autonomy within the French Union in order to postpone what seemed inevitable, and finally in March 1954, a volte-face that fully supported merger with the Indian Republic. Ironically, despite Goubert's ambiguous role in the years leading to the end of French India, he returned to politics after the de jure transfer of French India, and was appointed the first Chief Minister of Pondicherry (1963-1964) – as if for services rendered to the Indian nation.136

The third group to be found at this local level, and more particularly in Pondichéry and Karikal, was the anti-merger group consisting of the Dravidian movement, India Unionil Sera Maruppor Kazaham. This group claimed autonomy within the French Union in order to prevent merger with the Indian Union, hoping instead to merge the enclaves with a Tamil nation should one come into existence. The Dravidian movement as a whole demanded a separate Tamil Nadu or Dravida Nadu – ‘nadu or natu’ meaning ‘nation’ in Tamil – and therefore did not recognise the legitimacy of the Indian state. Like other nationalist movements across India, the Dravidian movement of South India emerged out of earlier opposition to British rule, but because of regional socio-political factors it developed a specific Dravidian consciousness separate from the national claims of North India. It continued in the period after India’s independence to forcefully oppose

the Indian government and its claims to national legitimacy.  

137 Dravidian consciousness was based on the commonality of Tamil culture, including its language, (Tamil, as opposed to Hindi which was spoken in the north of India), socio-religious groups which were non-Brahmin, and historical traditions that promoted Tamil values over those of the North.  

138 The movement was established against the perceived political threat of sedition from Brahmin quarters, and promoted egalitarian ideas based on secular and anti-caste sentiments.  

In the 1920s and 1930s, the precepts of Tamil nationalism were advanced by Erode Venkata Ramasami Naicker (1879 – 1973), also referred to as E. V. Ramasamy, who had first joined the Congress non-cooperation movement against the British, but soon fought within Congress for the end of caste segregation, for social reforms, and above all for equality for all, or, as it was often referred to, ‘self-respect’. He fought to eliminate Brahmins from positions of power, to destroy the caste system, to end British rule, and eventually to bring this liberation movement across all of India under the rule of workers and peasants. In 1937, when Congress adopted the objective of introducing Hindi as the national language, Ramasamy rebelled, as Tamil workers would have been disadvantaged in relation to those who spoke Hindi. His view of the nation was quite distinct from the Congress elite’s idea of a traditional Hindu past. His demand for a Tamil nation was constructed around the notion that the Tamil past was more just in that it did not discriminate against castes. He promoted the overthrow not only of the British, but also of the Hindu elite who, he declared, had facilitated British imperialism so that it could continue its own hegemony over the uneducated groups that formed Indian society.  

139 Party divisions within the

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139 Ramamurti, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-80; M.S.S. Pandian, ‘Denationalising the Past ‘Nation’ in E.V. Ramasamy’s Political Discourse’, in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay (ed.), *Nationalism Movement in India: a Reader* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 201-218; the party Dravida Kazagham was set up in 1944 in British India to advance the idea for a Tamil Nadu state - Dravidasthan, at the time of partition, Ramasamy boycotted the Independence Day celebrations, and even asked the help of Jinnah for the simultaneous creation of the separate state of Dravidasthan, but Jinnah declined, Ramasamy refused to honour the Indian national flag and later the Indian Constitution, Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, p. 32
The fourth group that was involved at the local level was headed by the French Indian Communist Party, which had been created in 1942 and was now the largest party in French India. It demanded independence from French rule, but wanted to decide later whether to join the Indian Union or not. Its leader, Varadarajulu Subbiah (1911-1993), a staunch opponent of French imperialism in India and in Indochina, had earlier demonstrated his skills as a political organiser when he founded the *Jeunesses de l’Inde francaise* in 1931 and the *Association des étudiants* at the College Calvé. These students went on strike in September 1936 when their list of grievances drawing attention to the lack of facilities and poor curriculum were not addressed. Subbiah also held the position of secretary of the *Harijan Sewak Sangha* and of the political party *Mahajana Sabha*. His involvement in the workers’ strikes of 1935-37 led to his expulsion from French India, but in an unusual turn of events, when Communists were later banned in India he found refuge in French India. Subbiah served many terms in French Indian and British Indian prisons, and the British had no qualms in extraditing him to French India in 1939. He now rallied the anti-merger movement under the Communist banner. However, persecution of the Communists in India, who remained a threat to the nationalist ideology advanced by INC, as well as their inability to challenge Goubert, who had the full support of the local administration, weakened the Communist voice and its challenge to merger with the Indian Union. Subbiah eventually rallied to the Indian national cause and actively participated in the ‘liberation’ of the French Indian enclaves.

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140 Hardgrave, *op.cit.*, Chapters 6 and 7.
142 Chapman, ‘The Origins of a Public Voice..’, *op.cit.*, pp. 1-12; Subbiah joined the *Satyagraha* movement in Madras and was involved in the *Harijan Sewak Sangh* of Pondichéry and Karikal, he joined the Communist Party after he had met Arni Hyder Kahn who had eluded arrest and was organising in Madras, Subbiah, *op.cit.*, pp. 24, 37, 45.
143 Subbiah, *op.cit.*, p. 197.
144 Geetha, *op.cit.*, pp. 91, 110-1
Subbiah’s support to the nationalist cause was in par with the communist ideology that prioritised any opportunity to strengthen the anti-imperialist movement. All of these pro- and anti-merger groups demonstrate the complexities facing the Indian and French authorities as to the future of the southern French territories. The matter would not be confined to diplomatic negotiations as hoped by Nehru, as the local population was resolute to fight for their own cause, even if this meant mounting tensions against each other.

For seven years (1947-1954), the various forces at both the international and local levels wrestled over the issues of integration, status quo, and autonomy; within this period, three phases can be identified. The first period, from 1947 to 1949, encompassed the withdrawal of Britain from the subcontinent, the rise to independence of India and Pakistan, and the end of the Customs Union Agreement. As stated earlier, national programs underpinned Franco-Indian negotiations concerning the future of French India, with India focusing on the integration of the princely states and France prioritising the consolidation of the French empire. Given these parameters, both nations agreed on a referendum in June 1948 to resolve the future of French India. The referendum was organised in Chandernagor, where the strongest agitation for merging with India had been felt, and in June 1949, 7,500 voters, comprising women and men above the age of twenty-one years, approved the secession from the French Union, while 114 voters opposed. This overwhelming response led to the 1951 Treaty of Cession that finally sealed the demise of the French Bengali comptoir.

This period also witnessed pro-India riots in Mahé that broke out on 21 October 1948, three days before local elections were scheduled, over the belief that French authorities had withheld electorate cards from known pro-merger voters. When a French military ship on the way to Indochina was sent to assess the seriousness of the situation, the Indian Ministry of

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146 Chaffard, op.cit., p. 207.
147 Ibid., p. 208.
External Affairs accused France of breaching the Treaty of 1814. The local Administrator was held hostage by local inhabitants for a few days, but when the French ship sailed into sight the pro-India supporters fled in fear of reprisals. The 1948 riots, referred as the October Revolt was the first uprising in French India after India’s independence, and showed that the anti-French sentiments in Mahé were as strong as they were in Chandernagor.

The second period, from 1949 to 1951, was marked by the declaration of Karikal and Pondichéry as free ports, resulting in an increase in the smuggling of illegal tax-free goods into India and the creation of an artificial sense of prosperity, especially in Pondichéry. The end of the agreement also signaled India’s introduction of new methods to convince the French colonial administration and the local population that French India was vulnerable. India emphasised that the enclaves would have great difficulty surviving without the help of their neighbours, thus stressing the inevitability of their future. Hence, this phase was likened to a Franco-Indian cold war.

The period was also dominated by the postponement, due to mounting violence, of the referendum due to be held on 11 December 1949 in the four southern establishments (since Chandernagor had already expressed its decision to merge). A group of neutral observers, dispatched by France to assess whether fair and free conditions existed for a referendum to be conducted in these establishments, reported that the situation in French India was unsettling and violent. As hinted at in the report, electoral manipulations were involved in Goubert's ascension to power when his party won an overwhelming victory to the Assemblée représentative in 1951. The electoral results caused Nehru to declare that a referendum could not be fairly carried out under the prevailing conditions.

148 Ibid., pp. 207-8; Submitted to the Honorable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Deputy Prime Minister of India, 3 March 1949, NAI, 15(11)EUR1/49: Situation in French Establishments in India.
149 Chaffard, op.cit., p. 207-9; Geetha, op.cit., pp. 162-5.
152 Geetha, op.cit., p. 166.
153 Ibid., pp. 231, 235, 237, 240-1.
The third period (1952 – 1954) witnessed the failure of the referendum negotiations and India’s increased use of coercive means to settle the French Indian problem. While France wanted the idea of democracy to prevail and to abide by her Constitution, which mandated consultation with the population, the history of fraudulent elections in French India accompanied by violence and electoral terrorism proved that under such conditions it would have been difficult to reach an acceptable outcome. Whether the result was to favour India or France, the electoral process was rigged. The introduction of democratic institutions had brought a certain prestige to France, but withdrawing without some form of consultation would have affected France’s legacy in French India, with negative consequences for the French Union. On the basis that the southern comptoirs would be allowed to leave the French Union without consultation, nationalist leaders in other French overseas territories could demand the same ‘unconstitutional’ arrangement. Furthermore, the hardship and coercive measures experienced by the local population assisted pro-Indian armed forces to liberate the two smallest French Indian territories, Yanaon on 13 of June and Mahé on 16 July 1954, with a population of 6,000 and 18,000 respectively. Following the introduction, in April 1954 by New Delhi, of rigorous border regulations limiting the movement of goods and of the local population, the mayor of Yanaon and four municipal councilors demanded on 3 May 1954 the immediate merger of Yanaon with India. Fearing reprisals, they fled to bordering Indian territories, from which a local man Dadala Ravanayya, who had resigned his post as sub-inspector of police in Pondichéry, organised and subsequently led with the help of ‘gun-wielding Indian police in civil dress’, a liberation attack. Dadala would assume charge as the first Indian administrator of liberated Yanam (Yanaon). Likewise, hardship due to the economic blockade in Mahé led to a number of pro-merger supporters, who had found refuge in India, to

155 Libération, 28 April 1954; More also states that the liberation of Yanam did not attract much attention in France, The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam, op.cit., Chapter 6, pp. 173-209, pp. 202, 204, 209.
organise under the banner of the Mahajana Sabha, and to take over Mahé on 16 July 1954 with less resistance than during the earlier uprising of October 1948.\footnote{Libération, 28 April 1954; More, The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam, op. cit., pp. 185-6.}

Apart from the determination of Nehru and the local population's desire to merge with India and see the end of the economic blockade, the military defeat of the French forces in Dien Bien Phu in May 1954 sealed the end of French imperialism in Asia. Negotiations over the future of the French Indian territories now centered around finding a solution which did not involve holding a referendum; such a solution, however, would bypass the population's constitutional right to decide. An acceptable way out of this conundrum was suggested by the fact that Article 27 of the French Constitution did not clearly stipulate it was the whole voting population that was required to vote in a referendum, only that a vote should take place. The omission allowed for the option that elected representatives could vote on behalf of the population. Hence, at the Kijeour (Kizhoor) Congress in October 1954 elected representatives of the assemblée représentative and conseils municipaux – in lieu of the eligible population – voted in favour of merging with the Indian Union.\footnote{Arrêté convocation pour le Journal Officiel, 9 octobre 1954, AD, Inde, Vol. 75: Congrès Kijeour.}

Over these three periods, various means were used, by all groups and at both levels, to reach their specific aims. At the macro level, the opening of embassies in Paris and New Delhi in 1947 and an Indian Consulate-General in Pondichéry allowed communication between representatives of the French and Indian governments to occur, a first step towards the recognition that diplomatic channels were considered a legitimate way to interact.\footnote{Geetha, op. cit., pp. 115,135; the Conseil des Ministres agreed in October 1946 to the creation of a French Embassy in New Delhi, and an Indian diplomatic mission was first established in Paris in February 1947, although India had difficulties nominating a head of mission, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères à Fransulat, Calcutta et Ambassade de France à Londres, 12 février 1947, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères à Mr Henri Roux, Chargé d'affaires de France, New Delhi, 26 mars 1947, Affaires Etrangères, télégramme à arrivée, New Delhi, 24 avril 1947, AD, Inde, Vol. 62: Relations avec la France; Nehru, SWJN, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 411.} Official meetings between the states' representatives, correspondence, the release of communiqués via embassies and consulates, and the use of the press were all means which assisted both governments to defend their respective positions with regard to the future of French India.
Debates in the Lok Sabha (Indian Lower House) and the Assemblée Nationale provided the arena for elected members to question the evolving future of French India.\textsuperscript{159}

It is worth mentioning that spying was also a means to achieve this end. Indeed, the presence of renonçants during a meeting at the Ministry of Overseas France in September 1948 demonstrates that they were highly regarded by the French government and entrusted to be instigators of pro-French propaganda. The report of this meeting, in the collection of the National Archives of India, testifies that the government of India relied on those who seemed – because of their adherence to a French way of life – to be loyal, to gather information from the heart of the French Ministry.\textsuperscript{160} At this macro level, institutionalised political processes such as elections and referenda provided the means with which to seek the eligible voting population's approval to maintain sovereignty and legitimacy over the territories. Despite the lack of an Indian constitution, which was not adopted until January 1950, India had nonetheless, on two occasions within her first year of existence, expressed the desire to resolve territorial disputes via referendum or plebiscite.\textsuperscript{161} As mentioned earlier, the population of Junagadh had voted almost unanimously in February 1948 in favour of union with India, while in the \textit{White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir 1948}, India declared a desire to use a fair and impartial plebiscite to resolve the territorial dispute between India and Pakistan.\textsuperscript{162} However, despite France’s insistence on the need to carry out a referendum to decide on the cession of the territories, her earlier agreement to return the loges constituted a definite breach of her own Constitution.

Although a referendum was held in Chandernagor, various factors – including a history of electoral terrorism, the liberation of Mahé and Yanaon, and the artificial prosperity of a segment

\textsuperscript{159} Chatrath, \textit{op.cit.}
\textsuperscript{160} Confidentiel ‘plusieurs réunions ont été tenues au ministère de la France d’outre-mer à Paris ainsi qu’à Pondichéry au sujet de l’avenir des Etablissements français en Inde, NAI, 15(11)EUR1/49: \textit{Situation in French Establishments in India}.
\textsuperscript{161} Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 136-9.
\textsuperscript{162} The \textit{White Paper on Jammu and Kashmir} was compiled following India’s military intervention on behalf of the maharaja in October 1947; the document laid out two fundamental themes, establishing India’s innocence in any premeditative actions and the guilt of Pakistan of active complicity in the attempt of tribesmen to seize power. In it India specified that the territorial issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be resolved via a plebiscite or referendum, Wirsing, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 39-41.
of the population in Pondichéry and Karikal triggered by their free ports status – prevented a fair and impartial voting process from taking place. Indeed, the incendiary situation in Pondichéry and Karikal, where the majority of the population endured great hardship with the economic blockade while a smaller segment benefited from increased illegal smuggling, pushed the two territories to demand their merging with India. France feared that a negative result in Chandernagor’s referendum could greatly influence the southern territories, while India was equally concerned that a referendum could turn against the Indian Union. Moreover, with the separatist movement gaining momentum and the increasing allegiance to the state of Pakistan of the predominantly Muslim community in Kashmir, India worried that any referendum in Kashmir would probably return a result in favour of Pakistan. Hence, as time went by, the desire for India to hold referenda strongly waned.

Despite many official discussions, combined with criticisms and threats on both sides, the only referendum that was held in French India confirmed an already evident outcome: Chandernagorians wanted to join India. After this, the issue of the referendum was too closely associated with the events unfolding in Kashmir, and for France a referendum result in favour of India would have meant the cession of all of French India. Such an eventuality would in turn have undermined the structure of the French Union itself, a highly undesirable situation at a time when France’s intervention in Indochina was increasing. The situation called for the consolidation rather than the disintegration of the colonial framework.

France also resorted to legal means, such as decrees banning public meetings, processions, and the freedom of the press, the issuing of arrest warrants, and the replacement of French civil servants by Indians in order to ‘indianise’ the French civil service in French India. Decrees were issued to introduce reforms such as the declaration of ‘free town’ status, although this resulted in only the administrative separation of the French Indian territories and did not

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163 F2789, minutes of meeting 26 February 1949, FO371/76086: Relations between India and France and India and Portugal.
prompt any definite program of handover. Other means included using the law and police to repress opposition and to bring the Mahé rioters to trial.\textsuperscript{164} The electoral process, which the French were so proud to have introduced, continued to be exploited and abused in order to serve the interests of a small group, including French-educated French Indians, merchants, and politicians who operated with the backing of the colonial administration, until the situation spun out of control and arrest warrants were issued against them.

Conversely, India used an array of coercive means to convince both the French administration and the population that French India had little future without India. Their measures included erecting barbed wire around the French Indian enclaves, tightening of customs and immigration control, terminating postal services, and hindering the delivery of vital necessities such as food, petrol, and electricity. The imposition of permits for travel between French India and India caused uproar amongst French Indian Muslims, since having a photograph taken entailed the violation of \textit{purdah}, a set of religious practices that included the need for women to cover their face with a veil. Thus not only did the colonial/national dispute affect the population living in the French territories economically, it also permeated their personal space. It was no longer the coloniser that was violating religious customs but the former colonised, a turnaround that resulted in what formerly manifested as Anglophobia turning into ‘Indophobia’.\textsuperscript{165} Above all, New Delhi’s policy was to remain fully in charge of the negotiations and the procedures that would lead to the merging of the French Indian enclaves.

Most interestingly at the micro level, the local population displayed a variety of means to express opposition and to confront the local administration as well as local rivals. Strategies included the formation of associations and political parties, the organisation of strikes, walkouts, campaigns of harassment, students protests, public meetings, demonstrations and shop lockdowns, the use of familiar symbols such as national flags, and the shouting of powerful

\textsuperscript{164} More, \textit{Freedom Movement}, op.cit., pp. 121, 153. The October 1948 Mahé rioters were jailed for up to five years, Ibid, p. 182; More, \textit{The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam}, op.cit., pp. 170, 180.

\textsuperscript{165} Geetha, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 188.
slogans such as ‘Liberté, Fraternité, Égalité’ and ‘French, Quit India’. Following Gandhi’s example, fasting became a familiar satyagraha tool to demonstrate disapproval while, in comparison, the takeover of administrative buildings constituted a more forceful way to challenge authorities hence expressing an allegiance to the nationalist movement. The use of physical violence and even arson sometime amounted to terrorism. The fear felt by residents about their uncertain future was exploited by spreading rumours that less food would be available, prices would rise, and current benefits be stripped. The forced annexation of Hyderabad, the armed campaign in Kashmir, and the horror of partition helped propagate panic amongst French Indians and in particular amongst the Muslim community. The press was also a useful tool to disseminate information for or against the merger issue and to justify territorial claims over French Indian territories.\footnote{Suresh, op.cit., p. 263; Geetha, op.cit., pp. 174, 177; More, Freedom Movement, op.cit., pp. 135, 184.} Above all, the events that led to the Kijeour Congress were far from peaceful. They manifested the tensions that existed between various factions of the population, and the use of coercive means exposed the extent to which India was willing to go in order to fulfil her national policy of territorial unification.

**Conclusion**

Compared to earlier forms of anti-French feelings, which had been limited to a small group of French-educated elite figures who exploited republican institutions to voice their discontent and maintain the hierarchy of French Indian society, the post-First World War economic difficulties triggered a wave of social unrest that challenged colonial authorities more significantly. The labour movement spread to a wider segment of the lower socio-economic population, and ran parallel to a rise in Indian nationalism that itself drew on a wider participation. With the influence of political refugees from British India and the spreading of a new national consciousness, French India became increasingly exposed to the anti-colonial ideology of the
Swadeshi movement, the rise in national revolutionary movement, and the INC. The use of the press and organisations inspired by Gandhi and the Indian left, helped link the fight against European colonialism across Indian borders.

Indian nationalism had a religious strand that undermined the building of a modern all-inclusive secular nation-state. The partition in 1947 and the ensuing massacres between its two main communities enticed the leaders of the new Indian nation to use neutral national symbols to help bring together a multi-cultural society previously segmented by provinces, languages, class, and religions. The building of this new state depended strongly on the unconditional amalgamation of former princely states, the provinces that formed British India, and foreign possessions. Hence, any form of separatism was condemned as a challenge to the success of the national enterprise. As such, those in French India who had hoped for special status on the basis of cultural particularities or sheer political opposition to the Indian state had little option but to accept New Delhi’s resolve for unification. This was especially the case after diplomatic negotiations over the referendum failed and coercive means were introduced to convince France and the local population of the inevitability of the situation.

Because of the distances between them, their Lilliputian size, and their lack of cultural homogeneity, the comptoirs could only with some difficulty support a movement for separatism, despite the intention of the Communists and those who believed in a Dravidian nation to use the merger debate to claim autonomy from both France and India. In contrast, Chandernagor’s residents, because of their proximity to Calcutta, the former British colonial capital, and because they had been exposed to the early nationalist movement, were the first to break away from the French Union. Chandernagor was the only colonial possession in French India to do so via a ballot, since the issue of a referendum became strongly associated with the problem of Kashmir and the future of France’s new colonial framework, which was undermined by the increasing fighting in Indochina. Above all, the merger debate created confrontation as well as collaboration.
amongst participants, and while both nation-states manoeuvred within a space delimited by national policies and diplomacy, French Indians operated within a space where the colonial/national debate spilled, at times violently, onto the streets and invaded their personal sphere.
Chapter 5

The Birth of a New State: French India Representations Refashioned

On 18 October 1954, after eight years of negotiations, 178 out of 180 elected representatives of French India were called to vote on the future of French India. The question presented to them was whether the comptoirs should merge with India or remain within the French Union. Of the 178 voting representatives, 170 voted in favour of French India merging with the Republic of India, which led, three days later, to the governments of India and France signing an agreement for the de facto transfer to India of the remaining four territories.¹ This handover occurred on 1 November, and while the event was mostly celebrated in the Indian nationalist press as liberation from the French colonial yoke, legally speaking the physical French withdrawal was not the end of the saga. In fact, France remained a sovereign state of the territories for a further eight years, until the French Parliament finally ratified the Treaty of Cession (1956) in July 1962. For the independent government of India, the representation of French India until the handover functioned to expose the dichotomy between a perverse European power determined to maintain its colonial yoke and the duty of the Indian motherland to reunite its people. For France, French India had remained the site of past imperial glories and myth-making embodied in the success of Dupleix in the mid-eighteenth century.² Furthermore, as one of the oldest colonies of France, French India provided an important symbol of continuity and stability, and thus an asset to the French Union, the colonial framework established by the Constitution of the Fourth Republic.

¹ Seven representatives voted against the resolution, and there was one abstention, Service d'Information de l’État de Pondichéry, Nouvel État de Pondichéry, événements marquants et progrès économiques et social depuis le transfert de facto (Madras: Associated Printers, 1956), p. 51, copy available in AD, Vol. 339: Ex-établissements français situation générale.
Through a review of articles written in the French and Indian press during the period of the French withdrawal from the comptoirs, and relevant reports from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I will explore how the handover triggered a change in the French colonial narrative. I argue that, on the one hand, the vision of a research institute in Pondichéry initiated, especially for the supporters of France’s colonial presence, a shift in the representation of French India from an imagined large Indian territory to an imagined organisation that would connect with other countries beyond the borders of French India. I will also discuss the fact that, for other actors and commentators, the end of French India was the site of a tragicomedy that stood in contrast to the seriousness of empire building. For India, on the other hand, France’s withdrawal was celebrated as a nationalist victory that helped bring into focus the issue of the Portuguese enclaves.

From blame to opportunity

As discussed in Chapter 3, public opinion on India’s independence and its impact on the future of French India was indifferent. Press articles on the end of French India were sporadic, but the events leading to Kijœur congress generated the most comments. In August 1954, Le Monde, a left-wing French daily, dedicated a large article to the last months of French India, which now consisted of Mahé, Yanaon, Pondichéry, and Karikal; Chandernagor had joined the Union of India in 1951. The article was entitled ‘La pitoyable fin des comptoirs français de l’Inde’ (The pitiful end of the French territories in India). The author, Georges Gallean, describes French India as an impoverished territory where little has been accomplished in matters of education, health, or employment. While the French revolutionary model and its associated liberation narrative was used in the interwar years – from the 1920s until the mid-1940s – to explain the Indian liberation movement and British withdrawal, Gallean’s article introduced a new narrative based on indignity and shame at French colonial apathy. Indeed, Gallean condemns France’s

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3 Tailleur, op.cit., p. 15.
4 Chandernagor voted in a referendum to join the Indian Union in 1949.
5 Le Monde, 18 August 1954.
failure in fulfilling her *mission civilisatrice* and explains that this failure has provided the justification for India to claim sovereignty over the remaining French enclaves. This failure is exemplified by the insufficient creation of jobs, which had been limited to those involving the ‘selling of alcohol which attracted hordes of thirsty customers from dry India and the smuggling of gold and diamonds’. Selling alcohol appeared to have been a major occupation in French India. Guy Demaison, a journalist who wrote in the monthly colonial magazine *La Revue des Troupes Coloniales*, wrote of his trip to the Bengali French enclave that arriving in Chandernagor was like entering a distillery, and that ‘next to the words “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” was a sign ‘Rhum [sic], Gin, Whisky, Brandy!’

Gallean also describes the French Indian population as extremely poor, ignorant, and unable to speak French, a fact, he says, which indicates the failure of the French colonial enterprise whose principle was embodied in the idea of bringing French civilisation and education to the less evolved natives. The author also draws attention to the lack of infrastructure that undermined the economic development of the colonial administrative centre. The Pondichéry jetty, indeed, had been left unrepaired since it was destroyed by storms at the end of 1952. Not only does the author describe as ‘pitiful’ the way the French diplomats handled the negotiations over the future of French India, but, using Dupleix as a reference, he hints at three centuries of neglect by the French colonial enterprise that defies the idea of ‘grande œuvre’ (grand enterprise). While Gallean states that, since France has failed in her colonial mission, she is not worthy of remaining in India, he does not acknowledge India’s quest for independence from a foreign power, nor the success of her territorial integration policy. As such, Gallean’s representation of French India does not allow for a dualistic expression of nationalist India versus...
French colonial power, but continues to view the evolution of French India within a Euro-centric framework.

On 20 October 1954, two days after the Kijour meeting, Le Monde published an article entitled ‘De l’empire de Dupleix à l’Inde: Pour la création d’un centre français de recherche à Pondichéry’ (From the Empire of Dupleix to India: For the Creation of a French Research Centre in Pondichéry), authored by Tibor Mende, a journalist who specialised in the Third World and who wrote a pessimistic account of India in L’Inde devant l’orage, which appeared in 1950. The article did not make the front page of the newspaper, but was instead printed on page three in the foreign news section. Unsurprisingly, the news was overshadowed by other important colonial reports – the Suez crisis and Indochina – which minimised the fact that the French Indian enclaves had become the first French overseas territory to secede from the French Union. This point was unacknowledged at the time, but its consequence was reflected in the title of a book written by Georges Tailleur, the last governor of Chandernagor, Le premier maillon de la chaîne: Chandernagore ou le lit de Dupleix (The first link of the chain: Chandernagor or the bed of Dupleix). Indeed, the mandates of Lebanon and Syria had obtained their independence in 1946, and the Chinese concession of Kouang-Tchéou-Wan (Quang Tchéou-Wan) was retroceded before the French Union was constituted; Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam had the status of Associates States under the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, though the status lasted only a few years. The loss of Indochina and French India marked the end of France’s hegemony in Asia, with the increased risk that these changes could initiate a wave of secession across other territories of the French Union. French India was no longer considered a place where French colonial or Indian nationalist tensions clashed. Developments there had become a threat to the existence of the French Union itself.

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The article’s title, ‘From the Empire of Dupleix to India’, provides an unchallenged chronological link between the conquest of the Deccan in the mid-eighteenth century by Dupleix and France’s approaching withdrawal on 1 November. While the title embodies a two-hundred-year French presence, it overlooks the subordinate colonial status of France in India during that period, and also obliterates the history of India’s nationalist movement. As suggested by the subtitle of the article: ‘For the Creation of a French Research Centre in Pondichéry’, Mende focuses on the setting-up of a research centre which, he argues, would allow France to maintain a foothold and some influence in the former French Indian territories. He also suggests that, with the approval of the Indian government, the establishment of a research institute in Pondichéry would provide a unique opportunity for France to assist formerly colonised countries, as well as directly assisting the countries of the French Union, by creating a direct link between them. The article offers a shift in the former representation of India; French India is now reduced to the vision of a research institute from which France could maintain her influence in India and beyond.

Furthermore, the article hints that the institute could become a bulwark against the spread of Communism in under-developed countries, thus reiterating France’s traditional role as the defender of democratic principles. While France had been circumscribed to the enclaves by the Treaties, and had now lost the French Indian territories altogether, her culture, her strength in research, and her republican tradition based on universal rights would nonetheless persist and extend beyond the former French Indian borders. Universalist principles, which had been promoted as a more benevolent French colonial style compared to that of the more ruthless British approach, would prevail. This new representation of a post-French India as embodied in the research institute places France in a new position of influence, a central role in a post-colonial world that would promote France’s grandeur and prestige at a time when her colonial abilities had been thwarted by the Vietnamese and Indian nationalists, as well as by the increasing unrest in

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Algeria. While Mende depicts the end of French India as a failure of the French colonial enterprise, the establishment of the research centre reflects a new hope designed to enlighten formerly colonised countries and maintain France's position as a first-world power.

In Combat, a left-wing newspaper that first appeared underground during the Second World War, Philippe Decraene, chief editor of the African news at Le Monde, wrote two articles, the first on 8-9 May entitled ‘La France doit-elle rester en Inde?’ (Should France stay in India?), and the second on 16 October 1954 entitled ‘Après six mois de négociations le différend franco-indien est en voie de règlement’ (after six months of negotiations, the Franco-Indian conflict is about to be resolved). In these articles, Decraene acknowledges that the French Establishments ‘never fulfilled their function as commercial outposts’, and in fact questions whether it is beneficial for France to remain in India since the comptoirs depend on India for their mere survival and cost ten billion Francs annually to the French government in wages, allowances, and pensions.\textsuperscript{11} In fact, Decraene overly inflated the amount the comptoirs cost France, Ostrorog indicated in a letter to the French Foreign Affairs Minister, Antoine Pinay, dated 10 May 1955, that prior to the withdrawal 'the annual expenses pertaining to the comptoirs were over five billion Francs'.\textsuperscript{12}

Decraene seems to hint that, given the dire situation, there would be a distinct advantage in repatriating or dispatching the current civil servants to other postings. He also argues that final negotiations over the fate of the French Indian territories offered an opportunity to avoid a repeat of the ‘coup de Chandernagor’, which saw the integration of the former Bengali territory with the State of West Bengal, and he recommends maintaining France’s prestige through the existing educational facilities and the creation of a Franco-Indian cultural centre. As one of the few French journalists who acknowledged the leadership of India in the region, despite his pro-French stand,


\textsuperscript{12} Stanislas Ostorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à son Excellence Mr le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s institut français à Pondichéry, 10 May 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
Decraene pointed to the importance for France of establishing strong diplomatic ties with India if it wished to maintain some form of continuing presence in India and influence in the region.

The creation of a research institute was perceived by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the best chance of retaining that influence. In a note dated 17 July 1954, the Conferences Secretariat of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs asserts that a solution to the Franco-Indian conflict must benefit both countries, must be founded on mutual equality, and must in no way jeopardise France’s future relations with India. Similarly to Decraene, the Secretariat suggests that the creation of a cultural and technical centre in Pondichéry would go beyond the mere maintenance of French culture, as it would be able to provide direct technical assistance to a country fighting ‘starvation and poverty’. A letter from the French ambassador, Ostrorog, to Jacques de Bourbon Busset, director of cultural relations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, explains that the embassy did not view the withdrawal as an ‘abandonment’, but, ‘since Pondichéry was a rotten market town, stained with corruption’, he welcomed the opportunity to found an institute which he saw as a means to exhibit French skills and efficiency. Furthermore, the institute would allow France to follow the example set by other organisations whose aims were to provide assistance for the development of India. As such, the research institute allowed a transformation of the old civilising mission to one that was humanitarian, dedicated to tackling poverty and helplessness. This vision of starvation and doom reflected Mende’s own pessimistic description of contemporary India. Likewise, Marchés coloniaux du Monde, which focused on economic issues, had depicted starving Indians receiving smaller rice rations than French Indians.

While some officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs viewed post-French India relations in terms of equality with India, a note by Ostrorog on the function and essence of the would-be

14 Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr de Bourbon Busset, directeur des relations culturelles, 1 December 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
15 Mende, op. cit.
Institute of Pondichéry showed that the colonial rivalry that had existed between Britain and France was still at play. The note recommends that the centre should evoke ‘la montagne Sainte Geneviève’, an area of Paris where the first universities were founded, and which had attracted students from all regions of medieval Europe. From there, it suggests, ‘the Greco-Latin heritage would be spread across India and challenge the Anglo-Saxon culture’. The use of the analogy implies that French culture, which itself found its origins in Greco-Latin civilisation, would be better suited to continue the transmission of civilising values than Anglo-Saxon culture. Similarly, Ostrorog reiterates this point by saying that the ‘last vestiges of a past empire trigger the need to expand our presence across all of India’. In the author’s view, the research centre would provide a space from which to continue old European rivalries, a beacon of Mediterranean culture on a subcontinent corrupted by Anglo-Saxon influence, as well as a platform from which to launch the next stage of French influence. This view challenges Britain’s own reference and appropriation of the Greco-Roman past to explain her colonial presence in India.

Finally, the Trait d’Union of November 1954, in an article entitled ‘Pondichéry la Nouvelle’, views the end of French India as a new beginning that would allow Pondichéry to finally fulfil its destiny. The author declares that Pondichéry could have been a ‘permanent trade fair’; it could have showcased model schools and hospitals, beautiful roads, and agricultural works; in all, Pondichéry could have been the jewel of French colonial power, the epitome of French ingenuity and generosity. Instead, the author laments, it became a model of political corruption. But, he announces, ‘nothing is lost’, because the cultural centre will now fulfil Pondichéry’s destiny. In a sense, the centre was believed to have the power to redress

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17 Note du professeur Robert Debré, no date but sequential to 17 July 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
18 Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à son Excellence Mr le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s institut français à Pondichéry, 15 November 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
19 See Hall and Vasunia, op.cit., for a study on connections between ancient Greece, ancient Rome, and modern South Asia in British colonial ideology.
20 Trait d’Union, November 1954.
France’s missed opportunities in India, and to generate hope for the future, a view that was not shared by those who associated the end of French India with decay and extensive loss.21

From French India to colonial decrepitude

The colonial press offered a number of variants on the theme of colonial loss. The *Nouvelle revue française d’outre-mer* (NRFOM), a colonial monthly published by a quasi-official association named the *Comité du rayonnement français*, whose main purpose was to promote the diffusion of French culture in the colonies, paid little attention to French India in the post-Indian independence era. It did, however, published four articles on French India between March 1953 and January 1955 that indicate an increasing interest in the future of the southern territories. While the articles written prior to and around the time of the French withdrawal were entitled ‘L’Inde française’,22 ‘L’Inde française va-t-elle disparaître?’,23 and ‘L’Inde qui fut française…’,24 the article published in January 1955, entitled ‘À propos des Établissements français de l’Inde’,25 referred to French India by its former official name.26 The switch to the former name – ‘the French Establishments in India’ – contrasts with the previous reference to ‘French India’, which was associated with a larger territory. The new reference signals much smaller territories within a larger Indian entity, thus consciously diminishes the importance of French India. Not only is the colonial loss of French India reduced from the grand empire of Dupleix to mere ‘territories’, but at the same time it minimises an Indian nationalist victory that, after Britain, vanquished another European power.

Two of the articles were written by the former colonial administrator Deschamps. In the first article, dated March 1953, Deschamps condemns the economic blockade organised by the

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21 Ibid.
22 *NRFOM*, March 1953.
23 *NRFOM*, May 1954.
24 *NRFOM*, December 1954.
26 Ibid.
Government of India against French India, and asserts that French Indians wish to remain within the French Union. He continues to emphasise the positive aspect of the French administration by pointing out that French Indians receive a higher ration of rice and better education, and that the salary of French Indian civil servants is four times higher than the wages their Indian counterparts receive. French India is thus portrayed as a site where nationalist and colonial tensions interact, and where the privileges acquired by French Indians are under threat from Indian nationalist demands. The article also reiterates the competing colonial discourses of the era prior to India’s independence, noting that ‘French Indians were allowed to vote well before British Indians’. As such, France is judged a superior colonial power to Britain, and French republicanism is expressed as a liberating force and a better option to the uncertainties presented by an independent India. However, the author argues within an Indian colonial context that is no longer relevant. India had by now become the largest democracy in the world, with the promulgation of her constitution in 1950 giving the right to vote to all males and females above the age of twenty-one years. Moreover, the article neglects to mention that the right to vote had been granted by the British to a limited number of British Indian men and women. In this article, then, French India is a place where Indian nationalism and its use of coercive means is contrasted with French republicanism portrayed as the defender of universal rights and a fairer alternative.

In May 1954, in an article entitled ‘L’Inde française va-t-elle disparaître?’ 27 Deschamps anxiously warns that, should French India be lost, the four outposts could rapidly dissolve within the Indian Union – as had many of the other European trading posts that once dotted the Indian coastline – and become ‘sad necropolises’. 28 While the use of ‘French India’ in the title fosters a sense of continuity in the history of colonial France, the warning that it could disappear challenges this stabilising notion; it is as if the borders of the French nation have come under attack. French India is compared here to former Dutch, Swedish, and Danish commercial

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27 NRFOM, May 1954.
28 Ibid.
outposts, but key historical details – namely that these outposts had been sold to Britain – are
overlooked. The author warns that French India, like the other European outposts, would be
reduced to colonial vestiges. The idea that these possessions would decay under Indian
influence, thus tarnishing France’s glory, triggers a sense of anguish in the author that recalls the
amputation of other territories such as Alsace-Lorraine in 1871, and the occupation of France
during the Second World War. The mention of decay also implies that the Indian government is
incompetent and unable to protect European culture, which naturally the French Indian territories
epitomise. The loss of French India is presented as an attack on the civilising mission of France.
The author belittles India’s territorial claims over French India, and argues that ‘with her two
million square kilometres and her 380 million inhabitants, India has far more pressing problems to
resolve than worry about minuscule [French] pockets’. By focusing on the French Indian
territories, in other words, India is neglecting her own population and national affairs.
Nonetheless, the author suggests that if the territories were to merge, France must continue to
exercise her cultural influence through the establishment of a research centre, presented here as
a last resort to retain some kind of national dignity.

The December 1954 article entitled ‘Inde qui fut française…’, written by François Baron,
the last governor of French India, lists the key dates and events which led to the foundation of
French India. The historical overview ends abruptly in 1816 when, with the Treaty of Paris, the
English retroceded ‘Pondichéry under the condition that it will not be fortified’. Then a new
section, entitled ‘The French Establishments in India’, gives a summary of the negotiations that
led to the October agreement and ultimately the French withdrawal. By leaving out the history of
French India between 1816 and 1954, not only does the author emphasise the earlier, ‘glorious’
colonial period ‘when Dupleix gave to Pondichéry and France a splendid moment that is still
remembered across all of India’, he also obliterates the Indian nationalist movement and its

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29 Gildea, op.cit., p. 142.
30 NRFOM, December 1954.
relationship with the British colonial administration. The omission also has the effect of minimising France’s subordinate colonial status on the subcontinent and the fact that French India greatly depended on the goodwill of its neighbours, whether British or Indian, for its survival. In his description of the events that led to the October agreement, including the economic blockade and the occupation of Yanaon and Mahé by Indian nationalist forces, the author depicts France as a ‘non-violent’ participant that faced India’s coercive means. Again, the author reiterates the dichotomy of the Occident/Orient (synonymous with civilisation/barbarism). France, in other words, criticises the Indian nationalist movement for using coercive means while adhering to Gandhian strategy of satyagraha (non-violence). In these articles, French India is no longer represented as a site of imperial glory, but rather as the victim of Indian nationalism whose future, under Indian administration, is doomed to violence, decay, and oblivion. Such images are consistent with a ‘colonial discourse that construes the colonised as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin’, a discourse that had in the past given European powers a legitimacy for conquest.31

In an article entitled ‘Après l’abandon de Yanaon et de Mahé, il faut sauver Pondichéry’, published in Combat on 19 July 1954, Decraene similarly expresses a sense of anguish at the shrinking of the French colonial world. He notes that, with the loss of Yanaon and Mahé, French India has now been reduced to 40% of its former size.32 Describing French Indian events as a ‘naufrage’ (wreck), a term that implies moral loss, the author calls on the French government to do its ‘moral duty’ and salvage whatever is left of French India.33 In French, the word naufrage is strongly associated with Théodore Gericault’s famous painting, ‘Le Radeau de la Méduse’, which depicts a tragic colonial episode off the coast of Senegal when the French ship Méduse wrecked as it brought military personnel to Senegal in 1816. Hence, Decraene is likening French India to a fragment of the French Union adrift in the ocean, a fissure in that post-war colonial edifice, the

31 Bhabha, op.cit, p. 23.
32 Combat, 19 July 1954.
33 Ibid.
In his attack on Indian nationalism, Decraene uses traditional forms of representation, similar to those used in the NRFOM’s articles that emphasised the division between the Orient and the Occident: ‘The Indian government continues its policy of territorial nibbling with well-known oriental patience’. The author fails to mention, however, that the policy of ‘territorial nibbling’ may well have been learnt from European colonisers during the early period of India’s colonisation. In addition, when France agreed to hand over the loges in the hope of appeasing the Indian government, ignoring the fact that the gesture was contrary to the constitution, they effectively consented to the first stage of ‘territorial nibbling’. Finally, Decraene admits that, after India’s independence – which he portrays as ‘the vivisection of the British Empire in 1947’, in reference to the pain inflicted by Indian nationalists and their lack of morality in doing so – France had underestimated the new state of India. He accuses French foreign policy of negligence and short-sightedness, and to some extent criticises France for her lack of negotiating power. As a Frenchman, he reproaches his own government for its inability to withstand the duplicity of Indian leaders, once again reiterating a favourite discourse that discriminated on the basis of racial origins. In any case, he continues, India would soon sink into anarchy and require the intervention of the great powers.

For Climats, a colonial weekly magazine, the loss of French India also provoked a sense of anxiety, but in contrast to the way NRFOM’s articles presented a vision of decrepitude and oblivion, Climats’ reaction was epitomised in the title, ‘Les Établissements français de l’Inde rayés de la carte du monde’. The title warns that Indian nationalism will ruthlessly erase all European heritage, and that the ‘abandonment’ of French India was a grave blow to the French Union which presages further crisis for the French Republic. As Decraene had done, the article points out that the end of French India entails the loss of the third largest population in the French Union after

34 In 1816, Britain retroceded Sénégal to the French; the ship La Méduse was transporting colonists and government officials when it shipwrecked; Betts, France and Decolonisation, op.cit., p. 8.
35 Bhabha, op.cit., p. 23.
36 Climats, 21-27 October 1954
Africa and Madagascar, (Algeria had a largest population, but was considered to be a département rather than a ‘territory’ of the French Union). As such, the articles in Combat and Climats echo the old colonial argument that a strong nation equalled a large population, an argument that had been the impetus for France’s nineteenth-century colonial expansion but that was now obsolete in the post-Second World War Two era. At the same time, the articles expose the ways maps and censuses were used as tools, as discussed in Chapter 2, with which to construct the colonial imaginary, reinforce the image of a great nation, measure and control the colonial space, and justify the colonial entreprise. The ‘abandonment’ of French India was a reflection of France’s lack of determination and confidence in defending her territories. Indeed, one Climats article, entitled ‘Maintenir! La situation de nos Comptoirs de l’Inde va s’aggravant’, went so far as to praise Portuguese authorities in Lisbon for their condemnation of a Goanese resident who promoted the merging of the Portuguese colony with India. The article supported the use of such a determined response should any French Indian renegades foment efforts against the interests of the ‘patrie’. According to the paper, France had not fought hard enough for her territories, and as a result had undermined the grand effort of Dupleix and other bâtisseurs d’empire (builders of empire); the end of French India stood in stark contrast to the mythical memories associated with Dupleix’s heroic battles and his dream of a French Indian empire.

The unceremonious end of Dupleix’ empire

Some of the French articles depicted the end of French India as farcical and as full of extravagant developments and unexpected volte-faces. The French Indian deputy, Goubert, attracted the most comical and sarcastic titles. An article in Paris Presse, for example, dated 1 April 1954 and entitled ‘Le député français de Pondichéry fuit ses électeurs’, describes with some

39 Climats, 14-20 October 1954.
humour how the previously pro-French deputy defected to India, vanishing in thin air to avoid an arrest warrant on corruption charges.\textsuperscript{40} Indeed, ‘the bailiffs have been unable to locate him’ because he had managed ‘to make his way through the thick barbed wires that surround Pondichéry’. Not only does the author ridicule Goubert’s sudden change of allegiance, he sneers at the inability of India’s barbed wire to keep all the undesirables out of India.

In an article in the \textit{Paris Presse} of 22 April 1954, entitled ‘… Pondichéry la douce a vécu un roman noir’ (… Sweet Pondichéry in the midst of a thriller), Goubert’s former regime is described as one led by ‘pirates only interested in accumulating wealth… estimated at tens of thousands of lacks’, (a lack is a unit of currency equalled to 100,000 rupees). Until a month ago, the article continues, the streets of Pondichéry resembled those of London on a coronation day due to the numerous pictures of Goubert on display in shop windows.\textsuperscript{41} Goubert is here likened to an authoritarian king focused only on his own interests. \textit{Climats} describes the last days of the French administration as an orchestrated play (\textit{scenario monté}): in the first act, the evacuation of civil servants and their families is already being planned ahead of the result of the Kijeour Congress at which, in the second act, Goubert and other fugitives will be allowed to vote as elected representatives. The order of scenes makes a mockery of the vote to decide whether or not French India will merge with India.\textsuperscript{42}

The choice of Kijeour was of the utmost importance; situated at the extreme eastern border of the Pondichéry enclave and easily accessible by road, the location allowed French Indian representatives such as Goubert – for whom an arrest warrant was still in force – to enter the \textit{pandal} (the structure that accommodated the Congress) from an entrance right on the Indian border.\textsuperscript{43} Moreover, a \textit{Climats} article dated 4 November 1954 reported that the Kijeour Congress was a muted battlefield and provided a military description of the event:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} \textit{Paris Presse}, 1 April 1954.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid.; \textit{Paris Presse}, 22 April 1954; one lack is equalled to 100,000 rupees or 7,300,000 francs.
\item \textsuperscript{42} \textit{Climats}, 14-20 October 1954.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Télégramme France OM, 17 September 1954, AD, Inde, Vol. 75: Congrès Kijeour.
\end{itemize}
The ‘pandal’… was built in neutral territory…. it only took one week to erect … demonstrating the efficiency and skills of French engineering…. it is twenty metres long, sixteen metres wide and four metres high… cost 10,000 rupees…. the president opened the session at 10 am by reading the clauses of the proposed agreement in French and Tamil… until now the agreement was under military guard…. the vote commenced at 11.10 am with the members of the representative assembly voting first, then the municipal councillors, in total 178 representatives… [at] 12 noon the changing of the Indian guard takes place, it is larger than ours [twelve sepoys] their khaki uniforms so similar to ours that we had to paint a small French flag on the English helmets of our cipayis in 1941… the result is given at 1.20 pm…. 170 are in favour… Mr Pierre Landy, the Secretary of the French Embassy in India, and Mr Kewal Singh, the Indian Consul-General in Pondichéry, are allowed to enter the ‘pandal’…. all is over by 1.45 pm… in a perfect order….44

At the end of the article, the author remarks, after being given a ‘mala’ – a garland of flowers presented on important occasions in India – that ‘in France these are reserved for funerals’. Thus the end of French India is portrayed as a quiet orchestrated defeat and a funeral procession.

Overall, the articles present the deplorable end of French India as a tragicomedy that stands in stark contrast to the seriousness of empire building and the memory of colonial heroes such as Dupleix. In a rather light tone that contrasts earlier articles written in 1949, *Marchés coloniaux* wrote in August 1954 that the imminent loss of French India would have little impact on economic activities between France and her establishments, in part because such activity was already quite minimal.45 Finally, *Agence France Presse* reported in its communiqué on the

44 *Climats*, 4-10 November 1954.
45 AOM, AGEFOM896/2627.
forthcoming transfer of the establishments that France’s withdrawal should serve as an example for resolving the problem of Goa. Despite the unceremonious end to French presence in India, there were still those who saw French colonialism as a role model on which to base negotiations over the future of Portuguese India with the uncompromising government of Portugal.  

The transfer also provided an opportunity for a nationalist response from France’s high-ranking politicians. On 30 October, French Prime Minister, Pierre Mendès-France, who had recently negotiated the end of France’s colonial presence in Indochina, gave one of his weekly speeches – this one was entitled ‘C’est de notre France d’Outre-mer que je veux vous parler ce soir’ – in which he reiterated France’s great achievements overseas. Without making any mention of French India’s forthcoming transfer, Mendès-France emphasised the size of overseas France, her population, her untapped resources and unlimited potential, and the economic and political advancements that had been achieved. The effect of the speech was to foreground the unique bond between France and her overseas territories while minimising the impact on France that the loss of a small territory like French India would have. At the end of the speech, his invitation to focus on African and Madagascan youth shifted attention away from France’s recent colonial losses in Asia.  

Similarly, in a speech given a day before the transfer, Gaston Monnerville, President of the Council (Senate), underlined that the French Union offered a revolutionary novelty to any French overseas territory and a constitutional framework to suit the needs of individual members of the French Union, while neglecting to mention that France was about to lose another overseas territory. This statement, from the first black Frenchman to hold a senior position in the French government, was intended to remind a national audience of France’s ongoing benevolent support of less politically advanced territories.

46 AFP Spécial Outre-mer, 31 October 1954, AOM, AGEFOM896/2627.
47 Allocution de Mr Mendès-France sur la France d’Outre-mer, 30 October 1954, AFOM, AGEFOM896/2627.
48 Déclaration de Mr. Monnerville sur l’importance de l’Union française dans la situation politique actuelle, Agence France-Presse, 31 October 1954, AFOM, AGEFOM896/2627.
While some French newspapers and more particularly colonial magazines wrote about and debated the events that led to the transfer, they did not elaborate on the handover ceremony. Paris Match was one of the few to published a lengthy article, entitled ‘I saw the flag that Dupleix hoisted being brought down for the last time’.49 Focusing on the evening before the transfer when the French flag was taken down for the last time, the author reminisced about the imperial splendour of French India. The tone is overly emotional and at times melodramatic as it reports how ‘the ceremony was distressing and the flag bearer passed out’, supposedly overwhelmed by the experience. The French press underplayed the fact that the Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, did not attend the ceremony, as he was on an official visit to Saigon and then Phnom Penh, the new capitals of the former South-East Asian French colonies. Agence France Presse commented from Vietnam that Nehru, who was the first head of state to meet Ho Chi Minh after France’s defeat in Indochina and the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam), seemed to have rejoiced at the completion of the Franco-Indian negotiations.50

A more accurate analysis, however, would emphasise that on the day of the de facto transfer, rather than attending the withdrawal of what in 1945 he had already considered a ‘third-rank power’, Nehru was strengthening India’s ties with South-East Asian heads of state and investing in her role as a world leader.51 Indeed, a report on the political situation in India from the French Consulate in Bombay, dated 29 November 1945, noted that Nehru considered only the USA and USSR to be ‘first rank’ powers, a status he believed India and China would also enjoy in the near future. France and Britain had, from his viewpoint, lost most of their relevance.52 Contrary to France’s own myth-making in regard to her so-called Indian ‘empire’, there was no

49 Paris Match, No. 294, 13 - 20 November 1954 by Georges Reyer ‘J’ai vu amené pour la dernière fois le drapeau hissé par Dupleix’.
52 Ibid.
historic speech equivalent to that which marked the end of British presence in 14/15 August 1947 ('At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom...').\textsuperscript{53} In fact, \textit{The Statesman} (founded in Calcutta in 1875) reported that the \textit{de facto} ceremony lasted only ten minutes:

Exactly at 6.45 am Mr Kewal Singh [the former Indian Consul-General to Pondicherry, who had just become the Indian Chief Commissioner] drove from the Consulate to Government House and his arrival was the signal for cheering by thousands of citizens who had gathered in the garden in front of Government House. He was received at the gate by Mr Pierre Landy [a French Foreign Office official]. They shook hands ... signed the agreement, and the artillery fired a salvo of guns to signal the transfer to the citizens of Pondicherry.

The whole process, which was over by 7 am, can be viewed as an accurate reflection of the importance of France’s Indian empire: small and insignificant.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, the \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika} (ABP), one of India’s oldest newspapers, founded in Calcutta and renowned for its nationalist tone, reported that a week before the official ceremony brisk preparations were already under way to wind up the French administration. One ship berthed in Pondichéry port was being loaded with all the personal belongings of officials, the paper said, as well as arms and ammunitions, two police cars, two trucks, and the gendarmes who had been stationed there for the past few months. Another ship was expected during the last week of October to take on board officials and their families; only a few officers required to hand over the administration would stay behind and then travel by air.\textsuperscript{55} These arrangements were confirmed in a report by the


\textsuperscript{54} \textit{The Statesman}, 2 November 1954

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Amrita Bazar Patrika}, 21 October 1954.
Représentant Français in Pondichéry – the title given to the French Consul in Pondichéry during the transition period – to Ostrorog. The report states that the French administration packed in such a hurried manner that ‘in the eyes of the population, it appeared suspicious as if it was hunted by an enemy that was imposing the law of the victor’.\textsuperscript{56} Thus, in stark contrast to what appeared in the French imagination as a large French Indian empire, the whole of French India sailed away on two ships. Finally, acknowledging that French India was not limited to the administrative centre of Pondichéry and that the event was celebrated across all of the former French Indian territories and welcomed by them, the ABP mentioned that handover ceremonies also took place in the other territories celebration the ‘return’ of the territories.

**French India as an imagined Indian space**

As soon as the agreement for the *de facto* transfer was signed on 21 October 1954, it was promoted in most of the Indian press as a nationalist victory and an opportunity to turn the focus onto Portuguese India. Indeed, press articles declared that Portugal ought to follow the French example,\textsuperscript{57} a statement that was reflected in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ report of 1954-55 - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was responsible for the administration of the territories until 1962.\textsuperscript{58} Portuguese India was now the last foreign enclave to remain on the subcontinent, and it was hoped that the ‘French action will have a sobering effect on Portugal’.\textsuperscript{59} French India now provided the setting for a showdown between an uncompromising Portugal and a nationalist India.

The *Searchlight*, which started publishing from Patna in 1919, printed an article dated 31 October 1954 entitled ‘Power transfer by France to India’, in which the author twice stated that the


\textsuperscript{57} *Searchlight*, 2 November 1954.


\textsuperscript{59} *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, 22 October 1954.
ceremony would mark the final chapter of French presence in India. The article also hinted that
tax evaders had enjoyed the territorial oddities of French India, noting that Pondichéry would now
cease to be the haven ‘it had been to civil debtors on either side of the border’. The programme
of the ceremony was given in more detail than it had been in the French press, and the tone of
the language, although more restrained than in the ABP, is clearly aimed at turning the event into
a nationalist victory. The article made repeated mention of national symbols, such as the raising
of the Indian flag and the illumination of government buildings, to reinforce the process of nation-
building initiated by the merging of French India:

Other highlights of the programme include raising the Indian tricolor at the flag mast of
the customs house near the sea shore and a public rally at which messages from
President Rajendra Prasad and PM Nehru will be read both in English and Tamil. There
will be illuminations of all government buildings and private houses, and a torch parade
and fireworks will mark the end of the celebrations. The transfer eve as well as the day of
independence will be observed as a day of great rejoicing by the 320,000 citizens of the
four settlements of Pondicherry, Karikal, Mahé and Yenam.

The article made use of identifiers that signalled, albeit at times subtly, that the process of nation-
building was in process. The hoisting of the Indian tricolour contrasted with the French tricolour,
and the messages were to be read, not in French, but in the official language of the Union
(English), and the local official language of the state of Tamil Nadu (Tamil). There is no mention
that similar celebrations were organised in Yenam (Yanaon) and Mahé, and it seems that no
speeches were to be given in the Indian languages of these two enclaves (Telugu and
Malayalam, respectively). The oversight may indicate that these territories were not viewed as

60 Searchlight, 31 October 1954.
separate entities, or that the journalist was unaware that celebrations were taking place in the other territories. That both public buildings and private houses would be illuminated could be perceived as a deliberate strategy to link public space, represented by government buildings now under the charge of the Indian government, with the local population.

The *Searchlight* article of 2 November 1954, entitled ‘French rule over four enclaves comes to end’, reiterates the basic principles of the Indian government’s policy and outlines its success in overcoming another colonial power: ‘firstly the elimination of foreign rule and the full integration of the French territories with the Union of India, secondly preservation of the cultural and other rights of the people and thirdly bringing about integration not by force but in a peaceful way by the method of friendly negotiations’. The celebration emphasises the success of India’s integration policy and the determination of its leaders to carry it through. As such, French India provides India with an example of the successful resolution of nationalist and colonial tensions, and also serves as a warning to Portugal.

The *Statesman*’s article entitled ‘French enclaves transferred to India’, pointed out that, although the ceremony marked the end of alien rule, France technically still held full sovereignty over the territories until the *de jure* agreement was ratified by the French Parliament. The newspaper also reported the assurance of Indian Chief Commissioner, Kewal Singh, that he and his colleagues ‘shall bend all our energies for the social welfare and economic prosperity and general happiness of the people of these territories. Our aim will be to give you [the population] a thoroughly honest and efficient administration based on justice, fair play and absolute impartiality’. The Chief Commissioner seems intent on contrasting the commitment of the Indian government with a notoriously corrupt French system that had done so little to economically improve the territories. The newspaper also reported the Chief Commissioner saying, in French, that:

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61 *Searchlight*, 2 November 1954.
As French was the official language of the new state, he was speaking in French and hoped that French would continue to be the popular language in these territories. Apart from the French language, he said the rich heritage of French culture would be preserved and promoted, and with this special cultural background the new state could contribute to the rich and varied cultural panorama of India.⁶⁴

The statement was intended to reassure former opponents of the merger, who feared that it would result in the disappearance of French Indian cultural characteristics. Here the Indian Chief Commissioner affirmed that French culture would not only be preserved but also welcomed in an already culturally diverse India. The Searchlight indicated that the five-year plan introduced across India to facilitate and monitor her economic development would be extended to the former French enclaves, demonstrating the commitment of the Indian government to rapidly improve the economy of the former French territories.⁶⁵ Hence, French India provided an opportunity to outdo the former coloniser, and by welcoming the diversity of French India it proved to the world India’s commitment to the preservation of the territories’ cultural particularities. Such policy was in line with New Delhi’s view of a naturally diverse nation that also helped consolidate state authority in post-colonial India.⁶⁶

The ABP of 2 November 1954 published a lengthy article entitled ‘A big problem solved in spirit of goodwill: de facto transfer of French pockets to India’.⁶⁷ The article included a cartoon entitled ‘Hearty Welcome’ (Fig. 9) reproduced, as mentioned in the bottom right corner of the caption, by arrangement of Shankar’s Weekly. Its author was the celebrated Indian cartoonist Kesava Shankara Pillai (1902-1989) who founded the weekly in 1948. Pillai became famous for

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⁶⁴ Ibid.
⁶⁵ Searchlight, 2 November 1954.
⁶⁶ Roy, Beyond Belief, op.cit., p. 7
⁶⁷ Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 November 1954.
producing cartoons as a form and source of political knowledge during colonial and post-colonial times. His cartoons provided accurate representations of political events that were most importantly accessible to a wide readership.68 The caption reads: ‘Pandit Nehru says the people of the French Settlements are welcome to the wider family of India’. It depicts French India as an Indian woman carrying an umbrella in her right hand and a suitcase in her left hand; she makes an entrance into what looks like an office. The characters depicted in the cartoon are Prime Minister Nehru, Foreign Affairs Minister Krishna Menon (standing behind him), and three other men who are all looking at the woman. Curiously, no hands are stretched out, and nor are hand palms brought together at the centre of the chest in the manner that would physically indicate they were welcoming the woman. The male character standing on the far right of the cartoon and wearing an army uniform is holding a bunch of flowers that seem to be for her, but he is standing the furthest from the woman and the entrance. In the middle of the room is a large armchair that seems to have been provided for the female visitor.

The cartoon genders French India, representing her as a tired, perhaps even lost, female figure who has travelled a long way to join this group of men. Perhaps she is an Indian version of Marianne, the national emblem of France. On the other hand, India is represented by the five men, a number that epitomises strength and demonstrates the inequality between French India and India. Perhaps these men will rescue the woman (hence the offer for her to rest in the armchair). The lack of welcoming gestures is particularly interesting: the two men closest to the woman have their hands behind their backs, while the army officer holding the bunch of flowers seems to represent India’s military forces, a reminder that although India used pacific means in the merging of French India, the use of military force had not been entirely dismissed. The

cartoon also helps celebrate Indian men’s manhood in defeating colonialism which had traditionally represented them as effete.69

Fig. 9: Hearty Welcome! Source: Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 November 1954.

The article itself uses national images of the motherland, likening the transfer ceremony to a day of freedom and reproducing part of Nehru’s speech sent from Cambodia:

I am far from India on this day, but my thoughts are in Pondicherry where an event of great significance is taking place. A part of India long separated from the motherland is coming back to us of its own free will and this change is taking place as a result of friendly agreement with France. The French settlements in India were small in area but they raised difficult problems. It is never easy to solve problems which involve the interest and prestige of different countries. It is thus a matter of peculiar satisfaction that both India and France have succeeded in solving this question with grace and goodwill. In doing so they have set an example of tolerance, good sense and wisdom which if applied to other problems in the world might lead to successful results.

I congratulate the people of what used to be French enclaves in India and welcome them as nationals of the republic of India. I offer felicitations also to the government of France under the wise leadership of his [sic] Prime Minister [Mendès-France] and the people of France on this occasion. I am happy that Pondicherry will continue to be a centre of French language and culture and will be a cultural link between the Republic of India and the Republic of France. The settlement of this problem is a justification and a vindication of the policy we have pursued in such matters. That policy is of peace and patient perseverance. Some people have thought that it was slow in achieving results. But the way of peace, though it might appear long, is always the shortest and most satisfactory. Jai Hind.70

Nehru’s speech is the epitome of diplomacy, as it presents in a flattering manner the outcome of eight years of negotiations that were not always cordial. The speech conceals some crucial points. To begin with, the population did not decide of its own free will to join India; the decision was made after India introduced a number of coercive measures. These means included the erection of barbed wire around the enclave, the discontinuation of the provision of electricity, the suspension of fuel, food, and mail deliveries, and finally, the introduction of travel documents to enter Indian territory. This last measure limited the movement of local populations, especially that of Pondichéry, whose enclave was criss-crossed like patchwork by Indian territory. Furthermore, Pondichéry’s population did not participate in any referendum or election process to decide the fate of the French territories. Instead, the decision was made indirectly at Kijeour by the population’s elected representatives, some of whom had previously fled their constituency on charges of corruption and found refuge in India. While in Nehru’s statement the outcome testifies to the goodwill and the grace of both governments to resolve the issue, in fact negotiations had dragged on for years and led to the Indian government’s introduction of aggressive measures.

70 Amrita Bazar Patrika, 2 November 1954.
While the policy outlined by the Jaipur National Congress did not include resorting to armed forces, the withdrawal of necessities could be viewed as equivalent to the use of explicit means of violence.

Nehru’s statement that French India ‘had long been separated from the motherland’ conceals another obvious fact: French India was originally the result of land purchases and gifts by local rulers, as well as treaties with another European power, and had never been a part of the Indian nation as it was conceived in the twentieth century. Nehru’s choice of words had a two-fold effect: they clearly situated the enclaves as an integral part of the wider political and cultural entity that was the Indian nation, and they hinted that, under European power, the enclaves had been carved out and removed from that imagined Indian nation. These assumptions contributed to building the myth that the Indian nation had its origins in a history that pre-dated invasion by European powers, a myth that was intended to reinforce New Delhi’s policy and its supposedly ‘undeniable right’ to integrate British India, the princely states, and foreign enclaves into one political entity. The statement also embodies the success of the Indian National Congress’s policy in regard to foreign enclaves on Indian soil. The allegedly peaceful means by which the transfer was finalised reinforced the strategic value of satyagraha and emphasised the undeniable progress of the nationalist movement.71

In his speech, Nehru rightly stated that the French settlements in India brought prestige to both France and India, and that the outcome of the long negotiations testified not only to his personal statesmanship, but also to the invaluable experience Indian officials had in dealing with difficult problems. He thus bestowed upon India and her statesmen the authority to resolve other disputes, and placed India at the forefront of nations to be reckoned with. While Nehru welcomed French Indians as nationals of the Republic of India, he failed to mention the possibility that some of those same French Indians might opt for French citizenship, and left unspoken whether the

71 Breuilly, op.cit., pp. 8-9; 20-1.
same welcome would be extended to them. In 1955, a report prepared by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs estimated that as many as 25,000 French Indians might exercise their right to obtain French citizenship. In sum, the handover ceremony helped erase the hardship of the blockade, pacify Franco-Indian relations, and validate India's policy of territorial integration, which now served to bring the dispute between Portugal and India sharply into focus. It also marked the beginning of a new administrative arrangement and the creation of the latest state to join the Republic of India.

**The birth of a new state**

The French Indian press was less nationalistic than the Indian press and more realistic than the French dailies and colonial magazines. In contrast with the French press, the *Trait d'Union* of May 1954, in an article entitled ‘Le Merger’, enquired whether the French Indian territories' role was to perpetually serve as 'sad memories of the lost conquests of Dupleix... vestiges of her great Indian empire'. It also pointed out that the merging of French India with the Republic of India would be an economic improvement for the four enclaves and provide an end to their ‘putrefactive stagnation’. It called for an ‘intelligent resolution of the minuscule problem of French India’ that would not only facilitate Franco-Indian relations, but also offer France an opportunity to establish herself in the former enclaves by creating a cultural centre, an idea that had been supported by Nehru as early as August 1947. The article demonstrates a willingness to move away from the realm of colonial myth and memories towards the possibility of local economic improvement under the aegis of India. On a local level, French India seemed unimportant, while on a national level, the enclaves fulfilled a far more important function for both India and France. Nehru had acknowledged that French India was linked with other international

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73 *Trait d’Union*, May 1954.
issues such as Indochina, the issue of Indians in South Africa – France had helped India with this issue at the United Nations – and the rise of the Cold War between USSR and the USA, in respect to which India remained unaligned.75

The article positions French India within a new and peculiar post-colonial situation in which France still had full sovereignty over territories that India ruled in a de facto manner. It questions what impact the merger would have on the population, how long the period of transition would last, and how the introduction of Indian legislation would affect the administration and its civil servants and pensioners. Would the French education system be preserved, and would workers' rights acquired after the labour agitation of 1936 be maintained? These were all important concerns that would eventually be defined in the Treaty of Cession (1956). The outcome of the national and colonial dispute would have major consequences for the local level, hence French India was depicted as a place where benefits gained in the past were being challenged by the change of administration.

The Trait d'Union issue of November 1954 acknowledged that French India had been caught up in a tide of momentous events (‘vague de grands courants’), and that the new post-war international context and nationalist demands had not spared the small French enclaves. Rather than blaming France or India, the monthly perceived the evolution of French India as the birth of a new state within India that was the product of a ‘peaceful agreement between two governments’. However, French deputies and a variety of colonial issues delayed the ratification; the Indian government had to wait until the instruments of exchange took place on 16 August 1962. Shortly afterwards, a Bill was submitted to the Indian parliament that allowed the four former southern French Indian territories to be referred to as the Union Territory of Pondicherry. The article’s

75 Ibid, Vol. 4, pp. 614-21, 664. The Asiatic Land tenure and Indian Representation Act, known as the 'Ghetto Act', 3 June 1946, regulated the acquisition and occupation by Asians of real estate in the provinces of Natal and Transvaal. It conferred a limited franchise on Indians and discriminated against South African nationals of Asian or ‘coloured’ origin. India responded by suspending diplomatic representations and introducing a trade embargo, and took the matter to the UNO receiving support from France. The mistreatment of Indians in South Africa was incorporated in the foreign policy adopted in the Jaipur Resolution of 18-19 December 1948, ibid., Vol. 1, pp. 249, 437, Vol. 8, pp. 25, 310.
introduction emphasised that the new state could not repudiate its past, nor its origin; it was unique.\textsuperscript{76} The body of the article proposed a common effort to ensure economic advancement and prosperity, and looked at how French India could become a centre of French culture in order to guarantee a continuing link between France and India. The \textit{Trait d’Union} had a small readership since, being published in French, it was only accessible to a few mainly educated French Indians. Thus, the authors, although realistic about the effect that the merger would have, wanted to preserve the privileges enjoyed by this small minority and to promote the maintenance of French culture. In sum, French India would now offer a better future for a larger number of its citizens while remaining the point of contact between India and France.

In October 1956, two years after the de facto transfer, a booklet entitled ‘\textit{Nouvel état de Pondichéry: événements marquants et progrès économique et social depuis le transfert de facto}’ continued to celebrate the transfer as a nationalist triumph, and wrote the following on the first page:

325,000 citizens could finally join the big Indian family from whom they have been separated, and add the precious gift of the French culture to the rich mosaic of languages and cultures that form the Indian Union. Faithful to their great political traditions, after a campaign of non-violence, the population of these territories and the government of the Indian Union have obtained from France this grandiose and historic gesture. On the night of 31 October 1954, at the stroke of the midnight hour, the sirens of the cotton mills of Pondichéry announced the day of independence.\textsuperscript{77}

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Trait d’Union}, November 1954.
Once again the message emphasises the return to the nation of citizens described as members of the big Indian family and the need to maximise their welcome. The culture they developed under foreign rule is portrayed as an asset to the already rich variety of Indian cultures. The message also minimises the violence that was perpetuated during the eight years of negotiations between French and Indian authorities, and between merger and anti-merger movements. The use of the phrase ‘at the stroke of the midnight hour’ relates the announcement of the merger of French India to Nehru’s speech at the Constituent Assembly on 14/15 August 1947, and links the two events together as nationalist victories over European colonial powers.\textsuperscript{78} After R.K. Nehru, Special Emissary of the Government of India, read messages from Rajendra Prasad, President of the Indian Republic, and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, he declared, ‘this solution was the result of the policies of the government of India regarding the issue of foreign possessions in India, of which the fundamental principles are ‘to eliminate foreign hegemony and integrate with India, to maintain culture and other rights, to obtain integration through diplomatic negotiations and not by force’.\textsuperscript{79} In reasserting India’s policy regarding foreign territories in India and India’s determination to deal with them via diplomatic channels rather than the use of force, this declaration was an obvious warning to the Portuguese, who were still reluctant to consider a withdrawal.

**Conclusion**

Through the review of various articles that reported the handover of French India, I have demonstrated that representations of French India in the French and Indian imaginary were reformulated. These changes were not linear, but rather were fashioned to meet particular discourses and stages in the evolution of French India. For most of the Indian press, French India

\textsuperscript{78} Masselos, *The City in Action*, op.cit., pp. 322-4.

was still associated with colonial and nationalist tensions, but such tensions were now limited to Portuguese India, since the celebration of the handover signalled the liberation of French India from colonial control. The event also served to affirm India’s national integration policy and promote the statesmanship of India’s politicians. For the French press, the event initiated a reconsideration of the Third Republic’s *mission civilisatrice*, and the creation of the research centre helped transform the French Indian failure into a new post-colonial opportunity that would continue to fit France’s role as a world leader. Conversely, for the French colonial press, the handover reduced the imagined French Indian empire to the state of decaying vestiges soon to be engulfed by an expansive nationalist India.
PART THREE

THE FINAL EVOLUTION
Chapter 6

Preserving French culture in post-French India

Our territories, freely given two hundred years ago by local sovereigns to the [French] Indian Company, are like small properties within the vast domain of a friend. Their reason for existence, their happy destiny, is to constitute a natural link of union between two great peoples, two cultures. The Franco-Indian community of 300,000 souls would be lost by dissolving itself in the mass of 400 million brother people without benefit to anyone.’ Governor Baron.¹

The Agreement of 21 October 1954 signed by the French to cede the four southern comptoirs to India provided a set of articles that outlined issues of citizenship, administration, justice, records, and education. Articles XXIV to XXX dealt specifically with French culture, which would be maintained through the continuation of French language teaching at existing educational establishments, the recognition of French Indian qualifications by the Indian government, and the creation of a research institute.² The maintenance of French culture was viewed by the French and Indian governments, journalists, and those in French India who had opposed the merger as a means to secure the cultural link between France and one of her oldest colonies. No longer viewed as a total abandonment, the

handover allowed France to transfer the territories with some dignity while also preserving the French influence, and the research institute became a new panacea, a respectable way to transform an unceremonious withdrawal into a more glorifying post-colonial achievement. From the viewpoint of the Indian authorities, the perpetuation of French culture was considered a small concession against India’s refusal to hold a referendum, and would soothe the fears of a French Indian population that was surrounded by four hundred million non-French Indians.

In view of the changes that the Agreement embodied, this chapter will first investigate the origins and the role that the Institute was designed to fulfil as France’s formal presence in Asia waned, and how India perceived the transformation of a colonial administration into a research institute. Since the Agreement allowed for the preservation of French culture in French India, the chapter will also assess the extent of French cultural influence and the level of French education in the territories in order to establish whether French culture was a myth or a reality, and to determine whether it could sustain the changes generated by the withdrawal.

A cultural institute: a post-colonial vision

As early as June 1945, the French Foreign Affairs Ministry was assessing the potential effects of India’s political independence on France’s presence in the territories, and considering the possibility of setting up a university to enhance cultural relations between the two countries. This was not a new idea; the French state had a history of propagating French language and culture through the establishment of overseas French lycées, écoles (primary and secondary schools), and instituts français, all of which were overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Between 1873 and the Second World War, each region of the empire as well as areas where France had geo-political

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influence saw the emergence of an institute from which scientific research was carried out. Institutes of this kind included the Institut français d’archéologie orientale in Cairo (1880), the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO), (Saigon, 1900), the Institut des hautes études marocaines in Rabat (1920), the Institut français d’études arables in Damascus (1922), and the Institut français d’Afrique noire in Dakar, Senegal (1936). Similar institutes were also created in the French capital, such as the Centre des hautes études des affaires musulmanes (1936) and the Office de la recherche scientifique coloniale (1943). The latter would become, after the war, the Office de la Recherche Scientifique et Technique d’Outre-Mer (ORSTOM), a state agency responsible for scientific research in the colonies. These institutes formed part of a colonial network designed to foster scientific knowledge and the development of colonial specialists, but above all they were instruments of state policy with the specific purpose of projecting national power and persuading other countries to value French culture and talent.

The period prior to the Second World War also saw a marked surge in the creation of new lycées and écoles françaises in foreign countries which were not part of the empire, with the number of French schools nearly doubling – from 23 to 40 – between 1933 and 1939, while the number of instituts increased by 25% – from 29 to 35 – in the same period.

Discussions and reports in relation to setting up a university in French India were first instigated by Olivier Lacombe, the French Cultural Attaché in Calcutta, who suggested in 1946 that the university would operate through the creation of a network of ‘Maisons de France’ – also labeled ‘centres de rayonnement spirituel’ (centres for the diffusion of French culture) – based in large Indian cities, as well as in Pondichéry. The idea was inspired by the EFEO, which had been established by the Government of Indochina in association with the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres with the aim of spreading French cultural influence throughout Asia. The EFEO was meant to be the

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4 Singaravélou, Professer l’Empire, op.cit., pp. 155-6. The EFEO had branches all over Asia.
6 Salon, op.cit., p. 28.
precursor of a university in Saigon but, having failed to fulfill its mission as an educational establishment; it focused instead on scientific and cultural research in Asia.\(^7\) The use of the word ‘spirituel’ instead of ‘culturel’ on several occasions in a report dated October 1946 is revealing; it was believed that these “Maisons” would have a magnetic force on Hindu youth, and that they would invigorate the [French Indian] territories, whose spiritual as well as economic activity were very weak.\(^8\) Although there were no details on how such centres would be run and how they would exert such cultural influence, in granting French culture an almost religious role the Ministry’s vision was following the traditional French mission of civilising and enlightening lesser cultures by means of the ‘cultural superiority’ of France. Albert Salon, a French diplomat who later reflected on the role of French culture in the world, calls it ‘French messianism’, a set of religious, philosophical, and political beliefs that grants French culture the power to bring civilisation to barren lands and imposes on its agents the duty to propagate it.\(^9\) Above all, the purpose of the research centre was meant to preserve a sense of identity in former French India.\(^10\) The Ministry nevertheless withdrew the idea, because it believed Indian nationalists would perceive these ‘Maisons’ as new comptoirs and a renewal of French imperialism.\(^11\)

The proposal was revisited shortly afterwards, but this time rather than setting up a university, it focused on the creation of a cultural centre in Pondichéry. Lacombe considered three aspects of this new colonial vision. The location had to be in a former French territory, in order to demonstrate the willingness and commitment of the French government toward its French Indian population. Furthermore, the institute could have no affiliation with the EFEO, or would at least have

\(^7\) Singaravélou, L’École française d’Extrême-Orient, op.cit., pp. 66, 77-6.
\(^8\) Note pour la Direction Générale des relations culturelles, 2 octobre 1946, AD, Inde française, Vol. 80: Questions culturelles.
\(^10\) J. P. Singh, op.cit., pp. 4-9.
to be set up along different parameters, especially after a Vietnamese nationalist group (Viet Minh) had occupied a branch of the EFEO in Hanoi and expelled its French personnel. The underlying reason for the attack was that the EFEO was receiving its budget from the Government of Indochina, and was therefore associated with the French colonial administration.

Lacombe was aware of the effect this incident was having on the reputation of France in Indochina, overseas, and at home. As a result, Lacombe's recommendation was that the would-be institute be totally independent from the colonial administration, and even that it be granted diplomatic status in order to safeguard future French interests in the region. His suggestion would give the institute a more official status and demarcate it from other educational organisations such as the privately-owned Alliance Française, which had been set up in 1883 in Paris with the aim of propagating French language and culture across the French colonies and across the world. A branch of the Alliance Française had opened in Pondichéry in 1889, and between 1911 and 1914, other branches were established across British India in Calcutta, Secunderabad, Bombay, Simla, and Baroda. However, Lacombe's report was unclear on which French Ministry would be responsible for the financing and running of such an institute. Should it be the Ministry of Overseas France, or External Affairs, or Education? Furthermore, he did not provide details of the curriculum to be taught and the budget that might be required, an issue of some importance given the economic situation in post-war France.

Despite these shortcomings, by June 1947 Lacombe's proposal seemed the only possible solution to the question of maintaining influence in the face of India’s independence, and it offered some real advantages: by promoting France and guaranteeing her *rayonnement*, the proposal

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12 Rapport Olivier Lacombe, Attaché culturel près le Consulat-général de France à Calcutta à Mr le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, 5 février 1946, AD, Inde, Vol. 16: *Situation intérieure*.

accorded well with France’s policy of post-war recovery, consolidation of the empire, and the regaining of her former status as world leader. At the same time the centre would allow France to remain present in Pondichéry, a strategically important factor in the context of cession threats from the enclave of Chandernagor. However, other challenges were becoming apparent. Financial assistance from Paris was delayed and might not come at all. More importantly, events in Indochina were seriously discrediting French plans to build an amicable and peaceful relationship with the Indian government and local population. Strikes, boycotts, pamphlets, and the Indian government all denounced the French action in Indochina. The institute was put on hold until the Agreement of October 1954, but what Lacombe’s proposal revealed is that after three hundred years of presence in French India, and despite ministerial reports, newspapers articles, and a small colonial lobby that incessantly trumpeted France’s cultural and institutional achievements overseas, France had, in fact, invested little in the way of cultural or scientific research in French India.

A strategic move in a new geo-political context

France could only maintain her influence on Indian soil as long as it was acceptable to the Indian government. The point was addressed in Article XXV of the 1954 Agreement, wherein it was stated that ‘the Indian Government agree[s] to the continuation of the existing French institution of a scientific or cultural character and by agreement between the two Governments, to the granting of facilities for the opening of establishments of the same character’. While Nehru had totally rejected the presence of foreign powers on the subcontinent, from the onset of the negotiations he welcomed

the idea of some form of French educational establishment, whether a university or an institute. In his view, an educational establishment would allow France to withdraw with some dignity and at the same time respect the historical and cultural particularities of French India. In addition, the creation of a research institute was in line with the Nehruvian policy that fostered scientific and technological modernisation as part of the nation-building formation.

A cultural centre also offered the means to appease anti-merger groups. Indeed, Kewal Singh, the Indian High Commissioner in Pondichéry (new title given to the former Indian Consul-General after the de facto agreement), urged the Représentant Français in Pondichéry (known before the handover as Commissaire de la République) in November 1954 to open the centre as quickly as possible in order to thwart any attempt from pro-merger groups at eliminating French influence in the comptoirs. Such eagerness from the Indian representative was not a show of support for France’s new post-colonial enterprise, but rather an indication of India’s determination to comply with the details of the Agreement and retain friendly relations with France that could lead to financial aid and trade agreements. Moreover the suggestion took into consideration the small number of French-educated French Indians, comprising pensioners, war veterans, and former civil servants, who would strongly oppose any non-compliance with the Agreement and would regard it as a form of abandonment from both governments were such an Institute not be opened. From a national and an international viewpoint, it was paramount for India to avoid any form of unrest; the memories of communal brutality at the time of partition were still vivid, and French India had also experienced its share of local violence in the period leading up to the Kijeour Congress. For as long as the Treaty of

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17 Roy, Beyond Belief, op.cit., Chapter 3, pp.105-32.
Cession remained unsigned, it was in the interest of both countries to see the speedy opening of the Institute and to smother any signs of disturbance from dissenting groups.

For France, the research institute went beyond the mere maintenance of France’s presence in former French India; it became part of a broader post-colonial agenda aimed at maintaining political influence in the region and aligning France with other great powers. The French Ministry of External Affairs noted, in December 1954, that with the end of the conflict in Indochina, and in view of the Franco-Indian Agreement, France’s candidature as a member of the Colombo Plan would be regarded more favourably; the US and Britain had already approved her candidature on principle.\(^{19}\) The Colombo Plan had been conceived in 1950 by the Foreign Ministers of Commonwealth countries, and aimed to provide economic assistance to countries across South-East and South Asia, based on Five-Year plans.\(^ {20}\) At its inception, India – the largest aid recipient – had rejected the possibility of France becoming a member because of her increasing military involvement in Indochina.\(^ {21}\) Franco-Indian negotiations over the future of French India would undoubtedly have played a part in India’s initial refusal, since India was opposed to any form of colonialism whether at home or abroad.

But in December 1954 Nehru communicated to Ostrorog, the French Ambassador in New Delhi, that both India and Ceylon would now support France’s candidature.\(^ {22}\) As the regional leader, India’s endorsement would greatly influence the decision of other Asian countries regarding France’s nomination, and France would gain real advantage from being a member alongside Britain and

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\(^{19}\) Direction Générale des Affaires Politiques, Note pour la Direction des Relations Culturelles, 2 décembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: *Institut français de Pondichéry*.

\(^{20}\) The founding members were Australia, Canada, Ceylon, India, New Zealand, Pakistan and the United Kingdom with the Federation of Malaya and Singapore, North Borneo and Sarawak; the following countries also joined: Burma (1952), Cambodia (1951), Indonesia (1953), Japan (1954), Laos (1951), Nepal (1952), Philippines (1954), Thailand (1954), USA (1951), South Vietnam (1951), Colombo Plan Bureau, *op.cit.*, pp. 6-7; Zachariah, *op.cit.*, p. 165.

\(^{21}\) Netherlands were also sidelined because of their control of Indonesia.

especially the USA, the largest contributor of aid to the organisation. In fact, the French Ministry of External Affairs envisaged that scientific research emanating from the Institute would not only assist countries within the French Union, but also members of the Colombo Plan, especially the former Associated States of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Under the cover of the Plan, the centre could become the means by which economic and political links with the former French overseas and associated territories would be maintained, while at the same time lifting France’s status from colonial failure to international advisor and decision-maker. France’s participation in the future economic development of former colonised countries legitimised some form of continued colonial rule. However, despite Nehru’s willingness to support France’s participation in the Colombo Plan, she never became a member partly because the organisation remained centred around Great-Britain and her Commonwealth countries.

The creation of the institute in Pondichéry was also closely linked to the evacuation of the EFEO in Hanoi between 1954 and 1957. Jean Filliozat, a distinguished Indologist and professor since 1952 at the Collège de France, negotiated the closure of the administrative centre of the EFEO in Hanoi on behalf of the Académie des Inscriptions et des Belles-Lettres. Unsurprisingly, Filliozat was then appointed the first director of the Institut français de Pondichéry. The Indian collections were transferred from Hanoi to Pondichéry so that the Indian studies previously carried out by the EFEO would now take place in India, where the new Institut would continue the tradition of scholarly

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23 Direction Générale des Affaires Politiques, Note pour la Direction des Relations Culturelles, 2 décembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry; France was a member of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East (ECAFE) established in 1945, which preceded and supplemented the Colombo Plan, although funds were not substantial the ECAFE acted as a meeting forum for members that enabled comparison of economic development, Marc Frey, ‘Control, Legitimacy and the Securing of Interests: European Development Policy in South-ast Asia from the Late Colonial Period to the Early 1960s’, Contemporary European History, Vol. 12, No. 4 (2003), pp. 395-412.

The old dream of setting up a thriving research institute to compete with the British Indologists of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, was resurrected. The previous attempt in the form of ‘La Société de Chandernagar’ had failed because the French had chosen to establish their prestigious research institute in the most isolated and least ‘French’ of the French Indian territories. Victor Goloubew, a permanent member of the EFEO later commented that, located so close to the British Indian capital, which at the time of the project was Calcutta, this beacon of French scholarship in India had little chance of succeeding. While the administration of the EFEO was transferred from the Government of Indochina (Ministry of Overseas France) to the Ministry of Education, the Institute in Pondichéry was overseen by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus the inauguration of the new Institute signalled the survival of a colonial project embodied in the EFEO and a transfer of responsibilities from the Ministry of Overseas France to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**The inauguration of the Institut Français de Pondichéry**

Five months after the Agreement was signed, l’Institut Français de Pondichéry was inaugurated on 21 March 1955 by Ostrorog, the French ambassador to India. Over one thousand people attended the opening ceremony, including such high-ranking officials from the Indian government as Shri C. Rajagopalachari, the former Premier of Madras and last Governor-General of India; M.A.K. Chanda, the Indian Vice-Minister of External Affairs; Shrimathi E.B. Hoshi, Indian Secretary to the Ministry of Education; Kewal Singh, the Indian High Commissioner in Pondichéry. Among the French officials were Armand Gandon, the French Représentant in Pondichéry, Mr

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Bayen, the Vice-Director at the French Ministry of Education; and Mr Journot, attaché culturel at the French Embassy in New Delhi.28

The Institute was promoted as a cultural link between India and France. A message from Prime Minister Nehru was delivered at the inauguration:

We have always looked upon Pondichéry as a cultural link between the Republic of India and the Republic of France and a centre where French language and culture would be encouraged. The establishment of this institute by the French government is an important step in this direction and is therefore very welcome.29

In this brief message, Nehru acknowledged that, for Indians, Pondichéry was a privileged site where cultural exchanges between India and France had historically taken place. By noting that ‘the Institute is an important step in this direction’, he asserted that with the blessing of India, France was given the opportunity to spread her culture in more peaceable ways than had been used in her colonial past. By juxtaposing the ‘Republic of India’ with the ‘Republic of France’, Nehru accentuated the equality of two nations, and as such erased the dichotomy between conqueror and conqueror. Now that France was confined in former French India to a few buildings such as the Institute, schools, churches, the Alliance française and a Consulate, her self-proclaimed ‘superior culture’ would be put to the test. The Institute would either successfully fulfill France’s mission by means of research and education or, on the contrary, in the words of Deschamps, a former colonial administrator, it would become ‘the sad necropolis of a former glorious colonial power’.30

28 Trait d’Union, March 1955.
29 Searchlight, 22 March 1955.
30 NRFOM, May 1954.
Ostrorog and Filliozat, the new director of the Institute, gave speeches at the opening that offer different perspectives on what the Institute represented for France’s civil servants. Filliozat emphasised how scientific cooperation and cultural rapprochement between France and India was crucial for the Institute’s research, from which both countries would benefit. The creation of the centre was not the beginning, he added, but rather the reinforcement of long-standing cultural exchanges. By providing a history of French interests in Indian civilisation, Filliozat described France’s cultural role as a peaceful contribution to the development of scientific knowledge. In his view, the centre was the product of this long cultural and scholarly tradition rather than of territorial conquests. By emphasizing the view that past Franco-Indian exchanges had occurred in a world where scientific activities were carried out on an equal footing, Filliozat effectively dismissed the notion that France’s former colonial impetus was based on her own cultural superiority.\textsuperscript{31}

Ostrorog’s speech, on the other hand, was that of a man who had first-hand experience of the events leading to France’s withdrawal. He mentioned, almost apologetically, the different ways a country can be conquered: with violence leading to war, through political influence, which he described as less violent, or finally by conquest of the mind, which he believed to be the most lasting form of conquest. To prove his point, he noted that Alexander the Great’s empire (gained through violent means) lasted only ten years, while the Greco-Latin civilisation, which in his view never used violence, lasted over twenty centuries. Ostrorog thus bestowed great importance on the Greco-Latin civilisation from which French culture emanates, and highlighted France’s significant track-record in erecting institutes dedicated to education and research, such as the École française de Rome (1875), École française d’Athènes (1846), École du Moyen-Orient in Cairo (1880), École d’Extreme-Orient in Japan (1898), and EFEO in Indochina. However, Ostrorog also unashamedly asserted that these Écoles were not benevolent cultural institutes, but rather a means to peacefully conquer other

\textsuperscript{31} Trait d’Union, March 1955; Jean Filliozat, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 1240-48.
civilisations. He also restated the opinion proffered by the Ministry of External Affairs that Indian specialists would learn modern concepts and methods from French experts, with the result that the Institute would become a centre for Indian specialists working for the economic advancement of under-developed countries like India. In Ostrorog’s words, the Institute would become a beacon of French civilisation and a liberating force that would undoubtedly enlighten less educated peoples; France’s colonial presence, then, was to be converted into a benevolent research program that would usher in a new era of peaceful yet crucial influence.

French Indians had their own viewpoint on what the Institute symbolised. The Trait d’Union of January 1956 dedicated a special two-page report to the Institute entitled Le brillant avenir culturel de Pondichéry. Overstating the geographical and cultural advantages of Pondichéry, the report zealously described the French Indian administrative centre as a ‘plaque tournante’ (a crucial centre) located near the intellectual and cultural centres of Madras, Bangalore, Tirupati, Chidambaram, Tanjore, and Madura, the birthplace of Tamil civilization. It suggested that Pondichéry could play a double role as a centre for the diffusion of French culture in India as well as the diffusion of Indian culture in France. However, the author pointed to the necessity of creating a ‘grand current of opinion’, a statement that indicates there had been little interest in the Institute among the general French Indian population since its inauguration nine months earlier. The article was written by Ambady Narayanin, a teacher at the Lycée Français de Pondichéry, (formerly known as the Collège Royal and opened in 1826) who seems to have expressed the dreams and concerns of the small percentage of French-educated French Indians who wanted to preserve the distinctive characteristics of French India, and perhaps also their cultural advantages, in the face of mounting Indian influence. Narayanin described this small population as a ‘sensitively cultivated class’ that understood the

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33 Trait d’Union, January 1955.
Orient and the Occident, a comment that conferred on this small ‘privileged’ group a particular status that differentiated them from the larger Indian and French Indian populations. They upheld the ideology of French cultural identity in the former colony and identified with Nehru’s image of the ‘French window’ in India.

**A bridge rather than a window**

In his October 1954 article entitled *De l’empire de Dupleix à l’Inde: Pour la création d’un centre français de recherche à Pondichéry*, Tibor Mende raised the ultimate question: could France maintain an influence on Indian soil that would be acceptable to the Indian government? The proposal was to maintain French culture in the former comptoirs through the continuing existence of educational institutions dedicated to teaching the French language. However, the proposal would face significant limitations. Although the Agreement stipulated that French would be the official language in the former territories, most of the population spoke local languages, and the official language of India as a whole was English. Moreover, an institute that promoted French culture and language while offering limited economic opportunities would have little attraction to Indians. Indeed, while employment opportunities in colonial administration had formerly been readily available to a small number of French Indians who had received a French education, the withdrawal of France from Indochina meant that these opportunities no longer existed. One of the major reasons for acquiring a French education had suddenly disappeared. In addition, French culture was considered elitist, and parents concerned about their children’s future favoured an education in English, which would be essential for any work opportunities elsewhere in India. In fact, the *Trait d’Union* likened English to a ‘commercial and administrative esperanto’, thus stripping the English language of any cultural

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34 *Le Monde*, 20 October 1954.
specificity and emphasising its economic advantages in contrast to the French language. In addition, the universalism and neutrality of the English language had already become an established aspect of Indian life, and English was regarded as one part of the Indian identity that linked socio-linguistic groups together. The article suggested that the languages of communication at the Institute should be French, English, and Hindi. Interestingly, Tamil was not mentioned as a medium of communication, even though it was the language spoken by the largest number of French Indians - since Pondichéry and Karikal, situated in Tamil Nadu, were the most populous territories of French India – an unexpected oversight from a journalist who spent some years living in and reporting on India. In effect, Mende’s words were suggesting that, in his view, the purpose of the centre was to strengthen the bonds between New Delhi and Paris, rather than between Pondichéry and those capital cities.

There were numerous difficulties in the establishment of the Institute, which consisted of three sections: French civilisation, Indology, and scientific studies. The second section, headed by Filliozat, a renowned scholar of Indian studies, was the easiest to establish. It was to be dedicated to the study of the civilisation, ethnology, linguistics, history, philosophy, and archaeology of India. The first and third sections, however, in the words of Ostrorog, needed to ‘be innovative… so as to meet the conditions and needs of a country where our cultural action has never had much influence in the past.’ In a sense, the French ambassador admitted to France’s failure in the domain of education and cultural diffusion during the three hundred years of her presence on the subcontinent. The cost of the Institute also created some concerns. Even though payments of pensions and salaries amounted

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35 Trait d’Union, Octobre 1954; Benrabah, op.cit., p. 254.
37 Mende, op.cit.
38 Stanislas Ostrorog, ambassadeur de France aux Indes à son excellence Mr Antoine Pinay, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s institut de Pondichéry, 10 mai 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry; Note pour direction d’Asie-Océanie, a/s institut de Pondichéry, 4 avril 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
to only one billion francs per year, a saving of four billion francs to the French government on the original five billion francs allocated to the territories, the Ministry indicated that funds were scarce and the recruitment of dedicated and qualified staff difficult. Ostrorog also disagreed with the French language and civilisation section being given a secondary status, emphasising the importance of perpetuating the memory of Dupleix.39

While debates continued over which directions the Institute should take, with the scientific section only becoming operational in 1956 and the French section being transferred to the Alliance Française of Pondichéry in 1958, the real gain from the ‘territorial sacrifice’ that the Institute represented was the opening of a period of rapprochement that included scientific and Indian studies, commercial exchanges, economic assistance, and technical cooperation.40 The Institute, which came under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would evolve to focus on Indology, social sciences, and environmental studies, and would acquire a reputation for its work on ecology, climate change in India, and the study of Indian civilisation and culture, specifically the history and religions of South India. The facilities included laboratories, libraries, and an extensive database, which provided a source of information for scholars carrying out research.41 In addition to the establishment of the Institute, within a few years of the Agreement, India had become the country in Asia to which French exports had increased most significantly, and they would continue to increase with the development of other industrial projects. The value of French exports to India had already doubled between 1951 and 1955, from eight billion to fifteen billion francs, with the sale of military equipment, planes, trains,

39 Stanislas Ostrorog, ambassadeur de France aux Indes à son excellence Mr Antoine Pinay, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s institut de Pondichéry, 10 mai 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 81: Institut français de Pondichéry.
tanks, and munitions. This increase in commercial activities led to the signing in 1959 of the first Franco-Indian commercial agreement before the de jure transfer of 1962. By the 1960s, the major areas of French export were machine tools, aeronautical and electric materials, and chemical and engineering products.

While France never became a member of the Colombo Plan, in 1961 she joined the Aid India Club, which offered economic assistance to India in the form of credits to purchase heavy equipment and receive French technology and expertise for the equipping of mines, the processing of minerals, and the setting up of steel production factories and petrol refineries. The technical cooperation programme between the two countries that started in 1956 provided scholarships for Indian students to receive training in France in the fields of productivity, petroleum, electricity, railways, and mining. Between 1956 and 1966, 593 Indian trainees went to France, while during the same period 62 French experts went on missions to India to assist with railway projects (1957-1966) and to set up an Indian Institute of Petroleum (1961). The Institut Français de Pondichéry was envisioned by the French and Indian authorities as an essential part of the Treaty, the panacea for a colonial loss, devised to satisfy the cultural sentiments of a small minority and the colonial memory of the whole French nation, but in fact it turned out to be a real investment in Franco-Indian scientific and

economic relations. French technological assistance in India played a far more important role than the benefits traditionally assigned to French culture. In fact, Nehru’s emphasis on the need to acquire science and technology worked to consolidate national sovereignty and democracy.

**French cultural influence and French Indian characteristics**

French Indian culture remained at the centre of negotiations and claims – the Indian government, for example, had insisted that French Indian cultural legacy should remain, as they were never considered a threat and on the contrary would reinforce India’s multiculturalism – but no one clearly explained what actually constituted French Indian culture. There seems to have been a consensus that the most determinant factor was the primacy of the French language. After all, primary and secondary schools as well as the medical school and law school in Pondichéry taught in French, courts there operated in French, and official reports and some newspapers were published in French. But after three hundred years of presence in India, French cultural influence was not limited to this linguistic factor. In a letter dated 10 October 1950 to Purushottamdas Tandon (1882-1962), a friend and fellow freedom fighter, Nehru helped broaden the meaning of what French Indian culture might be when he stated that

> culture is a way of life or a way of looking at things. It is a mental approach derived from long tradition and racial experience as well as environment, geography, climate etc. This includes

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both the mental climate of a people as well as their physical habits, such as food, clothing, social customs etc. Language, of course, is an important part of all this, but it is only a part.\textsuperscript{48}

Following Nehru, we can propose that French Indian culture was the result of a combination of imported French elements blended with local Indian ones, including permanent features such as town planning, buildings, monuments, and softer aspects such as clothing, food, drinks, and religion especially Christian converts who were discussed in Chapter 1. A look at the evolution of French Indian towns will help draw out their ‘French’ uniqueness and expose their cultural characteristics. French Indian towns emerged according to the macro-politics of colonialism, which determined their location and evolution and reflected the internal order of colonial society. Almost all colonial buildings and fortifications erected by the \textit{Compagnie} were destroyed by the British. When the French reoccupied their territories in 1816 there was no trace of their previous presence, and for the next one hundred and forty years they rebuilt without fear of foreign occupation and destruction; only cyclones caused severe damage. From 1820, the French endeavoured to resurrect Pondichéry, their administrative centre, by laying down outer boulevards on the site of the old circular fortifications, which had by then made way for large thoroughfares. A new town built on the previous foundations followed a gridiron pattern, a feature also visible in Karikal and Chandernagor, but to a lesser extent in Mahé and Yanaon. This form of geometric city planning, in which rectangular blocks of houses were separated by straight streets intersecting at right angles, derived from the Dutch occupation of Pondichéry between 1693 and 1699. French Indian towns were also modelled after the French \textit{bastide} town, which includes a large open space for the market, usually at the centre, a church close to the market, main roads leading to the market place, and a \textit{quai} or promenade along a river or the

With its 1,800 metres of walkway along the Bay of Bengal, the Cours Chabrol in Pondichéry is the most noticeable of these promenades, while a shorter quay is a dominant element in all of the other territories.

The Indian and French sections in Pondichéry were segregated. The ‘white’ town or French quarter with its administrative buildings was built on the waterfront, and to the hinterland was the ‘black’ town; the two neighbourhoods were clearly separated by a canal built in 1788. The architecture of the two towns was noticeably different; the dwellings of the local population were flat-roofed and displayed a verandah, while colonial architecture favoured high walls that enclosed gardens and houses, with ornamental gates as the dominant feature. Administrative buildings followed a similar pattern and style to private houses but were larger and more profusely decorated. Pondichéry had the most noticeable number of such colonial buildings, with the oldest the Hôtel Lagrenée de Mézières, a private upper-class mansion built in 1772. One of the few colonial buildings to survive war and foreign occupations, the house has a distinct façade with a monumental entrance, and walls that have exquisite, flowery, lime plaster scrolls featuring motifs representing the arts.

This eighteenth-century high-class mansion, or hôtel particulier, had a symmetrical layout of interconnected large rooms built around a garden or courtyard. However, Indian elements were borrowed to suit local weather conditions and to demonstrate the co-existence of European and Indian styles. The adoption of a flat terraced roof, uncommon in France, was probably a reaction to the strong winds and cyclones regularly affecting the area. The stone that was used for construction in France was unavailable in the south of India, so lime plastering was used instead, a major departure from traditional French construction methods. The Tamil town was itself a hybrid of a

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50 The Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage, op.cit., pp. 44-9, 117
51 Ibid., pp. 93-117.
European concept and native building traditions, resulting in a unique Franco-Tamil identity. The most evident feature of this mix of Tamil and French styles is the façades of two-storied buildings: the ground floor is usually of the Tamil type with a verandah and carved doors, while the first floor features French influences such as arched windows, plaster decoration, luted pilasters, columns, and architectural motifs. In 1956, the French administration was relocated from the Hôtel du Gouvernement which became the Raj Nivas – the official residence of the Indian High Commissioner and from 1962 the Lieutenant Governor of Pondicherry - to a former administrative building, the Secrétariats Généraux, which became the French Consulate.  

With Pondichéry having one of the largest Christian populations in French India, churches are also important landmarks, including the Cathédrale de Notre Dame de l’Immaculée Conception (1791) built in the baroque style, the Église de Notre-Dame des Anges (1855), and the neo-Gothic Église du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus (1908). This study is only concerned with churches as part of the French legacy in the Pondicherian landscape and not whether they are still affiliated with France. Approximately 1,300 buildings located along the boulevards are now considered heritage buildings, but with the lack of funding to preserve them this Franco-Tamil cultural heritage is now at risk of disappearing.

Parks, gardens, squares, statues, and cemeteries which emerged during the colonial period – the list of which is too long to name – add to the particularities of French Indian culture. The most prominent park, located in the old white town of Pondichéry, is a rectangular area situated on a site with a long history. Originally the old fort of François Martin, the site later became the Fort Louis, was then converted into a Place d’Armes in 1761, and later again became the Place du Gouvernement. This large park was surrounded by mansions, including the former Hôtel du Gouvernement, which is

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still an official building today. In the middle of the park one can still find a large 1863 building – a mandapam – that used to provide drinking water. After the Second World War, the jardin colonial was renamed the jardin botanique, which still welcomes visitors today.55

To someone familiar with France, however, Pondichéry seemed not to offer enough French cultural influence. A Mr Josselin, the Inspector of Public Education, complained in 1942 that while a visitor to Pondichéry might expect to come across the standard features of a French town – a ‘kiosque à journaux’ (newspaper stand), a ‘café’ with pedestal tables, the traditional ‘librairie-papeterie’ (stationers), a newspaper seller holding the local daily, a ‘pâtisserie’, the ‘coiffeur’ (hairdresser) – none were to be found. Perhaps the most important of these missing cultural institutions was the café, which has an evocative power in French culture. A familiar site in any French town, and commonly located at the heart of the public space, next to the church and the town hall, the café has been given a particular function in French history; as the place for the elaboration and diffusion of ideas, the café has been immortalised in literature and newspapers.56 After three hundred years of French presence in India, it is not surprising that Josselin deplored the lack in French India of shops that were found everywhere in France.57

In addition to the permanent urban features that formed part of the particularity of French Indian culture, other elements such as drink, food, and clothing can be identified. French India always allowed the production of arrack and toddy, traditional distilled alcohols made from the sap of coconut palm trees, because of the revenue these drinks generated for the local government through either

55 Ibid.


57 P. Josselin ‘La difficulté de la culture française dans nos établissements de l’inde: de quelques difficultés qu’elle y rencontré’ in Brutinel, op.cit., (unpaginated).
taxes or the sale of licenses to vendors. British India and later independent India had a history of prohibition, which did not extend to French India, even though, as in British India, authorities were aware of the damage that alcoholism was causing amongst the population. France had been receiving a yearly indemnity since 1853 for not manufacturing and selling alcohol in Masulipatnam, a preventive measure imposed by Britain to safeguard the health of British troops stationed nearby.

Although Hindu texts and Islamic law frowned upon alcoholic drinks, alcohol consumption was common practice in Indian culture but from the 1900s the nationalist movement promoted temperance as means to weaken the colonial state and its taxation policy.

Gandhi brought the issue of alcohol to the forefront of his disobedience movement and strongly condemned the consumption of alcohol because he believed it contributed to the impoverishment of the masses. He had laid down a clear set of guidelines for satyagrahi, that is, those who wished to follow satyagraha, or ‘truth force’, a philosophy that went beyond the concept of non-violence to encompass the principle of living a life of self-purification and the pursuit of truth. One of these principles commanded the follower ‘to be a teetotaler and be free from the use of other intoxicants in order that his reason may be always unclouded and his mind constant’. The temperance issue was important as it reflected the moral standing of those who pursued national goals through the means of satyagraha. As stated by Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, often referred as

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58 Most of the tax revenue in French India in the nineteenth century came from the sale of arrack, toddy, tobacco, betel nut, and salt. Tax collection was organised through the old regime tax farming system of outsourcing but from the mid-nineteenth century came under state control. Arrack and toddy were the preferred alcohol drinks of Indians. Toddy was made from the sap of coconut tree and arrack was the product of the distillation of toddy. In 1882, because of the need to balance the local budget, the administration and the conseil général encouraged the consumption of alcohol. From 1882, the production and sale of alcohol was granted to individuals who purchased licences. It proved very successful with a rapid increase in local tax revenue representing by WWI, 80% of the revenue from indirect taxes and 45% of the total revenue, Weber, Les établissements, op.cit., pp. 323-33, 2201-3; Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 340.
62 Gandhi, Vol. 69, pp. 69-70.
‘Rajaji’ (1878-1972), Chief Minister of Madras and a close follower of Gandhi’s ideology, ‘look at the glory that would be ours, if prohibition succeeds. We can be an example to the whole world. Do you not want India to succeed where America has failed?’ In other words, the success of prohibition would be a moral victory over the vice associated with Western powers. It is worth noting that to a great extent the anti-alcohol campaign imposed the brahmanical values among other social classes.

The first success of Gandhi’s abstinence campaign was the introduction of prohibition laws in the presidency of Madras in 1937. Although suspended in 1943 because of the war, the measures were later reintroduced and extended to the rest of India, with the exception of Kashmir, Bengal, and Mysore. Prohibition became a ‘directive principle of State Policy’ enshrined in the Indian Constitution (1950). Article 47 of the Constitution stated:

The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties and, in particular, the State shall endeavour to bring about prohibition of the consumption, except for medicinal purposes, of intoxicating drinks and of drugs which are injurious to health.

Prohibition resulted in thirsty South Indian customers crossing the French Indian border in search of their favorite alcoholic drinks. The government of Madras vehemently criticised the French administration, which it believed was undermining the Indian government’s attempt at eliminating the

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63 Quoted in Irschick, Tamil Revivalism, op.cit., p. 209; Robert Eric Colvard, ‘Drunkards beware!’: Prohibition and nationalist politics in the 1930s’, in Harald Fischer-Tiné and Jana Tschurenev (eds), A History of Alcohol and Drugs in Modern South Asia: Intoxicating Affairs (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 188-90; similarly celibacy was viewed as a form a resistance against western seductions, Derné, op.cit., p. 237.
64 Fischer-Tiné and Tschurenev, op.cit., pp. 1-6.
65 Ostrorog, op.cit., pp. 139-41
evils caused by alcohol, in defiance of the moral campaign instigated by Gandhi. In a spirit of cooperation with the Madras presidency abstinence laws, elected members of the assemblées représentatives in Karikal, Mahé, and Yanaon voted in January 1948 to close liquor shops. But the loss of income, an increase in unemployment amongst workers involved in the manufacturing and distribution of alcohol, and a decrease in the local government budget caused the same members to reverse their initial decision, much to the disappointment of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. The French administration did agree to limit the number of bars and introduce a stricter policing of public intoxication, but given the lack of a police force one wonders how the French could possibly have enforced this agreement. The abstinence debate did not affect Chandernagor because the law did not extend to the State of Bengal where Chandernagor was located.

While the spirit of satyagraha spread to some of the French Indian territories, Pondichéry remained immune. It seems the administrative centre was unwilling to associate itself with an abstinence movement that was strongly associated with Indian nationalism, nor was it eager to relinquish an important part of French culture that was at the same time an important source of income. Indeed, Pondichéry had a history of wine and alcohol consumption. Already during the period of the Compagnie, two of the most important products to be imported into the administrative centre were food and alcohol. Between 8,000 and 10,000 litres of Bordeaux wine, 20,000 litres of eau-de-vie, and 20,000 litres of Madeira wine arrived in the French Indian capital every year between 1725 and 1770 for which data is available, with a similar quantity landing in Chandernagor. The delivery of delicate French wines and liquor continued even during times of hardship caused by the

war, to the dismay of the British authorities. It is worth recalling that Pondichéry had the largest number of renonçants in French India, who may well have been less inclined to support the elimination of alcohol after making a decision to associate themselves with French culture.

Moreover, the ten percent of Pondichery's population who were Catholic were regularly exposed to the wine used during mass. After all, a vocal critic of prohibition in the Madras presidency was a Syrian Christian, the politician George Joseph, who proposed that everyone should have the right to make their own liquor. Even the Indian authorities effectively admitted the importance of wine consumption in Pondichéry when, during discussions over the Customs Union agreement, they consented to an increase in the wine quota allowed into French India. Even after the de jure transfer, and while prohibition laws were still enforced in the Madras region, such was the cultural importance that alcohol played in Pondichéry that distilleries continued to operate, thereby creating problems with smuggling and attracting a flow of customers from neighbouring areas.

While French Tamil food had not been the subject of heated disputes like alcohol, and had not been the bearer of political connotations like clothing, as we shall see later, it nevertheless evolved to include a French influence. Unlike the mainly vegetarian cuisine found in South India, Pondicherian cooking is characterised by a number of non-vegetarian dishes – a reflection of the large Christian community that is present in this part of India. Religious bans on the killing of cows and the consumption of pork by Hindus and Muslims have eliminated these products from their own cooking. But a very small population of Indo-Vietnamese, who migrated from Indochina after 1947,

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70 31 January 1940 from his Majesty's Consul General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation 1938-1945; From his Majesty's Consul General in French establishments in India Pondicherry to Secretary to the Government of India in the External Affairs department, New Delhi, 30 March 1940, BL, IOR/L/PS/12/4456: French India reports on general situation 1938-1945.

71 Irschick, Tamil Revivalism, op.cit., p. 209.

72 Finance department to External Affairs, 6 February 1947, NAI, 124X(secret): Customs Union Agreement 1946.

and Créoles, whose ancestors can be traced back to the beginning of European presence in India, do incorporate beef and pork in their meals. Like Muslims and non-vegetarian Hindus, they also eat goat, fish, poultry, and mutton.

Another particularity is that Pondicherian dishes tend to shy away from the use of coconut, a primary ingredient in South Indian cooking, while French recipes that call for the use of butter and olive oil have been adapted to include ghee (clarified butter) instead. Moreover vinegar, a product readily available in French kitchens, is preferred in Pondicherian dishes over lemon and tamarind. Finally, while some Créole dishes have French names – for example, ‘ragoût’, ‘salade célèbrité’, and ‘le curry boulette’ – they are in fact typically Créole dishes and have very little in common with similarly-named French dishes. However, the replacement of French ingredients by readily available local products and the habit of calling Créole dishes by French names both point to a French culinary influence, even if the consumption of such dishes would have been limited to a small population of French Indians.

As in British India, the wearing of Western-style clothes was related to religion, wealth, urbanisation, gender, and levels of education, and thus formed part of a dual process of identification and differentiation. The adoption of Western-style dress allowed the individual to be identified with the modernity that European clothes inferred; at the same time it set the person apart from the majority of fellow Indians. In French India, Western-style clothing helped educated French Indians, especially renonçants, to demarcate their ‘special’ status from the general Indian population. Articles published in L’Inde Illustrée emphasised the importance for renonçants of adopting French-style attire in order to show that they had fully embraced French culture and could therefore command respect and

However, after Gandhi abandoned his barrister’s suit for the modest khadi or khaddar, a cloth made of homespun yam, French Indians, like their counterparts in British India, followed his example and adopted Indian-style clothes as a means of displaying their opposition to Western culture and especially European colonialism.

Gandhi’s sartorial choice became the symbol of subversion in British India, and the introduction of the charka, the spinning wheel used for spinning cotton, and the wearing of the khadi took on socio-political dimensions. Favouring homespun Indian clothes and promoting locally produced goods over British manufactured ones signaled a decision to identify oneself in the public, ‘imperial’ space as part of an Indian community that demanded self-determination. In addition, the simplicity of khadi helped eliminate divisions between castes and religions, and acted as an equaliser amongst those who chose to wear it. Nehru noted the effect created by khadi: ‘The old standards had fallen; European dress, symbol of position and authority, no longer counted. It was difficult to distinguish between peasants and townsmen... they were often dressed more or less alike, mostly in handspun cloth with the well-known Gandhi cap on their heads.’ Gandhi’s decision to wear minimal clothing went even further, in that it symbolised ‘the wound of an imperially subjugated people that had once clothed the world’, a reminder that India had once been the ‘industrial’ hub of the textile industry and the reason European trading companies had originally come to India. Hence Gandhi’s clothing reinforced a sense of pride in Indian values and her ability to assert economic independence. Likewise, his emphasis on the use of the traditional charka rather than industrial

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76 L’Inde Illustree, Septembre 1933, Septembre 1934; Vidy, op. cit., p. 13.
77 Sri Soudjanarandjani, 11 September 1930; Peter Gonsalves, Khadi: Gandhi’s Mega Symbol of Subversion, (New Delhi: Sage, 2012), Introduction, Chapters 2 & 3, Conclusion; Cohn, op.cit., Chapter V.
78 Nehru, Discovery of India, p. 406.
79 Gonsalves, op.cit., Introduction, Chapters 2 and 3, conclusion.
machinery had the effect of condemning the damage British manufactured goods had inflicted on the traditional cotton industries of India.\footnote{Latronche, op.cit., pp. 52-3.}

*Charka* and *khadi* were introduced into French India by the *Harijan Sewak Sangha*, the organisation founded by Varadarajulu Subbiah, who was also its Secretary. The organisation was inspired by Gandhian ideology and dedicated to improving the conditions of the outcastes.\footnote{Suresh, op.cit., p. 258.} Already during the 1936 labour agitation in Pondichéry, French official reports remarked that wearing *khadi* and the *topi* (or Gandhi’s hat), another badge of nationhood that marked the essence of ‘Indian-ness’, had become more widespread.\footnote{Chapman, *Gender, Citizenship and Newspapers*, op.cit., p.111; Prakash, *European Commercial Enterprise*, op.cit., p. 12; Chandavarkar, op.cit., p. 386.} In his memoirs, Subbiah mentioned that when he gained political consciousness, he dressed in Indian clothes.\footnote{Subbiah, op.cit.} The former French Indian deputy to the *Assemblée Nationale*, Edouard Goubert, experienced a similar conversion. The official picture of Goubert on the *Assemblée*’s website shows him wearing a suit that signals his French identity and adherence to Western-style fashion (Fig.10).\footnote{Assemblée Nationale, Base de données des députés français depuis 1789, *Edouard Goubert*, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/sycomore/fiche.asp?num_dept=3490>, viewed 4 February 2014.} After his March 1954 political volte-face and defection to India, from where he led an anti-French attack, Goubert made sure he always wore Indian attire and even changed his name from Edouard Goubert to E.G. Pillai, a palpable sign of his new political allegiance to India and the merger movement.\footnote{Praja Socialist Party, op.cit., p. 7.} The statue in his honour located at the northern end of the Romain Rolland Street in Pondichéry (Fig.11) pictures him wearing a *sherwani* (long coat with a small upright collar), a pair of cotton trousers, and a Gandhi *topi*, all symbols that designate Indian values and identity.\footnote{Deloche, op.cit.; Tarlo, op.cit., pp. 320-1.}
Figure 10: Edouard Goubert. The French Indian deputy from 1951-1954 wears a French suit in this official picture. Source: Assemblée Nationale, histoire et patrimoine.
Almost all of the French Indian personalities attending the *de facto* transfer ceremony wore similar Indian garments. In a photograph of the event (Fig. 12), Kewal Singh is shown introducing R.K. Nehru, the Indian Foreign Affairs secretary who was the Prime Minister’s first cousin, to the leaders of the new State, Goubert, Subbiah, a Mr Peroumal, Pourouchothama Reddiar, Mr Dutamby, and V.S.
Matthews. All but one are wearing local outfits, with Mr Peroumal even sporting a topi. Only Mr Dutamby wears a white, Western-style suit and a bow tie, and holds a Western-style hat in his hand. Numerous pictures taken of crowds and officials at the event (and published in a booklet celebrating the new State of Pondichéry) suggest the practice of wearing Western clothes had already lost ground among the new leaders and those members of the population who had in the past subscribed to it. While the picture of a polling station taken early in 1947 shows all male voters wearing their Sunday ‘Western’ best to participate in the election process (Fig. 13), the pictures of the de facto transfer shows the majority of participants wearing Indian garments, and the event has an overwhelmingly nationalist tone. Hence, in the matter of a few years, the wearing of Indian clothes during important public and national events had become widespread and was associated with Indian political assertiveness; bodies clad in Indian garments marked the new national boundaries by serving as metaphors for the nation.

It is worth noting that while men's dress complied with these shifting social and political norms, French Indian women had little need to adopt Western clothing, even when their husbands did so. Men were more widely involved in public activities, but women continued to operate within a more traditional framework, and the customary sari helped meet the notion of female modesty. When women did don items of Western clothing, they were usually lacy blouses and petticoats to complement their saris. Pictures of groups of people and of street scenes taken in French India during the 1930s and 1940s confirm that women were rarely adorned with Western-style dress and thus continued to be the bearers of tradition. In a picture of school teachers taken in 1936, five out of
six female teachers in the foreground wear a sari; the one remaining woman is dressed in a below-the-knees skirt and buttoned, white blouse. In two pictures showing voters carrying out their duty at local assembly elections on 12 January 1947, all male voters and attendees (Fig. 13), without exception, are wearing Western-style suits, while the female voter is wearing a traditional sari (Fig. 14).

Figure 13: A line of French Indian men voting at the *assemblées provinciales* elections, 12 January 1947. Source: ANOM.

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While urban planning, clothes, food, and drink were not considered cultural elements of French India worthy of mention in the Franco-Indian agreement, the maintenance of French language was carefully inserted, as it seemed to epitomise French culture. Moreover, Indian officials and journalists portrayed French culture as unique, and as important as any other in India. During his visit to Pondichéry in November 1955, Rajendra Prasad, the President of the Indian Republic, said in his speech in English, that ‘the Indian culture was comparable to a magnificent necklace made up of various precious stones, and that French culture would only enhance the splendour of this jewel’. His statement was in line with a national policy to retain local and regional cultures, especially languages, as the central government had faced fierce opposition from regions where it attempted to impose Hindi as the national language. It also emphasised the notion of ‘diversity in unity’ which was fundamental to the Indian nation-building process.

91 Trait d’Union, November 1955.
Nonetheless, promoting the maintenance of French culture was a particularly strategic move. On the one hand, it satisfied the French-educated population, particularly the French-educated class that had supported incorporation within the French Union and, as a result, had lost credibility when the handover took place. It also pleased the French government, which had ‘to accept a humiliating defeat after brandishing constitutional means’ and, instead of a full referendum, had been forced to agree to elected representatives voting on the future of French India. On the other hand, the decision to maintain French as the official language of French India left most of the French Indian population unaffected because they continued to speak their own local languages regardless.

Articles XXIV to XXX of the 1954 Agreement made provisions for French education to remain available in French India, and for existing educational establishments such as the medical and law schools to be maintained. The provisions were designed to recognise and foster the cultural characteristics of French India while appeasing the former anti-merger lobby. For visitors, especially French civil servants and officials, the use of the French language in French India was still the most discernible sign of French culture. However, after three hundred years of French presence in the comptoirs, the use of French as the most common language of communication did not seem to be as predominant as was often believed to be the case. As early as the 1910s, Alfred Martineau, the governor of French India, suggested on many occasions that Chandernagor might be exchanged for some similar British-held land, either in India or overseas, as there were no French speakers and little sign of French culture left there. In 1935, Victor Goloubew labeled Chandernagor a ‘colonie fantôme’ (phantom colony) and blamed its lack of Frenchness on the failure of the scholarly project of

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92 Ibid.

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Georges Tailleur, the last French governor of Chandernagor, had noted that there was only one French speaker in the territory when he arrived at his new posting in 1949. In an April 1947 article for the colonial magazine *La Revue des Troupes Coloniales*, the journalist Guy Demaison similarly wrote that Chandernagor was a dead *comptoir*, and that he was surprised on his arrival to see the English words ‘French’ next to ‘bakery’ and ‘wine’, instead of *boulangerie française* and *vin français*. By then, except for the French Administrator, one police officer, one priest, and a few French nuns, there was only one local person who could speak French. Hence it is not surprising that the English section of the local school was busier than the French section; it seems there was little point in learning French in Chandernagor.

The colonial administration’s lack of interest and investment contributed to a process of cultural abandonment. From Pondichéry, Governor Baron admitted in July 1946 to the French Minister of Overseas France, Marius Moutet, that ‘our administration is responsible for the situation in Chandernagor, we have in the last twenty years abandoned it to its own isolation. There are no teachers, no magistrates. The Governor only showed up once a year for a very short visit …. furthermore half of the population is not French but is constituted of refugees.’

A year late, René Kolb-Bernard, the French Consul-général in Calcutta, made similar comments after his visit to Chandernagor: ‘The French influence no longer exists, there is no trade with France, no French industry, no French family except those of the French administrator and the Chief of Police, no

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96 Tailleur, *op.cit.*, p. 20.
97 *La Revue des Troupes Coloniales*, April 1947, p. 76.
decent French newspapers, and any recent effort to propagate our language has been unsuccessful
due to thirty years of neglect".100

In Pondichéry, the situation was only slightly better. More newspapers were printed in the
administrative centre than in any of the other comptoirs, thanks to a larger population of expatriates
estimated at one hundred and fifty, as well as French-educated French Indians.101 In addition, since
most secondary and all tertiary educational establishments – that is the lycée, the law school, and the
medical school – were situated in Pondichéry, there were more French speakers to be found. The
official newspaper (Journal officiel de l’Inde française), newspapers focusing on issues affecting civil
servants (L’Éducateur, Le Petit fonctionnaire), or an historical review (Revue historique de l’Inde
française) were all printed regularly in Pondichéry.

In addition, the independence of India and the negotiations over the future of French India
triggered an increase in the number of newspapers published in French. Some appeared for only a
few issues, while others continued until years after the handover. Most commented on current affairs
and issues affecting the population, and debated the pros and cons of merger. The increase in
newspapers testifies that the printing press was viewed as an important propaganda tool for the dual
task of informing the population and challenging the authorities. It also indicates that there existed an
audience of people who could read French and afford the cost of a paper, although it was not
unusual for sheets to be passed on, hired, or read aloud to a small group.102 Papers published in
French from Pondichéry included Le Trait d’Union (a pro-French monthly), La Voix nouvelle: Organe
politique et culturel (a bi-monthly newspaper focusing on cultural and political issues), La Voix du
Peuple (the bi-monthly organ of the Parti Démocrate Progressiste), Libération (a pro-merger bi-

100 René Kolb-Bernard à Mr Henri Roux, Ministre Plénipotentiaire, New Delhi, à sa visite à Chandernagor, 3 septembre
101 Marchés Coloniaux, 21 August 1954 mentioned that there were approximately one hundred had found employment in
teaching and legal professions, while fifty others were known to have some small commercial activities.
102 Chapman, Gender, Citizenship and Newspapers, op.cit, p. 100.
monthly), *Jeunesse et Joie* (a bi-monthly aimed at Christian youth), *Le Petit Fonctionnaire: Organe de la Fédération des fonctionnaires et retraités de l’Inde Française* (a monthly focusing on civil servants issues) and *République Française* (a pro-French weekly which published Tamil and French articles), all of which started publishing after the Second World War.

While these magazines and newspapers are catalogued at the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, the collection and information relating to them is incomplete. Apart from *Le Trait d’Union* and *La Voix Nouvelle*, all other Francophone papers disappeared between the time of the handover and the late 1950s.103 Readership was never large, and as mentioned by the *Trait d’Union* in its tenth-year special edition in November 1954, ‘French was a language less spoken and even less read than English or Tamil’.104

Although newspapers published in French indicate the existence of a Francophone and Francophile community, they do not specifically prove that French culture was readily available. Indeed, a number of articles despaired of the lack of cultural events in French India. The *République Française* was the most critical and cynical about the unavailability of French culture in French India, as it stated in 1949:

> There is currently no French cultural event, not even a French film is shown. Whenever an Indian official is in Paris, pathetic comments are made regarding the tight cultural links that have evolved over centuries between France and India. In fact we must note that France does absolutely nothing to tighten these links. Our town would be proud to become the ‘open window’ so dearly mentioned by Nehru, we are ready to build this ‘window’, to make it the most beautiful, the largest and the most welcoming, but needless to say it should not open

104 *Trait d’Union*, November 1954.
on a vacuum … Pondichéry is actually receiving less support in the cultural domain than the most backward parts of Central Africa.\(^{105}\)

Fifteen months later, the same newspaper commented that the cultural situation had not improved; no films and only one French play were scheduled for the whole of 1951.\(^{106}\) As part of its commitment to maintaining whatever French culture was available, the newspaper regularly listed the radio programme broadcast by *Radio France-Asie* to the French *comptoirs* in India. The programme offered a wide range of music from classical to more popular forms of French musical entertainment, but broadcast for only forty minutes – from 7.05 to 7.45am – daily.\(^{107}\)

The *Alliance Française* of Pondichéry, founded in 1889, provided French language courses to members, school students, and medical school students who needed to improve their French language skills. Other cultural activities delivered from the *Alliance* included the projection of films, but the antiquated equipment and the poor selection of movies made the experience rather dull and unattractive. The success of the *Alliance Française* was limited because of lack of funds and frequent closures. The *Association des Français en Inde* also indicated their concern to French officials that the shortage of books and French journals across the French Indian educational establishments constituted an impediment to the instruction of French language.\(^{108}\)

Ministry reports were rather pessimistic about the state of French cultural influence in other parts of French India. In September 1956, Armand Gandon, *Représentant Français* in Pondichéry, wrote to his superiors about his official trip to Yanaon:

\(^{105}\) *La République Française*, 9 November 1949.
\(^{106}\) *La République Française*, 3 March 1951.
\(^{107}\) *La République Française*, 21 April 1951, 26 May 1951, 9 June 1951,
Yanaon has a population of about 8,000 inhabitants with only 4,000 living in the main town. There are no descendants of Europeans, no mixed-race person and no more than twenty *renonçants*, most of whom are employed in the French army. ...Most inhabitants are farmers .... [and] most of the population is Hindu, with two hundred Muslims and the Christian community is composed of sixty roman Catholics; all are fishermen and extremely poor. The only regrets about the change of administration come from the loss of some economic advantages previously gained from the resale of goods from Pondichéry. .... During the events of June 1954, all French cultural influence was eliminated, French street names were changed to local names, from then on all education was delivered in Telegu and despite the agreement of 21 October, the situation has never been reversed. French is only taught as a second language by a teacher who has been recruited in India and hence does not know any French. French was in the past only taught at primary level and any students wanting to progress to secondary level had to go to Pondichéry ...There are only a few French books available at the local library.

The author concludes that, overall, the French cultural situation is poor. The territory that was already neglected under the French colonial administration – ten years could go by before a French governor visited Yanaon – had little chance of exhibiting any kind of French culture or of producing French speakers.¹⁰⁹

Two years later, Robert Morel-Francoz, Gandon’s successor, wrote that nothing distinguished Yanaon from the other villages in Andra Pradesh apart from the church, the botanical

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garden, and the administrator’s residence. A student who had received his French primary school-
leaving certificate was unable to read the few lines in French meant to welcome the French official.
Morel-Francoz despaired that French studies were in a state of ‘complete decadence… and [have]
only become a fiction of politeness’. He finished by saying that he thought neither he nor his
successor would ever come back to Yanaon, as it would probably end up being absorbed by the
state of Andra Pradesh. He then described the former tiny French Indian territories as ‘fictive
possessions, like a family jewel that one can no longer wear, and that, even if emotionally difficult, it
is better to dispose of.’

Morel-Francoz also visited Mahé in 1958, and in his report to the French ambassador in
Delhi he commented that the village had already been engulfed by the surrounding areas, and that
‘the interest to France is more sentimental than intellectual. The past has become blurred… a pretty
page has been turned.’ In sum, these official reports attest that French culture was already non-
existent in Yanaon and Mahé before the 1954 agreement, and despite the willingness of the Indian
government to recruit staff to teach French, there was no hope that any form of French linguistic
influence would survive the change of administration.

**The impact of a new kind of civilising mission**

A 1945 report from the Ministry of Education mentioned that there were seventy-one state
primary schools, nineteen religious primary schools, two private and two public secondary schools,
twenty-one schools offering English tuition, and four vocational schools in French India. In
Pondichéry, secondary education in French was available at a girls’ boarding school (*pensionat*), the

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Collège Calvé, which had two sections: one taught to the level of the Brevet élémentaire (certificate of the first level of secondary studies), and the other offered classes in English to matriculation level. There were also similar colleges in Karikal (Le Collège moderne) and in Mahé (Le Collège de La Bourdonnais). Le Collège français in Pondichéry (known before 1947 as the Collège colonial), founded by Jesuits in 1760, was the only establishment that taught both genders to the level of French matriculation (baccalauréat). Two schools – the medical school, established in 1863 to train doctors, midwives, and nurses, and the law school, both of which were overseen by the colonial administration rather than by the Ministry of Education – provided the only tertiary education available. Both of these schools delivered diplomas which were only valid within French India, since students were specifically trained to meet local needs. Students wishing to pursue further studies in France had to sit special entrance exams. L’École des Arts et Métiers, a professional college that formed part of the Public Works Service, provided very basic skills to just a few boys.

According to data provided by the Ministry of Education in 1945 and listed in Table 5, there were more pupils schooled in first level primary bilingual schools than in primary local language schools, but more pupils received a Certificat d’Études Primaires (CEP, certificate of primary studies) in an Indian language than in French language. There were three times more pupils attending a French language second level primary school than a local language second level primary school (347 versus 114). Although the report did not differentiate between the number of graduates in the Indian

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112 Annasse, op.cit., p. 136-7; In 1945 English tuition was provided across French India to 2,123 pupils at Collège Calvé in Pondichéry, Collège la Bourdonnais in Mahé, and in Chandernagor three establishments taught English: Collège Dupleix, Ecole Mandir and Section d’Etudes supérieur Franco-anglaises mentioned in Ministère de l’éducation nationale, Carnet de documentation sur l’enseignement dans la France d’outre-mer, Carnet No. 15, op.cit., p. 31.


114 Ministère de l’éducation nationale, Carnet de documentation sur l’enseignement dans la France d’outre-mer, Carnet No. 15, op.cit., p.33.
Brevet Élémentaire (certificate of the first level of secondary studies) and the French Brevet, only thirteen students graduated out of the 156 who sat the examination, just above 10%. Finally, only a handful of students in secondary education ever obtained a qualification: six received the certificate of secondary studies, while only eight received the diploma at the end of secondary studies (baccalauréat). Overall, although a large number of pupils received their primary education in French, only a few pupils ever went onto French secondary education. L’Éducateur, the organ of teachers in French India, confirmed this point, noting that the CEP was not sufficient to obtain a job in the administration, and questioning the value of an education designed for the benefit of a privileged minority.115 While 70% of French Indian children in 1954 received primary education, the French ambassador berated its quality. In a letter to de Bourbon Busset, director of cultural relations at the Ministry of External Affairs, the ambassador suggested that ‘the exceptional mediocrity of the level of education [was] due to the free education which the administration wanted to guarantee but [which had] resulted in recruiting underqualified teachers’.116

Not all schooling was free in French India, but whenever the republican principle of free education was enforced, the French government’s unwillingness to spend the necessary funds seriously compromised the quality of that education, to the point where only a few French Indians were fluent in French. Ostrorog estimated that about 25,000 French Indians, approximately 8% of the French Indian population, could differentiate themselves from the mass of peasants by some knowledge of the French language and by their ‘Christian practices’ (which the ambassador did not further identify).117 In 1954, the French administration believed that only 3% of French Indians could

115 L’Éducateur, Juin 1949.
117 Stanlisas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr le Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s communication d’une note de M. Gandon sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry, 22 Juin 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.
hold a conversation in French. With such poor results, maintaining French culture through the medium of French education would prove to be a challenge, especially in the face of India's commitment to improving living standards through better education in the vernacular.

Table 5: Number of students and number of teachers in private and public schools, type and number of qualifications awarded in French India for the year 1944-1945. Source: Ministère de l’éducation nationale, *Carnet de documentation sur l’enseignement dans la France d’outre-mer, Carnet no 15, les Établissements français de l’Inde*, Paris 1946, pp. 23-33.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Number of teachers</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
<th>Number of candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>registered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>girls</td>
<td>boys</td>
<td>French speakers</td>
<td>Local language speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian primary schools (1st cycle): French and local language tuition</td>
<td>2,550</td>
<td>3,779</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French primary schools (1st cycle) bilingual</td>
<td>3,453</td>
<td>6,931</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian primary schools (2nd cycle): local language tuition</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>2*</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French primary schools (2nd cycle): bilingual</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td>Brevet élémentaire (French language)</td>
<td>347</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary education Pondichéry &amp; Karikal (French language)</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
<td><em>Certificat d'études secondaires</em> (3)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education: <em>École de droit</em> (Law School)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tertiary education: <em>École de medecine et safes-femmes</em> (School of medicine and mid-wifery)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
<td>Not provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational training: <em>École des Arts et Métiers &amp; Ecole d'enseignement artisanal</em></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td><em>Not provided</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) CEP: *certificat d'études primaires*: certificate of primary studies  
(2) *Brevet élémentaire*: certificate of first cycle of secondary studies  
(3) *Certificat d'études secondaires*: certificate of second level of secondary studies  
(4) *Baccalauréat*: diploma of third cycle of secondary studies  
* minimal French tuition was provided
In 1955, as soon as the handover had taken place, the Indian government announced that not only would Pondichéry be included in the next plan (1956-1961), but that extra budget would be allocated to help the French Indian territories keep on par with the rest of the country.\(^{119}\) The five-year plans were designed to assist industrial and agricultural development to achieve self-sufficiency, and were important instruments in the nation-building formation.\(^{120}\) Seven hundred thousand rupees (or over 51 million francs) was granted for the financial year ending March 1955, and one million rupees (or 73 million francs) was allocated for the 1955-56 financial year.\(^{121}\) In comparison, for the period 30 June 1946 to 30 June 1951, the *Fonds d’Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social* (FIDES) allocated 155 million francs to French India for infrastructure improvement, or an equivalent of just 31 million per year. This figure equals 61% of the amount that the Indian government provided in 1955, and 43% of the 1955-56 amount.\(^{122}\) While it is often argued that the amount invested by the French government in French India demonstrates that France was not abandoning the territories, data provided by the *Bulletin d’information de la France d’Outre-Mer* and published by the press bureau of the Ministry of Overseas France show that French India received only a third of the investment given to Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, which was half the size of French India and had only 4,500 inhabitants, and almost all of European descent, compared to the 320,000 living in the southern French Indian territories.\(^{123}\)


\(^{121}\) *Trait d’Union*, February 1952.


\(^{123}\) Although Weber mentions that funds of 68 million francs was allocated to French India in 1952 for the construction of new schools, health centres in rural areas, the reconstruction of the pier and for the completion of the power station, the author does not provide references or a comparison with amounts given to other overseas territories. See Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit.*, footnote 2 p. 407; Ageron, *La décolonisation française, op.cit.*, pp. 43; French India was yet again a neglected colony with little change since between the two world wars. Already between 1919 and 1934 French India had to manage with a limited financial assistance of seven million francs to
While France’s economic assistance to French India had been very modest, the Indian government’s monetary aid showed a greater commitment to economic development, including the improvement of vocational, adult, and children’s education through the provision of additional schools that catered for a variety of educational needs. These schools were set up to increase the level of literacy, numeracy, and technical skills across a much larger cross-section of the population than the colonial administration had ever catered for, hence fulfilling Nehru’s aspiration that all Indians be given greater opportunities for educational and economic growth. This impetus towards greater equality was embodied in Articles 14 to 18 of the Indian Constitution, and aimed at transforming Indians into citizens of the new nation. Although the maintenance of French education was guaranteed by a few institutions, the establishment of more schools and other educational organisations that taught in local languages only diluted the little French culture that still existed in former French India. The focus of the Indian government’s efforts was not, of course, on perpetrating some French colonial myth, although in practice there were no objections to it, but rather on providing greater skills and improving living standards across the region, a strategy that also helped persuade the population of the benefits of the merger with India.

A report on the new state of Pondichéry, published in 1956, provided a detailed account of the first year under the governance of India. The number of primary schools had risen to 218, or just over twice the number existing in 1945, and fifty-seven of these new primary schools were located in isolated villages. There were sixty new teaching positions, and new school equipment. There were twenty-three secondary schools, a marked increase on the 1945 situation, and established schools, including the Collège in Mahé and schools at Pallour and Calmandabam, were to be expanded.

improve infrastructure, while between 1923 and 1934 La Réunion received almost 25 million and Saint-Pierre et Miquelon 60 million, Weber, Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix, op.cit., p. 328.

124 Nehru, Discovery of India, op.cit., p. 581.

Above all, the curriculum had been reviewed to reflect local needs. French Indian students had long complained that the French curriculum did not teach any Indian-specific subjects.\(^{126}\) In 1936, students at the Collège Calvé had gone on strike over a list of grievances that included ‘school’s fees, lack of sports and science facilities, and the ridiculous conditions of the curriculum of the school characterised by the absence of subjects in Indian history and geography which maintained students in darkness regarding Indian culture’).\(^{127}\) The École des Arts et Métiers was to be transformed into a large vocational training school that would enrol one hundred students; childcare centres had been set up, the law school and school of medicine had increased their intake of students, and a teacher’s school, nineteen adult schools, and courses in English had also been set up. Finally, technical education in the use of modern equipment had been given to peasants.\(^{128}\)

The report also indicated that 572 candidates, mainly boys, had received the Certificat d’Études Primaires (certificate of primary studies) in an Indian language – the document does not stipulate which Indian language this was – while only 395 candidates received the same qualification in French. However, forty-one candidates had received the Brevet élémentaire (certificate of the first cycle of secondary studies) in French, a greater number than the seven who had received the same qualification in the Indian language (see Table 6), an indication, perhaps, that the government’s efforts had not yet reached the pupils who were at the first level of secondary studies.

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\(^{126}\) Annasse, op.cit., 1975, p.138.

\(^{127}\) Subbiah, op.cit., p. 108.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exams</th>
<th>Number of candidates</th>
<th>Number of graduates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CEP</strong> (Indian language)</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEP (French language)</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevet** (Indian language)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brevet* élémentaire (French language)</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*CEP: certificat d’études primaires (certificate of primary studies taken by pupils between the ages of 11 and 13 years)
**Brevet élémentaire: (certificate of first cycle of secondary studies taken by pupils between the ages of 15 and 16 years)

The same report stated that the local library in Pondichéry received 2,958 new books, of which fewer than 8% were English books (236), 21% were French (620), and the remainder Tamil (2,102). There had been a concerted effort to acquire more Tamil books for an increasing number of inhabitants who had access to education in Tamil, a strategy that was resulting in a form of ‘Indianisation’ of the education system. This effort was in line with a national policy to increase printing as well as access to printed materials. In any case, the figures show that the French language was further diluted, a reality that French observers had difficulty reconciling themselves with. Indeed, a French National Assembly report, following a mission to French India in 1964, began

with a reference to Dupleix and proceeded to comfort French deputies by stating that ‘the streets continue with their French names and the statue of Dupleix stands facing the sea as before. In the shops French is spoken and the peace and tranquillity of this place has not changed much since the eighteenth century’. It is clear that the report was intended to reassure officials that French India had changed little since the withdrawal, despite later mentioning that a lack of resources was making it difficult to maintain French education. David Annoussamy, a French Indian who lived and worked as a magistrate during the period under study, stated that few French books remained in the local libraries because of a lack of care, the destructive attention of local insects, and uncaring librarians who burnt them to make room for new acquisitions in Tamil.

A series of articles on Indian politics, religion, and education written in May 1964 by André Fontaine, a French historian and journalist at Le Monde, are useful in measuring the success of efforts to preserve French culture in the former French Indian territories. The author is taken aback by the contrast between the daily pronouncements emanating from France about French grandeur and influence in the world, and the small role France was playing in India, a country that was as large and populous as all of Europe. His reaction testifies to the potency of the ‘aura culturelle’, whose purpose is to promote the importance of French cultural power where it actually has little influence. He also admits that France is faring poorly compared to Britain, the USA, the USSR, and even China. However, he states with some admiration that French is still the official language in the former colony, and that the French penal code is still in use. While granting French language a central role in the new state of Pondichéry, he later admits that only one primary school teaches French and that over eighty percent of the population has never spoken French.

130 ‘Information Report presented on behalf of the Commission of External Affairs and the ‘Plan’ following a visit to India by a delegation of the Commission from 18 January to 8 February 1967’, in Chatrath, op. cit., p. 78.
131 Annoussamy, L’intermède, op. cit., p. 186.
133 Bègue, ‘La valeur de l’«exemple français»’, op. cit., p. 316.
On the one hand, the juxtaposition of the importance of French language at the government level with its irrelevance at the people’s level shows that the author confers on the French language a more influential role than it actually warrants. It also testifies to some remnants of colonial presence. On the other hand, Annoussamy, stresses that immediately after the *de jure* transfer in 1962, ‘English acquired the pride of place, since it was the language of the Heads of Departments sent by New Delhi’, a situation that greatly displeased French-speaking government workers.\(^{134}\) It is true that at the time of the *de jure* agreement, French was the official language, but the onslaught of the English language from Greater India challenged the need for French speakers and therefore also the need to preserve the French language. The competition between the French and English languages in French India was nearing its end.\(^{135}\) Fontaine suggested that one way to reverse the lack of French speakers would be to set up a Franco-Indian university, which again testifies to the very limited success of the *Alliance Française* and the IFP as organisations dedicated to maintaining French culture and language. The debate over the use of English and French language after decolonisation is a reminder of the competition between two colonial powers, with French linguistic ideology, which posits that language is an ‘affair of state’, pointing to the ‘dangers’ that the French language faces in a world increasingly dominated by English.\(^{136}\)

Despite French being the official language of the state of Pondichéry, India never belonged to the *Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique* (ACCT), an institution set up in 1969 to group together Francophone countries, a community that paid allegiance to a language.\(^{137}\) The fact that India was a member of the Commonwealth, and a country where English was the most spoken European language, suggested that, just as France had occupied a subordinate position on the

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\(^{134}\) Annoussamy, ‘The Merger of French India’, *op.cit.*, pp. 73, 71.

\(^{135}\) Benrabah, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

\(^{136}\) Ibid.; Gabrielle Parker, *op.cit.*, pp. 695-700.

subcontinent in the past, French language usage in the future would remain minimal. Fontaine provides a description of the remnants of French culture: a few Citroën cars are parked on streets whose French names are written in white on blue enamel plaques like those found in France, and, as in a previous era, alcoholic drinks that are freely sold contribute to an incessant traffic of customers from neighbouring dry states. His inventory of French Indian assets lists a Lycée attended by the children of French civil servants, a research institute, the Ashram, and Catholic churches. But apart from a few French symbols, bad drinking habits, colonial buildings, local policemen wearing a French képi, and a couple of educational institutes, there is almost nothing to remind the visitor that this was once the administrative centre of a vast power. As Morel-Francoz asserted in 1958, 'the [colonial] past had become blurred… a pretty page had been turned.'

**Conclusion**

The creation of the Institut Français de Pondichéry as a cultural and scientific centre was a strategic move that fulfilled numerous functions at a local, regional, and international level. It also became the site for the resolution of nationalist and colonial tensions. From the Indian government’s viewpoint, it appeased anti-merger groups who had denounced the end of French India as unconstitutional, as well as a minority of French Indians who feared that their cultural characteristics would be engulfed. It also challenged France to succeed in her mission to civilise using peaceful means. For France, the Institute represented her commitment not to abandon her former colony, and allowed her to maintain a physical presence in Asia, especially since the foundation of the IFP was closely linked with France’s withdrawal in Indochina and the subsequent transfer of the EFEO to Pondichéry. While the Institute helped safeguard France’s scientific work in Asia and enhance her

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international prestige, it also realised the old colonial dream of establishing a research programme in India to rival that of the British Asiatic Society. Colonial rivalries were still at play in post-colonial French India. The French government's responsibility for maintaining French culture and language in French India ceased when that section of the IFP was transferred to the local *Alliance française*, a transfer that indicated any concerted effort at retaining French cultural influence would be small and inefficient. While elements of French culture endured in the French Indian landscape, softer aspects such as the French language could not survive an onslaught from India that consisted in a wide-ranging educational program in local languages, and waves of migrants attracted by generous government investment determined to outdo the former colonial administration.
Chapter 7

The Final Evolution

It was in any case not very reasonable to want the population of French India to be French whereas everything held them and attracted them towards the Indian world: commerce, social relations, language, moral and religious institutions, political ideals,... To explain that French India should be detached from India would pose a problem for sociologists as unsolvable as squaring the circle. P. Josselin, (Inspecteur de l'Instruction Publique des Établissements français dans l'Inde, 1942)¹

The 21 October 1954 Agreement signed by the French and Indian governments contained thirty-five articles providing for the de facto transfer of the administration of the French Establishments in India, applicable as of 1 November 1954.² Kewal Singh became the Chief Commissioner (the equivalent of a governor) of a ‘part C’ state, a centrally administered area as described in the Indian Constitution.³ The Agreement, which reflected the Indian National Congress’s broader policy embodied in the Jaipur Resolution (18 December 1948), was a carbon copy of a

¹ Josselin, op.cit, unpaginated.
proposal submitted to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs in 1949. This proposal stated that the ‘present administration, linguistic, educational and judicial systems may be allowed to continue for a limited period and subject to this adjustment the territories now known as French Indian settlements should be taken over and politically incorporated in India’. This limited period lasted, in fact, for eight years, resulting in the unusual situation that French legal sovereignty was nominally maintained while at the same time the Indian government introduced numerous national laws and controlled the administration of French India.

Above all, the de facto transfer triggered a debate over the issue of citizenship and the categorisation of French Indians who might be entitled to French citizenship. Through an exploration of the nationality options that the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs contemplated, this chapter will reveal that despite a constitutional declaration, French citizenship was always intended to be limited to a small minority of French Indians, while, in contrast, Indian citizenship was extensively granted. This chapter will also demonstrate that the inclusion of French Indians into the Indian citizenry was in accord with India’s integration policy as well as her commitment to outdo the administration of her colonial predecessor. An analysis of Nehru’s visits to Pondichéry within a year of the de facto transfer will indicate that Indian officials were quite aware of the difficulties that the transfer had posed, but also show how the calculated deployment of economic investment facilitated the amalgamation of French India and helped erase the French colonial past.

**The nationality debate: French exclusion versus Indian inclusion**

When Britain announced that she intended to withdraw from India, the French government contemplated a number of options designed to avoid a total loss of sovereignty over French India.

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4 Submitted to the Honorable Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Deputy PM of India, 3 March 1949, ANI, 15(11) EUR1/49: Situation in French Establishments in India.
Amongst the issues to emerge from these debates, that of nationality especially preoccupied the authorities and those French Indians whose interests and privileges were most at stake. Early on, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered the possibility of dual-nationality under the rule of a Franco-Indian condominium; the most famous example of such an arrangement was the French-Anglo condominium of the New Hebrides. Although this solution suggested that India and France would share administrative responsibilities and that the population would pay allegiance to both nations, it nonetheless posed a number of problems. Since a condominium was considered viable only as a temporary measure until the sovereignty of the territory was finally decided, it would only postpone that dispute to a later date. Moreover, this form of co-management would only be effective if both powers were committed to co-operating and had neither particular privileges nor distinct interests, none of which was the case here. French India was physically part of the Indian subcontinent, had legally come into existence following a Treaty between two colonial powers (France and Britain), and its future depended on an agreement between France and independent India. In any case, while India was unlikely to approve a condominium, especially after her resounding success in integrating the princely states, France strongly suspected that, given the choice of allegiance, the majority of French Indians would probably opt for Indian nationality. The idea of a condominium seemed wholly impractical.

Other possible solutions arose, such as turning French India into individual, autonomous territories with their respective populations given the right to choose between becoming nationals of an autonomous (French Indian) territory or of India. The proposal found inspiration from the principality of Liechtenstein, which in 1919 conferred on Switzerland the principality’s diplomatic

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5 Note pour Monsieur Chauvel, 26 Août 1947, a/s statut de l’Inde française, AD, Inde française, Vol. 37: Projet de statut autonome; it is worthwhile to note that New Hebrideans had the citizenship of neither Britain nor France.
representation. Ministry officials thought that France could perhaps likewise represent these small, autonomous territories. But France had no authority to offer Indian nationality, and the option did not stipulate whether those opting to remain within the French Union would become French nationals or only nationals of the French Indian territory in which they resided.\(^7\)

The issue of double nationality tended to generate the most discussions amongst the press, Ministry officials, and above all, a small minority who thought that their rights and privileges were the most at risk from the handover. Even the Aurobindo Ashram’s residents became involved in the debate, as they considered dual citizenship an evolution towards global integration rather than merely the outcome of an agreement over transferred territories.\(^8\) Robert Duvauchelle, the *Représentant Français* in Pondichéry in 1954, favoured the option of dual citizenship, especially if the Franco-Indian agreement was not going to provide guarantees to protect those who wished to continue their allegiance to France while residing in India. Indeed, the French Representative explained that some Chandernagorians living in Calcutta who had opted for French citizenship were being treated like outsiders by Indians and faced the possibility that the Indian government would not renew their residency papers, a situation that could ultimately lead to deportation.\(^9\) The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs acknowledged that those who had embraced French ways were now ‘foreigners in the same area they were born in’.\(^10\)

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\(^7\) Note de Mr Daniel Lévi, a/s Établissements français aux Indes, Paris 9 Novembre 1947, AD, Inde française, Vol. 37: *Projet de statut autonome*.

\(^8\) Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry to the Honourable Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, New Delhi, 22 December 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: *Nationalité*.

\(^9\) Représentation Française, Note sur les options de nationalité française, Pondichéry, 21 Décembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: *Nationalité*.

The idea of dual citizenship was not a novelty, since it had recently been embodied in a French law of 9 April 1954, which allowed a French citizen to acquire foreign citizenship. As long as Nehru supported the principle of dual nationality, the French legislation could be extended to her Indian territories.\footnote{Note sur la question de double nationalité dans les anciens comptoirs français de l’Inde, 8 Février 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.} On the other hand, Ostrorog, the French Ambassador, objected to dual nationality on political grounds, since it gave an individual the right to work for both the French and Indian administrations, and would thus ‘give a small number of undesirables the possibility to continue their intrigues which had plagued both countries in recent years’. Financially, Ostrorog feared that a large number of extremely poor French Indians could choose this option for the sole purpose of gaining financial help from the French government, a situation in his view that would be rather undesirable.\footnote{Comte Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France, a/s note du député de l’Assemblée Nationale au sujet de la double nationalité, 8 Février 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité; Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr le ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 22 Juin 1955, a/s communication d’une note de Mr Gandon sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.}

The option of dual citizenship was eventually discarded. Instead, Ostrorog and Duvauchelle wrote at great length to the Ministry about who should be allowed to become a French national. The debate provides great insight into the rationale for French nationality and the intricate politics involved in granting it. Article 80 of the Fourth Republic’s Constitution granted French nationality to residents of overseas territories. The right was initially extended to a large number of French Union residents, but as the details of the Treaty of Cession were being discussed, Ostrorog and Duvauchelle expressed the view that the option of becoming a French national should be limited to just a few. This option would involve not only retracting the citizenship of some current French nationals, in contravention to Article 80, but also making it unavailable to many others. Indeed, the two officials were greatly concerned by the number and the quality of those French Indians who would apply. They believed some civil servants and pensioners who had little allegiance to France would take
French nationality only to keep their pension privileges. Indeed, pension regulations had not considered the possibility of territorial cession and subsequent changes in nationality. This could most certainly be circumvented, since the beneficiary would have acquired his rights while holding French nationality, and thus the change should not affect pension rights, as such there was no need for beneficiaries to apply for French nationality.\footnote{Télégramme au départ, a/s nationalité Indes, 20 Septembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité; Représentation Française, Note sur les options de nationalité française, Pondichéry, 21 Décembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.} The French authorities in Pondichéry thoroughly studied the possible ways to ‘legally and practically’ limit the number of optants (those who would be entitled to opt for French citizenship). One of the strategies proposed was to promote Indian nationality as more advantageous than French nationality, as it would instantly remove cumbersome Indian administrative procedures. There were concerns that the Indian government would make residency difficult for those who were not Indian nationals. Another strategy to reduce the number of optants was to introduce compulsory military service for French Indian citizens, from which they had previously been exempted.

Armand Gandon, the Représentant Français in Pondichéry in 1955, advised the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on a five-category listing of the most desirable French Indian candidates. The first category included descendants of French from the métropole; in the second were mixed-blood French nationals; in the third, those who had already acquired French nationality and their descendants; in the fourth, renonçants and their descendants; and in the last were Indians who had never renounced. According to Gandon, French Indians belonging to the last category (and for whom there were very often no civil records) were deemed the least Frenchified, and he strongly recommended the agreement deny them the right to opt for French citizenship.\footnote{Ibid.}
problematically, most of the 1,300 volunteers serving in the French army came from this category.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, the Ministry’s representative in Pondichéry defined a potential French citizenship applicant on the level of francisation, which would have been acquired through blood (or jus sanguinis), or through embracing French culture, this being notably the case for renonçants and mixed-blooded French Indians. Ostrorog estimated that only 25,000 French Indians were Frenchified. Even if some could afford to live in France or in the French Union, in French India they would always be a minority and – since the Indian government would favour its own nationals – would no longer have access to positions in the public service.\textsuperscript{16} This nationality debate mirrors the old contradiction between the republican ideal of citizenship and the reality of France’s dealings with the ‘other’ which led, particularly in the colonies, to a disassociation between ‘nationals’, perceived as subjects, and ‘citizens’, defined as culturally and socially belonging to the body politic as full members.\textsuperscript{17}

The Treaty of Cession gave any French Indian the right to opt for French nationality. If under the age of 18, the child’s father, or if he was deceased, the mother, would determine the nationality of the child. However, the clause included the possibility for the child of a French national to renounce French nationality in order to take up Indian nationality upon reaching the age of 18.\textsuperscript{18} Articles IV and V stipulated:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Armand Gandon, Note sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry, 4 Juin 1955, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.
\item Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Mr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, 22 Juin 1955, a/s communication d’une note de Mr Gandon sur les options de nationalité à Pondichéry, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.
\item Ministre de la France d’Outre-Mer à Mr le Président du Conseil, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères, a/s Établissements français dans l’Inde (questions relatives à la nationalité), Paris, le 3 Septembre 1954, AD, Inde française, Vol. 79: Nationalité.
\end{enumerate}
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French Nationals born in the territory of the Establishments and domiciled therein at the date of the entry into force of the Treaty of Cession shall become nationals and citizens of the Indian Union with the exceptions … of those who by means of a written declaration drawn up within six months of the entry into force of the Treaty choose to retain their [French] nationality. Persons availing themselves of this right shall be deemed never to have acquired Indian nationality.19

This meant that all French Indians lost the French nationality they had been granted by the Fourth Republic’s Constitution and became Indian nationals overnight. Hence *jus soli* became the most determinant element of Indian nationality. On the other hand, any French Indian wishing to remain a French national needed to make a declaration within six months of the signature of the Treaty. *Renonçants* and those who were of European descent criticised this procedure, since they had always viewed their French nationality as the same as that of a person of French descent or a person who had been born in France. They therefore argued, although to no avail, that the Treaty of Cession should not alter a status previously acquired either by birth or naturalisation.20 It is worth mentioning that although India was eventually opposed to dual nationality, dual nationals did exist, as anyone born in India is an Indian national and anyone born to a French national was French, but there was no administrative mechanism to deal with such instances, and those enjoying dual citizenship did not notify the Indian authorities that they also held French citizenship.21

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The Treaty also provided for those who were born in French India but who resided outside of it at the time of the de jure transfer. Articles VII and VIII specified that French nationals born in the territories but living in a country other than the Indian Union or the French Indian territories would retain their French nationality, or alternatively they could choose to acquire Indian nationality upon providing a written declaration to the Indian authorities. Thus, entitlement to Indian nationality did not extend to those born in the comptoirs but residing outside at the time of the de jure agreement which took place in 1962; these people needed to apply for Indian nationality.22 As such, this clause challenges the jus soli condition mentioned earlier. In fact, the de jure transfer acted as an ‘Indian birth’ to all residing in French India, making them Indian nationals at the stroke of midnight and stripping them of their French nationality. By contrast, when Madagascar became independent in 1960, Indians who were residing there could apply for Indian citizenship if their father and grandfather were born in India during the colonial period, if they had not acquired another nationality, and if they had kept a link with India. Under such conditions, 7,000 Indians residing in Madagascar obtained Indian citizenship.23

The population of French India in 1954 was approximately 321,000; 5,000 adult French Indians and 2,100 children applied for French citizenship, which nonetheless was a much lower figure than the Ministry’s anticipated 25,000 potential applicants.24 Annoussamy advanced several reasons to explain why more French Indians had not expressed an interest in gaining French citizenship. Firstly, there was a lack of information regarding the option. Indeed, the de jure transfer took place

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23 Blanchy, op.cit., p. 262.
without pomp, and although the Treaty was published by decree in the *Journal Officiel* of 25 September 1962, published in Paris, there was no publication in the official gazette of Pondichéry. An earlier announcement had been made in 1956, but apart from a notice in the hall of the French consulate, the option of retaining French nationality only became known by word of mouth.\(^{25}\) Secondly, since India did not allow dual citizenship, French citizens who chose to remain in former French India would have to apply for permanent residency in India and deal with cumbersome bureaucracy.\(^{26}\) Some also believed that by becoming French citizens they would automatically forego their Indian nationality; civil servants even thought that they might have to migrate to France, a country that remained very unfamiliar to them.\(^{27}\) Finally, applicants had to provide documents, such as the birth certificate of their grandfather, which could be difficult to obtain.\(^{28}\) Although these three reasons are convincing, Annoussamy does not mention that the Ministry’s policy goal, as discussed earlier, was intentionally to limit the number of *optants*. With less than a third (including children) of its projected number applying for French nationality – a figure that represents just above 2% of the French Indian population – the Ministry more than achieved that goal. The Treaty also produced some interesting outcomes, especially amongst former French Indian politicians. For example, Edouard Goubert became an Indian national, while Saravane Lambert chose to remain French.\(^{29}\)

While Paul Michalon asserts that the French nationality option allowed France to leave with some dignity after the shambles of the negotiations and the Kijieur Congress, and Annoussamy

\(^{27}\) Dassaranadayadou, op.cit., p. 71.
\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) While Weber mentions that Lambert was born in Indochina, the *Assemblée nationale*’s website cites the former deputy as born in Pondichéry, Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs de l’Inde après Dupleix*, op.cit., p. 405; Assemblée nationale, Biographies des députés de la IV\(^{e}\) république, <http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/histoire/biographies/IVRepublique/saravane-lambert-17091907.asp>, viewed 12 December 2012.
deplores the shortcomings of the nationality option, I would argue that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was more interested in cultural diplomacy and retaining French dignity through the establishment of a research institute than it was in offering French nationality to a large number of French Indians with the financial burden this would bring. Records at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs show that the Ministry’s main concern was the protection of a very small minority of French Indians who had shown allegiance to France. Indeed, 95% of the applicants were renonçants, which is hardly surprising since the nationality clause was primarily designed for them. It was easier for renonçants to obtain their grandfather’s birth certificate, as they and their ancestors had more dealings with civil records than uneducated and unregistered peasants; the acte de renonciation, for example, was recorded in the civil registry at the town hall. Furthermore, the Trait d’Union commented on the ongoing debate regarding the issue of nationality, hence educated renonçants had more opportunities to keep informed on the evolution of the option.

Most importantly, renonçants had also organised in small committees, such as the Comité de défense des intérêts français de l’Inde française, headed by Ramassamy Ayer, Patriotes de l’Inde française, chaired by Arthur Annasse, the Amis de la Langue et de la culture française, chaired by a lawyer named Mr Rassendren, and the Groupement représentatif des Intérêts pondichériens. These groups lobbied deputies, published letters in French newspapers, and wrote to the Ministry of Overseas France and the Ministry of External Affairs to alert the French public and the legislators of their plight. Annasse followed in the footsteps of his maternal and paternal grandfathers, who had worked in the 1880s for French Indians in the colonial administration to be given the same rights as

31 Annasse, op.cit., p. 123
French nationals. Their lobbying in Paris eventually led to the provision of an *acte de renonciation* in 1881.\(^\text{33}\) Annasse himself had learned his skills as an activist while working in Indochina during the Second World War. In February 1942, he challenged a Vichy decree that stopped the payment of the expatriation allowance granted to French Indian civil servants working in Indochina.\(^\text{34}\) Some other organisations disappeared soon after the Kijeour Congress, such as the *Parti Francophile de Karikal*. There was little difference between the aims of these organisations, and they all largely consisted of French-educated magistrates, teachers, and retirees from the armed forces and administration, all of whom felt they had been abandoned by the French government. They relentlessly challenged the Kijeour decision, advocated their rights as *renonçants*, fought for dual nationality, demanded the non-ratification of the Treaty unless amendments regarding nationality were considered, and requested freedom of circulation within India and recognition of their professional qualifications by the Indian government.\(^\text{35}\) Overall, through their lobbying activities, they benefited the most from the French nationality option.

Above all, the nationality issue signals the non-discriminatory nature of Indian nationality, since it was extended to all who were born in the *comptoirs* without distinction based on culture, religion, or even past political allegiance. The fact that 98% of former French Indians became Indian nationals indicates the success of India’s integration policy and the failure of France’s mythical *mission civilisatrice*; it also highlights the limited impact of her assimilation policy and the shortcomings of a Constitution that was unable to maintain the French nationality granted to French Indians in 1946. India’s welcome inclusion of former French Indians not only testifies to Nehru’s

\(^{33}\) Annasse, *op.cit.*, p. 121-2

\(^{34}\) Ibid., p.142.

commitment to them as new Indian nationals but also contrasts tellingly with France’s poor treatment of her overseas nationals. Indeed, Nehru’s two visits to Pondichéry in 1955 can be viewed as proof of India’s pledge to the population of the French Indian territories.

**Nehru’s visits to the French Establishments**

Nehru’s first visit to Pondichéry on 16 January 1955 marked a turning-point in the history of the former administrative centre, and sealed the disjunction between past anti-colonial feelings and forward-looking nationalistic feelings. Although France was still the official sovereign power, French India was already officially referred to as the ‘French Establishments’ and was unofficially called ‘the State of Pondicherry’. Both French and Indian national symbols were used during the festivities; the French and Indian flags flew next to one another at the Collège Français, and students sang both the Indian and French national anthems. The *Trait d’Union* reported that the Prime Minister reviewed the float that would, for the first time, represent the state of Pondicherry at the official parade marking the celebration of Indian Republic Day on 26 January.36 The model, which symbolised Pondichéry’s historical links with France and Western civilisation, was a replica of a Greco-Latin building with no reference to Tamil culture (Fig. 15). The participation of Pondichéry to the ritual of national commemoration served to consolidate national feelings and to welcome French Indians within the national community.37 After the transfer, Indian authorities referred to ‘Pondichéry’ in its anglicised form of ‘Pondicherry’.

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36 *Trait d’Union*, January 1955.
37 Roy, *Beyond Belief*, op.cit., p. 73.
The Prime Minister’s visit to Pondichéry so close to Republic Day celebrations seems to have been a tactical decision to assert the national significance of the merger of the former French comptoirs into India, and to help anchor French India within the concept of India as a unified nation. After all, Republic Day in India is a celebration of the ascent of the country to Independence and the introduction of its own constitution in 1950. It also commemorates the declaration of Purna Swaraj (total self-rule) on 26 January 1930, when at the Lahore session of the INC Gandhi declared, ‘We will
be satisfied with nothing less than complete independence’. The day was observed year after year, and assumed an importance unequalled by any other national event; it was a day of commemoration in honour of all those who had served and sacrificed for the cause of Swaraj (self-rule). Srirupa Roy mentions that in post-colonial India, the commemoration served as an instrument in nation-building process that proclaimed ‘the unity in diversity’ of the Indian nation. In his ‘A Settlement in Friendship Speech’, delivered in English, Nehru declared:

My coming here today after a number of years has brought many memories to me. … What has happened here is of a much larger significance than the mere size of Pondicherry might indicate. From the point of view of India, it is a certain step forward in her political revolution. The big step was taken when India became free after an agreement with the British government. This is another step forward, however small … resolved by peaceful means not war. … In dealing with this question of Pondicherry, we have achieved a settlement in friendship and cooperation with the French government, leaving no problem behind, not even bitterness. That is the civilised way of dealing with problems. The uncivilised way is that of war, even though the so-called advanced countries may fight. Thus, while Pondicherry may be a very small part of India, Pondicherry has now become a symbol of friendly solution by negotiated settlement between nations. This settlement has truly brought joy and happiness to me, because I have laboured throughout my life for a certain objective in India. I have

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39 AICC papers, *Congress House announcement regarding the celebration on 26 January, 14 January 1948*, NMML, All India Congress Committee Papers, R6864.
40 Roy, *Beyond Belief*, op.cit., p. 29.
seen that objective fulfilled in a large measure, and as more fulfillment comes to it naturally I rejoice. And my joy has been much greater because of the manner of doing it. You may remember that our great leader Mahatmaji [Gandhi] always laid stress on the manner of doing things, on the means employed. It is good to have a right objective, to have right ends in view, but he always said that it is more important to adopt right methods and right means.41

When the Prime Minister mentions that his visit brought back memories, he is referring to his previous visit in October 1936 when, as president of the All-India National Congress, he had been invited during his election campaign in the south of India to speak in Pondichéry.42 His visit coincided with a particularly violent anti-colonial and social struggle, which featured striking students (22 September 1936) and textile workers (1935-37) demonstrating for better school facilities and improved working conditions. The struggle peaked with the gunning down of twelve strikers by French forces on 30 July 1936, a tragedy that would be commemorated every year thereafter.43 Subbiah, the leader of the French Indian Communist Party, recalled in his memoirs that ‘Nehru had started to address the crowd in French, but that after a few minutes he switched over to English, as he was told that for people of Pondicherry French or English did not make any difference as they were mainly Tamil speaking people; subsequently his speech was translated in Tamil by a local

42 Subbiah, op. cit., pp. 105-08.
orator'. This anecdote shows that Nehru had very little knowledge of French India’s particularities at the time of his first visit in 1936.

However, Nehru’s personal experience in the national movement allowed him to link Pondichéry’s political struggle with India’s fight for freedom, which he described as a ‘revolution’. His use of ‘we’ acts as a means to unify French Indians with other Indians into one nation without any distinction based on language or religion, and thus reinforced the nationalist precept of the Indian nation based on diversity and unity. He praises the skilfulness of Indian political leaders in negotiating without recourse to violence and notes that India used civilised methods in opposition to the uncivilised ways of advanced countries. In this way Nehru turns the old, assumed dichotomies of Occident/Orient and civilisation/barbarism upside down, suggesting that the Orient acts peacefully while the Occident has a history of violence that is especially linked to its colonial history. Here again the Prime Minister reiterates the moral success of satyagraha as the means to achieve self-determination, and India’s commitment to a policy of non-violence as epitomised by Gandhi. He also hints that similar peaceful negotiations could resolve the other colonial problem, Portuguese India. Furthermore, by recalling that India ‘had become free after an agreement with the British agreement’, Nehru reiterates that France had been only a subordinate colonial power in India when it persisted in challenging the notion of self-determination. While in the pre-1947 era visits from distinguished nationalist leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru raised the spirits of residents and encouraged the message of freedom, Nehru’s equally important subsequent visit strengthened the bonds between

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44 Mentioned by C.S. Subramanyam, foreword, Subbiah, op. cit., p.vi, pp. 105-08.
45 Roy, Beyond Belief, op.cit., p.77.
New Delhi (represented by its highest official) and the geographically peripheral enclaves where uncertainty about the future, especially the future of French Indian culture, still prevailed.⁴⁷

The Prime Minister’s second visit occurred on 4 October 1955, nine months after his first visit and one year after the *de facto* transfer. While the purpose of this visit was ‘to measure [the] progress of the new State of Pondicherry’,⁴⁸ the timing of the visit, ahead of the first anniversary of the *de facto* agreement, reinforced the interest that New Delhi had in the new State. The number of officials accompanying the Prime Minister was increased for this visit, giving it a far more official tone than the preceding one. They included Shri T.T. Krishnamachari (the Minister of Commerce and Industry), Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri (the Minister of Railways), M. Kamaraj Nadar (the Prime Minister of Madras), and Indira Gandhi (the Prime Minister’s daughter). Nehru took the opportunity to send a national and international message by inviting the French Indian population ‘to work hard for the benefit of India, to increase the standard of living of our country and for peace in the world’, an invitation that revealed the Prime Minister’s vision of India’s economic and political success becoming a model for peace and freedom at large.⁴⁹ This call for increased productivity had the benefit of creating a bond between French Indians and other Indians, all labouring and engaged in a common goal. Indeed, India would invest a great deal of money to guarantee peace in the *comptoirs* and to prove that India, as a national and regional leader, could outperform the French in managing the territories.

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⁴⁸ *Trait d’Union*, October 1955.
⁴⁹ *Trait d’Union*, October 1955.
Economic progress and development

The population of French India, however, was somewhat uneasy about being administered by a government that had imposed restrictions and greatly inconvenienced daily lives in the years leading up to the de facto transfer.\textsuperscript{50} Moreover, the territories had been handed over without proper consultation. Thus the government had to do more than just make a declaration that it wanted Pondichéry to be on par with the rest of the nation. It really had to convince the population that there were overwhelming advantages to being a part of greater India. The Indian government stated its promise in the introduction of the State of Pondicherry annual report of the year 1956-57:

The main concern of the government is to improve the living standard of the population by improving all resources and erect a new State that would guarantee the wellbeing of the population, and give a real signification to the political freedom that it has just acquired.\textsuperscript{51}

The statement hinted that the previous administration had kept French India in a state of poverty and oppression. It was now up to the Indian government to outdo the French in ensuring economic freedom alongside political freedom, as such it legitimised the state’s authority and emphasised its role in the provision of state-led development.\textsuperscript{52}

In order to win over French Indian hearts, the Indian Government introduced generous development schemes that produced excellent results in providing employment and an economic impetus. These schemes also attracted a large number of people from other parts of India, since a suitably qualified workforce was lacking in the former French enclaves. Indeed, the 1956-57 report

\textsuperscript{50} Annoussamy, ‘The Merger’, op.cit., p. 70.
\textsuperscript{52} Roy, Beyond Belief, op.cit., p. 110.
mentioned that, due to a lack of specialised labour, some projects could not be accomplished.\textsuperscript{53} The government blamed the delays, at least partially, on the previous colonial administration’s inability to train an adequate labour force. The delay, however, would only be a setback, and the earmarked funds were to be used for the realisation of the specified projects the following year. The economy was stimulated by lowering taxable business income by 50\% and customs duties by 5\%, and by increasing the number of import licences. Social relations were taken into consideration with the opening of an unemployment office, which registered 530 jobless workers within the first six weeks. A State Emergency Relief Organisation was also set up. But the main economic improvement would be the reconstruction of the pier. The previous slow and labour-intensive system of using small boats to transport goods to the beach (as shown in Figures 16 and 17) allowed only two tons to be disembarked at one time. The new pier would achieve a figure of up to 1,500 tons.

\textsuperscript{53} Annoussamy, ‘The Merger’, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 70-3; \textit{Administration de l’État de Pondichéry, rapport annuel 1956-57, op.cit.}, p. 1.
Figure 16: Bags of rice ready for exportation are being loaded by local labour onto small ships. The bags will then be transhipped onto large vessels waiting beyond the sandbar which made anchoring near the beach impossible. Source: Douglas Gressieux, Les comptoirs de l’Inde: Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, Yanaon et Chandernagor: mémoire en images, p. 103.
Mechanisms put in place by the Government included the setting up of local and regional committees to assess economic and social needs. Technicians were also provided to assist these committees in determining the most pressing and realisable projects. Veterinary services were set up, fertilisers were donated to peasants, and new methods to improve rice production were introduced. Eleven cooperatives of weavers were also organised. The scale of the state-led
developmental projects in Pondichery embodied Nehru’s vision of the ‘state as the authoritative problem solver of the needy nation’.\textsuperscript{54}

In its ten-year anniversary special edition, published on 10 and 25 November 1964, the Voix nouvelle: 

\textit{Organe politique et culturel} (a bi-monthly newspaper focusing on cultural and political issues) proudly listed the extent of the projects achieved within the first decade under the aegis of the Indian government.\textsuperscript{55} The largest improvement was the increased supply of power, with the cost of power being halved overall.\textsuperscript{56} Power supply increased eleven-fold from 3,555 million Kwh in 1954 to 41,613 million Kwh in 1964, and the number of villages that received electricity increased from forty-two in 1954 to 175 in 1964.\textsuperscript{57} Even Gandon, the \textit{Représentant Français} in Pondichery, noted during his visit to Yanaon in 1956 that electricity had reached the town three months earlier, but that, surprisingly, the residence of the Indian administrator had yet to enjoy this benefit. This might indicate that the government prioritised the needs of the many over the comfort of the local government official, or perhaps that technical difficulties prevented the residence from receiving the power supply.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, the number of electrified wells increased from 267 to 2,342; state revenue was one and a half times greater than a decade previously; production of food grew by 40%; the number of asphalted roads quadrupled; expenditure in public health went up fivefold; seven primary health centres were set up; and the number of veterinary centres increased from two to eleven.\textsuperscript{59} Although the newspaper does not provide qualitative details, this still represents an impressive ten-year

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54} Roy, \textit{Beyond Belief}, op.cit., p. 117.
\item \textsuperscript{55} \textit{La Voix nouvelle}, 10 November 1964, 25 November 1964.
\item \textsuperscript{56} \textit{Trait d’Union}, November 1955; \textit{La Voix nouvelle}, 10 November 1964, 25 November 1964.
\item \textsuperscript{57} \textit{La Voix nouvelle}, 10 November 1964, 25 November 1964.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Armand Gandon, \textit{Représentant Français à Pondichéry à Mr Christian Belle ministre plénipotentiaire, chargé d’affaires, 28 Septembre 1956, a/s visite à Yanaon}, AD, Vol. 339: \textit{Ex-établissements français situation générale}.
\end{itemize}
achievement, especially since France remained the legal sovereign power over the territories until 1962.60

**Dual sovereignty**

Because of the delayed ratification of the Treaty of Cession by the French Parliament, the most striking and certainly unusual consequence of the *de facto* transfer was that the French Establishments were burdened with dual sovereignty. The particularities of this situation emanated from two factors: the French government was willing to satisfy Indian claims by immediately abiding by the Kijeour Congress results, but at the same time French authorities needed time to deal with legislative requirements. For the Treaty to gain effect, the French Parliament would have to pass a law approving the Treaty’s ratification and then have it published in the *Journal Officiel* in Paris. Indian officials believed that the *de jure* transfer would occur within a couple of months, while the Indian daily *Amrita Bazar Patrika (ABP)* accurately predicted that the finalisation of the Treaty would most probably take much longer since, it said, the French moved very slowly.61 While the *ABP* seemed to be referring to France’s protracted decision to end her colonial presence in Asia, the delay was actually caused by a number of factors related to colonial administration which led to a change in the constitution and a debate over the constitutionality of the *de jure* transfer. As a result, French Indians were forced to endure another eight years of French sovereignty.

French India was technically the first overseas territory to leave the French Union. When France signed the October 1954 agreement, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia had just been given independence, but they were considered by the French Constitution to be ‘Associated States’ rather than territories. By the time the Treaty was ratified in 1962, France had experienced a series of

61 *ABP*, 22 October 1954.
colonial crises, including the Suez crisis (1956) and the Algerian war (1954–1962), and most of France’s overseas territories had gained independence. First came the Protectorates of Tunisia and Morocco in 1956, followed in 1960 by Afrique Occidentale Française (Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Upper Volta, Niger, Guinea in 1958, Ivory Coast, Dahomey), Afrique Equatoriale Française (Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad), and the Mandates of Togo and Cameroon. Madagascar also gained independence in 1960, followed by Algeria in 1962. The Comoros Islands (except Mayotte), Djibouti, and the New Hebrides (becoming Vanuatu) remained French until they gained independence in 1975, 1977, and 1980, respectively. Only a few scraps of France’s extensive colonial empire scattered across the globe would remain, including the overseas departments (Départements d’Outre-Mer – DOMs) and the overseas territories (Territoires d’Outre-Mer - TOMs).

The process of ratifying of the Treaty of Cession was delayed by the dismantlement of the French Union and the Algerian crisis, which led to the promulgation of the Fifth Republic with General de Gaulle becoming president in 1958, but also by debates amongst French deputies over the validity of the agreement. Indeed, the Treaty was deemed unconstitutional because it did not comply with the conditions of Article 27 of the 1946 constitution, which stipulated, firstly, that a territorial cession could not be granted unless the affected population had given its consent, and secondly that treaties were only valid after a law had endorsed their ratification. French deputies disputed the process by which French Indian elected representatives had voted in favour of merger with India while the

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62 Aldrich and Connell, op.cit., table 2 p. 36.
63 Départements d’Outre-Mer consisted of Guyane, Guadeloupe and dependencies, Martinique, and La Réunion, all of which acquired their department status in 1946, while Mayotte would become an overseas department in 2011. The Territoires d’Outre-Mer consisted of French Polynesia, New Caledonia and dependencies, Wallis and Futuna, the Terres Australes et Antarctiques françaises (TAAF), Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, Saint-Martin, and Saint-Barthélemy, Ibid., pp. 3, 36.
population of French India had been denied the right to express its opinion via referendum. It is worth noting that the dispute over the legality of the Franco-Indian Treaty was not unique; during the same period two other international agreements were deemed unconstitutional: the Franco-Ethiopian agreement of 16 January 1954, which ceded a substantial area of the Somali coast to Ethiopia, and the Franco-Vietnamese convention of 16 August 1955 regarding nationality. Both had been agreed without the prior consultation of the population and the ratification of the French Parliament.66

French deputies disputed the handover of French India’s administration to the Indian authorities because the Treaty had not yet been ratified. A report on the Treaty of Cession of the four southern French territories submitted in March 1958 by Said Mohamed Cheikh, deputy for the Comoros, stated that the de facto transfer was void because it had effectively given power to the Indian authorities to administer the French Indian territories before the French Parliament had endorsed the Treaty. The deputy pointed out that the Treaty had never been published in the Journal Officiel de la République Française, nor presented to the salle des traités of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, it had not been recorded by the services responsible for publishing all agreements, conventions, or any other letters testifying that an inter-governmental agreement had taken place. The lack of due process undermined the validity of the Treaty.67

In addition, deputies were reluctant to sign off the demise of a colony that was older than Nice and Savoy.68 However, the French government had recognised that refusing to ratify the Treaty would only result in another diplomatic crisis with the Indian government, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had commended on many occasions for its patience and understanding and for adopting a neutral stand over the Algerian problem. In fact, Nehru always promoted diplomatic

68 Marsh, Fictions of 1947, op.cit., p. 29.
negotiations over the use of force to resolve the Algerian issue. In addition, economic and cultural relations had grown significantly between India and France, and the French government was aware that non-ratification could jeopardise future deals. Indeed, the number of French missions responsible for sending engineers to India had risen from three in 1956 to fifteen in 1957 and twenty-one in 1958, while the number of Indian students benefiting from scholarships to study science and technology in France had grown from seven in 1956 to eighty-three in 1958. Furthermore, the period that de Gaulle inaugurated with his presidency was one of economic growth for France, and the government’s focus had changed from maintaining the old empire (which was in any case now facing dismantlement) to establishing France’s leadership of Europe and employing an independent nuclear deterrent as a means to promote national greatness, as well as efforts to retain ties with the now independent former colonies in Africa despite decolonisation.

The delay also reflected the discrepancy that existed between the realities of French India, which Ostrorog insisted no longer existed, and the myth of French India that retained its hold on the mind of certain French deputies influenced by the French Indian lobby, which was represented by small committees for the defence of French Indian interests. Alfred Jacobson, conseiller de l’Union

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73 Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassadeur de France aux Indes à Son Excellence, Mr Christian Pineau, Ministre des Affaires Étrangères, a/s communication d’un rapport de M. Morel-Francoz, Représentant français à Pondichéry, 20 Mars 1957,
Française, compiled a report in February 1957 (on behalf of the Commission of Foreign Relations for the Assemblée de l’Union Française, or AUF) in which he advised against the ratification. The deputies of the AUF admitted that the Treaty signalled a break with the purpose of the French Union, and could also serve as an example for a neighbouring territory to claim sovereignty over a small French overseas entity, or in the case of the Comoros Islands facilitate the separation of the island groups into two distinct political entities. Thus, instead of supporting the ratification of the Treaty, the deputies promised to ‘continue to fight for patriotism and defend the interests of the overseas territories which had put their trust in the AUF’.

While the deputies of the AUF rejected the proposal to ratify the Treaty on 1 March 1957, the promulgation of the Fifth Republic in October 1958 along with the ensuing decolonisation of France’s colonial empire helped overcome the problem of the Franco-Indian Treaty of Cession. The French Union, created after the war in 1946, was replaced by the Communauté – the adjective ‘Française’ was removed – that was mandated in the new Constitution of the Fifth Republic (1958), and which offered overseas territories the choice of remaining linked to France or gaining independence. As former overseas territories choose to leave the Communauté and following the independence of Algeria in July 1962, French India was no longer considered an isolated issue whose cession could
threaten the Communauté. Instead, it had become part of a broader decolonisation process that the French Assembly was now readily prepared to deal with. The cession of French India was ratified on 13 July 1962 by the French Parliament and the law approved by the Senate on 23 July 1962 despite further debates in the Assembly opposing the ratification.77

While French deputies debated the validity of the Treaty of Cession, Indian authorities quickly implemented a series of measures to take over the administration of former French India. The Foreign Jurisdiction Act 1947 gave the Indian Ministry of External Affairs the legal means to administer the Establishments, and under the same Act two notifications, the French Establishments (Administration) Order 1954 and the French Establishments (Application of Laws) Order 1954, issued on 21 October 1954 and 30 October 1954, respectively, had the effect of extending Indian laws over the new State. Under the Indian Constitution the French Indian territories became a ‘part C’ state centrally administered by New Delhi. According to Annoussamy, the government of India disliked the former colonial French name, ‘the French Establishments in India’; under the French Establishments (change of name) order 1954, the name was changed to French Establishments.

These decisions were aimed at instigating the erasure of colonial memory and reinforcing the establishment of the Indian nation, a trend that would continue well after the ratification. While names associated with religious sites, such as mosques, churches, and temples maintained their original French Indian names, large thoroughfares were given the names of famous national figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru, and Lal Bahadur Shastri (the second Prime Minister of India). The names of

famous local men (for example, Goubert and Sri Aurobindo) were used to replace existing street names such as *rue Dumas, rue Dupleix, rue Surcouf, rue Labouronnais, and rue Suffren*.

The change of *rue Dupleix* to Nehru Road is quite revealing; the name of the famous Indian freedom fighter who became the first Prime Minister of India replaced that of the hero who epitomised French colonial presence in India. The famous promenade *Cours Chabrol* became Goubert Avenue (also referred to as Beach Road). Statues of French colonial figures were moved to make way for statues of local heroes. The statue of Dupleix, for example, was relocated from its prominent waterfront location in *square Dupleix* (renamed Nehru Place) to the garden of the French Consulate-General, then later to the southern extremity of Goubert Avenue. A statue of Gandhi was erected opposite the old pier on Republic Day, 1965. By contrast, the statue of *Jeanne d'Arc* still stands where it always did, opposite *Notre-Dame des Anges*; perhaps a French female national figure burnt at the stake by the British in the fifteenth century or that she was a religious figure (St Joan), seemed less challenging to the new nation than French male colonial figures.

The move to eliminate evidence of the colonial presence had already been felt in Yanaon during the March 1954 riots, when street names were ‘rebaptised’ during a spontaneous attack against colonial authorities by the local population. Similarly, students in Chandernagor requested that the names of ‘Dupleix’ and ‘de Bussy’ be removed from the local schools, and that the statue of

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79 Ibid.

Dupleix be replaced by ‘the effigy of Kanai Lall Dutt, a local martyr and a pioneer of the nationalist movement’.81

The French government never interfered with any Indian government decisions concerning the administration of the French Establishments. Ostrorog praised the excellent relations between France and India, and remarked that despite India’s leadership in the Afro-Asia bloc, she never took an adverse position towards France, especially regarding the Algerian issue.82 Likewise Nehru declared a few days after the exchange of the instruments of ratification in Rajya Sabha (Upper House):

The transfer has been pending for a large number of years, and most of us and many Members of this House must have felt frustrated at the long delay in this transfer. Ultimately this transfer has taken place. We realised then and we do now that France was going through a difficulty period attended by big constitutional changes, and therefore although we pressed for it, we did not wish to say or do anything which might injure our relations with France. I am glad that the policy of patience pursued by us has led to a successful result. Pondicherry and the other former French Settlements are now part of India … the main thing is that we have achieved our objective in accordance with our policy and practice, peacefully and without injuring in any way our relations with France, and I should like to express my appreciation of the French government and specially of its eminent Present, General de Gaulle.83

82 Ostrorog, op.cit., p. 161.
Both representatives congratulated each other on their mutual co-operation, their non-interference policy, and the peaceful completion of the issue. Rather unusually, French citizens residing in French India were entitled to vote in Indian elections until 1965, when their right was revoked. The intergovernmental agreement of 1954 was mutually respected and the ratification created the Union Territory of Pondicherry in 1962, another step in the unstoppable process of integration.

**The Union Territory of Pondicherry**

Nearly eight years after the *de facto* agreement, the Treaty of Cession was finally expedited by de Gaulle shortly after he had signed off on the independence of Algeria (3 July 1962). The ratification granted full sovereignty to India over the French Indian enclaves of Pondichéry, Karikal, Mahé, and Yanaon. Chandernagor had been ceded by the *Treaty of Cession of the Territory of the Free Town of Chandernagore* on 2 February 1951, and by the *Chandernagor (Merger) Act, 1954*, which came into force on 2 October 1954 making this former enclave part of the District of Hoogly of the State of West Bengal. The exchange of instruments between the governments of India and France took place on 16 August 1962, which meant that the French Establishments officially became Indian on that day. Nine days later, the Indian parliament approved the *Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act 1962*, which provided for the four former southern French Indian territories to become the Union Territory of Pondicherry (UTP, Map 16). The Act was then added to the First

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Schedule of the Constitution. By the time of the de jure transfer, the ‘part C’ designation for states had been replaced by ‘Union Territories’, which were administered by a Lieutenant-Governor appointed by New Delhi. He was assisted by an elected legislative assembly and appointed council of ministers, all members of the legislative assembly. The administration of the former French Indian territories was thereby centralised. While in the past local affairs could be resolved between the French Commissaire de la République and the conseil du gouvernement, now any differences between the Lieutenant-Governor and the council of ministers was referred to New Delhi for a decision.

There are three other important points to make about the inauguration of the UTP. Firstly, the Indian government chose to retain the name of the former colonial administrative centre, albeit in its anglicised spelling, for the new Union Territory of Pondicherry. Providing a link between the recent colonial past and the newly merged Indian state would maintain some of the cultural particularities of French India. Although the Treaty did not specifically indicate that the state should be named after the largest and most important of the four enclaves, nevertheless the concern of the population over the loss of its French Indian traits had to be taken into consideration. Secondly, the Constitution (Fourteenth Amendment) Act 1962 provided a different spelling for three of the former French enclaves: Pondichéry was now Pondicherry, Mahé became Mahe, and Yanaon, Yanam. A bill to rename Pondicherry’s spelling to Puducherry was approved in 2006.

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89 Annoussamy, L’intermède, op.cit., p. 179.
90 The Hindu, 22 August, 2006.
Most importantly, the UTP kept the same disparate and truncated shape as French India, even though out of the four southern comptoirs, Mahe and Yanam were the smallest and least French. Despite their distant locations in relation to Pondicherry, when officially referring to them and the state they are associated with, the town’s names are written as ‘Mahe, Pondicherry’ and ‘Yanam, Pondicherry’. Rather than clearing the colonial slate and taking the opportunity to amalgamate or consolidate the former French Indian communes, most of which were surrounded by existing Indian territory, the government of India maintained the geographical oddities that had resulted from Franco-British colonial rivalries. Slight name changes aside, the boundaries of the communes of Pondicherry, Mahe, Karraikal, and Yanam remained the same. In comparison, Chandernagor was totally integrated into the state of West Bengal following the Treaty of Cession in 1951. This difference can be explained by the fact that the conditions that led to the merging of Chandernagor and of the southern comptoirs into the Union of India were very different. Chandernagor voted in a referendum to merge with the Indian Union, while this option was never submitted to the population of the four southern enclaves; instead, elected representatives voted at Kijeour on behalf of the population. For this reason, the government of India had chosen to retain aspects of French India in the southern comptoirs, even if this appeared anomalous.

The Act also instituted a number of constitutional and legislative measures regarding the management of the new state. The Pondicherry (Administration) Act 1962 provided, inter alia, for the continuance of existing officers and laws, and for the extension of the jurisdiction of the High Court of Madras to Pondicherry. The Citizenship (Pondicherry) Order, 1962 conferred Indian citizenship on all persons born in the Union Territory except those who opted to retain their French nationality before
15 February 1963.\textsuperscript{91} The \textit{Pondicherry (Laws) Regulation}, 1963, promulgated on 18 July 1963, extended 160 central enactments to the Union Territory of Pondicherry.\textsuperscript{92} The administrative control of Pondicherry and Goa, where Indian forces marched in and evicted the Portuguese in December 1961, was transferred to the Ministry of Home Affairs on 1 September 1964, after previously being entrusted to the Ministry of External Affairs.\textsuperscript{93} Compared to the former French Indian territories which formed UTP, Goa was granted statehood in 1987. The post-French Indian world was struck a further blow when the Legislative Assembly of Pondicherry decided on 3 April 1965 that English, Tamil, Malayalam, and Telugu would be concurrent official languages alongside French.\textsuperscript{94}

In the meantime, Franco-Indian relations were strengthened with the signing of a nuclear co-operation agreement during the 1965 visit to India of the French Prime Minister, Georges Pompidou; other agreements were established between 1974 and 1976 under Prime Minister Jacques Chirac.\textsuperscript{95} Finally, a mixture of demographic integration and internal migration facilitated the political and social integration of French India. A generous government investment policy fostered economic improvement, which in turn resulted in a migratory movement from greater India. Whatever French Indian culture might have remained was thereby further dissolved. French India, in other words, had experienced the same fate as other Indian communities who feared the loss of their local identity as a result of merging within the Indian state in 1947.

Curiously, when in 1978 the Prime Minister of India supported a proposal by the Union exchequer to reduce expenditure in UTP by merging the former \textit{comptoirs} with their respective

\textsuperscript{94} Annoussamy, 'The Merger', \textit{op.cit.}, p. 73.
contiguous states, it met with sharp opposition from the population that had settled in them after the transfer.96 They fought to maintain their special status as the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Above all, the intensity of the opposition and its organisation reflected pre-1954 hostilities. An Anti-Merger Conference was organised in Pondicherry, bringing together members of the Communist, Congress, Muslim League, and Kazaham (Dravidian movement) groups under the leadership of the old CPI leader, Subbiah. This time the old pre-1954 veterans all came under one banner to ensure that UTP remained a distinct state within the Union of India. Hartals, demonstrations, and a boycott of the Republic day celebration (26 January) were called for. Clashes with police resulted in twenty-five demonstrators being shot dead; many others were injured and more than four hundred were arrested in relation to this new anti-merger movement.97 The legacy of French Indian merger politics was still present in the state of UTP.

The level of opposition eventually forced the Indian government to abandon the proposal. The participation of post-1954 migrants demonstrated that they had benefited from the economic development promoted by the Indian government, and that they were unwilling to support a decision that might affect their prosperity. In a twist of fate, those who had fought the hardest for the maintenance of French culture to be included in the conditions of the Treaty had either left for France or become part of a dwindling community engulfed by the ever-increasing number of migrants (which grew by 30% every ten years).98 Apart from the maintenance of colonial names, truncated territorial vestiges, and some economic advantages which new residents were ready to fight for, the former

97 Ramasamy, op.cit., pp. 234-5.
French territories known as UTP had fully become part of the Indian nation. Above all, while French India had represented a bulwark against the British in India, the extension of Indian laws modelled on the British legal framework finally erased the particular status of French India. The whole process brought French India into a system that was dominated by a British legacy that finally put to an end to the Franco-British rivalry that began in the seventeenth century.

**Conclusion**

Despite the provisions of the French constitution, which stipulated that French nationality was extended to overseas subjects, French Indians had to apply to remain French. Only a few decided to do so. The nationality issue has shown that for all its universal principles, France's citizenship was closely linked to cultural and social belonging, with renonçants constituting the largest group of those who opted to be French. While some authors have interpreted the small proportion of optants as a sign of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' failure to adequately facilitate the process, in fact the result stemmed from a conscious policy of limiting citizenship to a small minority. While it cannot be said that most of the population made a conscious choice not to opt for French citizenship, cumbersome Indian administrative procedures seemed to have helped deter anyone who was undecided. While Nehru's visits to Pondichéry helped anchor French India within the image of a national India, the economic stimulus provided by generous governmental schemes ensured the fast and successful integration of the former French Indian territories. Even the dual sovereignty that marked French India during this period did not hinder her evolution, which culminated in the creation of the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Although the geographical aspects of former French India were maintained, less permanent features were removed in an effort to erase the colonial past.
Conclusion

Remembering French India

The end of French India and how it was perceived can be illustrated by the way India and France each chose to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the transfer of the French Indian territories to India. France offered little in the way of tribute as the event passed remarkably unnoticed in the press; former colonial powers do not reminisce on their losses against determined nationalist forces. Instead, the Bibliothèque Nationale de France acknowledged the historic date of 1 November 1954 by compiling a selected bibliography of works on Franco-Indian relations between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ‘golden age’ of the Compagnie des Indes and a period of French colonial history associated with grandeur and influence on the subcontinent.¹ The gesture demonstrates the on-going interest that this particular period had generated amongst historians, archivists, writers, administrators, and travellers, in contrast to the lack of concern for the modern era from the end of Napoleon’s regime (1815) to the French withdrawal from the comptoirs (1954), and the following decades. Yet again, the BNF’s decision served to downplay France’s role as a subordinate colonial power in India with French India consisting of only five minuscule, defenceless, scattered, and non-contiguous territories flanked on the periphery of the much larger and imposing British India, a constant reminder of France’s secondary position on the subcontinent. The move also helped minimise the question of the dependency of the French territories on British India for their mere survival, and continued to promote French influence in India while, in fact, France’s presence had been largely constrained by the strict conditions imposed by the Franco-British Treaty of Paris (1814).

The persistence of this belief in a grand French India demonstrates the potency of a myth, constructed after France’s defeat in 1763, that aimed at depicting French colonialism as a better option to the British alternative. This myth emerged as part of the formation of a French national identity defined in opposition to Britain. Above all, the focus in 2004 on the earlier period marked by Franco-British colonial rivalries completely missed an opportunity to reflect on the occasion it aimed to celebrate, - the fiftieth anniversary of France’s withdrawal from India -, to ponder on the reasons why France remained in India after the British had left, and to evaluate the effect of the withdrawal on Indo-French relations since the transfer. Indeed, France overlooked a chance to celebrate more recent Franco-Indian relations epitomised since 1958 by the signing of many trade, technical, and economic co-operation agreements.²

The government of the Union Territory of Puducherry (UTP) waited until 16 August 2012 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the merger of the French Indian territories with the Republic of India, and on that day former French Indian freedom fighters were honoured.³ In UTP, 16 August is observed as the ‘Independence Day’ of Pondicherry even though the French Indian territories never became independent but were incorporated into an already established Indian state.⁴ This perspective emphasises the success of an Indian nationalist movement that defeated European powers by negotiation, as was the case for Britain and France, and by force, as exemplified by the expulsion of the Portuguese from Goa in December 1961; the overall result asserts a policy of state integration that had underpinned the rise of the Indian nation-state. However, the recent suggestion by New Delhi - under the influence of the Viduthalai Kaala Makkal Iyyakkam, a movement striving for the cause of the people who opted for Indian citizenship at the time of the merger of Puducherry with the Indian Union - to move the Independence Day of Puducherry (16

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⁴ The Hindu, 17 August, 2012.
August) to 1 November and to turn 16 August into ‘Republic Day’ in UTP, was intended to further fuse the history of Pondicherry with that of the nation. The suggestion would see the 16 August commemoration follow straight on from 15 August – the national holiday that commemorates India’s Independence from Britain - as official Republic days that mark the nation. The change hints that India is still in the process of inventing her traditions, writing her history of gaining the enclaves’ independence from France, and wanting to celebrate both transfer dates as a liberation from the French colonial yoke. The demand, headed by a movement supporting those who claimed allegiance to India, demonstrates that issues over adherence to the national group that had dominated the period between 1947 and 1962 are still very much at play today. Celebrating the two transfer dates as national victories reasserts the defeat inflicted on the old colonial power, minimises the role of those who might have showed loyalty to France, and serves to reinforce the political bonds of the former French territories with New Delhi and the nation it represents.

The discrepancy in the celebratory dates between France (1 November 1954/2004) and India (16 August 1962/2012) reflects how a significant event that links the history of nationalism and decolonisation is remembered differently by observers and participants, and how it is manipulated to suit a national narrative. For France, the physical withdrawal and the handover of the administration to the central government of New Delhi on 1 November 1954 was the final stroke, while for India the full procedure was only completed with the exchange of the diplomatic instruments (1962), thus emphasising India’s regard for due process. However, by officially commemorating the end of French India on 1 November 1954, France has overlooked the period of dual sovereignty that affected French Indians for eight years, a rather unusual situation caused

by endless debates and subsequent delays in the French Parliament where deputies questioned the validity of a cession that had been agreed to by elected representatives rather than by the eligible voting population. They also pondered a withdrawal that occurred before the Treaty of Cession was signed, hence challenging the legitimacy of the handover. But these details of jurisprudence disguised the fact that French India was at the heart of France witnessing the end of her empire. The fact that the *de facto* and *de jure* transfers were sandwiched between the loss of Indochina (1954) - marking the end of formal French influence in Asia - and the independence of Algeria (1962) makes the cession of the French Indian territories very much a part of France’s post-war process of decolonisation, even though the transfer and the events leading to it did not arouse public interest as did other major colonial issues. French deputies, like French politicians and administrators, had quite some difficulty consenting to the cession of one of France’s oldest colonies, and one that had provided such an important and continuous link between the first colonial domain acquired under the *Ancien Régime* and the Fourth Republic. Indeed, French India had been part of France for longer than Nice, Savoy, and Corsica. But compared to the painful end of French Algeria, which attracted a significant number of gestures and the building of ‘sacred sites’ to address the issue of the Algerian syndrome, the small size of the French Indian territories, the historic link with France which set them apart from other colonies, and the rather peaceful way the transfer occurred did not produce the same historical opportunities to reconsider Franco-Indian relations in the postcolonial present, and indeed only deepened the sense of amnesia that shrouds the French Indian territories.\(^7\)

While India is still finalising the ways by which to remember the end of France’s presence, France continues to represent French India in the old familiar terms. Nostalgia for the bygone times of the *Compagnie des Indes* persists unabated, as illustrated by the commentaries in a leaflet on an exhibition of the *Compagnie des Indes* that states: ‘What would you not give

\(^7\) Aldrich, ‘The Colonial Past and the Postcolonial Present’, *op.cit.*, pp. 334-56.
today to admire, just for a few moments, the stern and sails of one of the ships of the Compagnie des Indes, passing by Groix Island [an island off the coast of the port of Lorient], off [to India] to fulfil infinite promises'.

The comment evokes the success of Dupleix and exudes images of adventure and exoticism associated with India, themes abundantly used by colonial novelists and reporters to justify France's presence in India, and to maintain the illusion of her influence. But as in the past, France still has difficulty even providing accurate records of what exactly French India consisted of, and the names of the French Indian territories have now been relegated to a distant colonial memory, if not oblivion, as testified by the revamped website of the National Archives of Overseas France. It proudly lists the 'French colonial empires' and with the help of an interactive map, the viewer can easily locate and read a note on each of the former French overseas territories and colonies. However when viewed in March 2012, the website had omitted to list French India, an oversight that was rectified a few weeks later.

The section dedicated to French India now mentions that it consisted of five districts and eight loges and lists them as Balassore (Balasore), Cassimbazar (Kassimbazar, Kasim Bazar), Yougdia (Jugdea), Dacca, Patna, Masulipatnam (Mazulipatnam), Calicut, Surate (Surat) and the Iskitipitch (Iskitippah) islands. The actual number listed is nine, not eight.

In addition, the website wrongly indicates that the 'English reoccupied the trading stations on several occasions between 1778 and 1883 [sic],’ when in fact the Treaty of 1814 settled Anglo-French relations in India and established the particularities of French India in terms of

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defence and borders. Even if British assistance was at times required to maintain order in the territories – at best a sign of collaboration between two colonial archrivals - and border disputes continued to strain Franco-British relations, the Treaty sealed the end of armed hostilities between the two colonial powers. The confusion over the number of French Indian loges and when the French Indian territories were retroceded demonstrates the elusiveness of these distant lands, historical remains in which the French government still attaches great pride, though the national repository of colonial archives does not seem capable to this day of providing their exact location and historical particularities.

While the cataloguing of these former colonial lands is still blurry, the website - like the maps, reports, colonial literature, and the Exposition coloniale of 1931 - epitomises a modern means by which France continues to project the familiar concept of her former, even if rather small, presence in India, whose purpose is meant to preserve a colonial memory for national aggrandisement and to inform unaware French people of France’s glorious epoch in India. Through this means France maintains her grip on her former colonial space, and perpetuates the vision of a long-lasting French Indian empire, with the effect that the colonial past endures, even if most of it is fictional. Indeed, on the website, there are no details on the territorial and cultural characteristics of French India. It is still viewed as a single entity - referred as Inde française - where the intricacies of the non-contiguous territories, their size, historical specificities, and regional variations are omitted; meanwhile, the contemporary period is totally overlooked. The mention in one caption of the website that French India was granted important republican institutions such as the right to elect a deputy and a senator indicates great pride in the French republican values and the métropole’s commitment to incorporating the colony into France.

At the same time, viewers of the website are reminded that French India rallied to de Gaulle in 1940, a point that signals the devotion of French India to the motherland and testifies to the ‘Frenchness’ of French Indians and their adherence to the idea of parliamentary democracy
and freedom. The image depicts a motherland that extended her arms out to French India, while French India rushed into her arms to support France when her institutions were under threat. But yet again, the history of French Indian opposition to French colonialism, triggered by the introduction of the principles of equality which threatened the hierarchical order of French Indian society, is unacknowledged. Similarly, the reasons why French India decided to rally to de Gaulle are not clarified as a decision that was based on a desire to support Britain rather than to show unconditional allegiance to de Gaulle. Indeed, given the Lilliputian size of the French Indian territories, it was almost inconceivable for them not to follow British India in 1940, a forewarning that at independence in 1947 France should have considered taking the same step as Britain and withdraw. However, France's determination to salvage a pre-war empire in a new post-war colonial framework ultimately denied cession to even the smallest of her territories.

Maintaining a vision of French India as it had once been in the past, and defining French India in relation to British India, limited France's grasp of the potency of a nationalist movement that was determined to rid India of any foreign presence and did not shy away from using coercive means to achieve its aim. The bickering over imaginary borders that divided French India and British India did not sustain the challenge emerging from a resolute anti-colonial movement that spread across the region claiming territorial sovereignty and demanding independence. The rise of political awareness did not operate within the colonial framework based on the belief that French colonialism was better, instead it focused on a common socio-political purpose to build a new independent nation. It is this discrepancy between India's determination to be independent and France's upholding of a vision of bygone times – a vision that had helped define French national identity at home and abroad as a grand nation - that produced a clash when India became independent and claimed sovereignty over the tiny French Indian territories, a point that French officials were unwilling to reflect on during the occasion of the golden jubilee.
Although the old vision of French India continues to arouse nostalgia, interest for the ‘real’ French India of the comptoirs is, as in the past, generally scant. Since 1954 France has paid little attention to the comptoirs. André Lewin, former French ambassador to India (1987-1991), admitted that while he visited Pondichéry and Karikal on many occasions, and was the first French ambassador to visit Mahe after the transfer, he unfortunately never set foot in Yanam. He conceded France’s ‘certain oubli’ (definite neglect) of the comptoirs, a point reitered twenty years later in a 2012 Le Monde article entitled ‘Ces Français oubliés de Pondichéry’. The website of Les Comptoirs de l’Inde: Association culturelle et centre de documentation sur l’Inde mentions that despite 800 museums in France dedicated to history, there is none devoted to the 300-year French presence in India; only the museum of the Compagnie des Indes in Lorient continues to echo early Franco-Indian relations. Created in 1992, the association is committed to promoting the history of French India and Francophonie in India, as well as acting as a window to the past and the present. With the rapid growth of India’s middle class, which values an education in English, it is difficult to foresee great success for the association’s aims, and the extent of its influence in India and in France will probably remain very limited.

Another link between France and the former comptoirs is represented by the French nationals of ethnic Tamil origin (Franco-Tamils) - that is, those who chose to become French citizens in 1962-3. However, since the 1970s their numbers have been dwindling; in 1999, a report by the French Senate stated that the number of registered Franco-Pondicherians was 8,146, or approximately 1.11% of Pondicherry’s total population (in 2001) of 735,332. The

Senate report mentioned that 6,500 were ‘inactifs’ - meaning retirees, the unemployed, and those receiving social benefits - compared to 2,403 who were employed, with the largest proportion of them employed in the tertiary sector, 212 in industry, 473 in middle management, 41 in construction, 29 in agriculture, and 27 in religious activities.\textsuperscript{14} Since 1999, the proportion of the Franco-Tamil population has now decreased to 0.69% of the population of Pondicherry (city), partly because of a 30% increase in the total population of Pondicherry (city), which according to the census of 2011 now numbers 950,289.\textsuperscript{15} If we were to base the calculations on the population of the Union Territory of Puducherry (which stands at 1,244,464), the rate of Franco-Tamils would be even lower.\textsuperscript{16} The decrease in the population of Franco-Tamils is also due to the overall aging of the entire population, which means a higher death rate and a lower birth rate, and the tendency for young Franco-Tamils to leave for France. While the number of Franco-Tamils is growing smaller in Pondicherry, where traditionally their number was greater than in other parts of French India, and those remaining are described by the French authorities as well integrated with the rest of the population, the number of Franco-Pondicherians in France is currently estimated at 70,000 or ten times greater that the number of Franco-Tamils living in South India. This in fact represents a thriving community living in France that has developed over a couple of generations, and which is keeping a link to the old roots through the setting up of associations that promote French Indian culture in France.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite the dwindling number of Franco-Tamils in Pondicherry, they continue to arouse resentment from the local population due to the generous welfare benefits that they still receive from France and which represent an income higher than that of a professional working in

\textsuperscript{14} Sénat, Rapports d'information 476 (98-99), op.cit.
\textsuperscript{17} Pairaudeau mentions that in the late 1980s there were approximately 40,000 Tamils from the former comptoirs and 2,500 – 4,000 Indo-Vietnamese, ‘Via l’Indochine’, op.cit., p. 25; Sénat, Rapports d'information 476 (98-99), op.cit.
Pondicherry. Payment of benefits are indeed remitted in Euros and the great disparities between the French and Indian costs of living means that those receiving benefits form the single wealthiest group in local society. In his study of the Franco-Tamil community, William Miles has remarked that for them ‘wealth is not linked to labour, it is linked to [French] citizenship.’ This state of affairs has attracted criticism from Indians and Indian authorities, as it sets Franco-Tamils apart from the local population, while France looks down on Pondicherians, declaring that ‘their only “raison d’être” is to wait for a certificate of citizenship’ so that they can also enjoy the monetary benefits that being French would grant them. Thus, Pondicherians are portrayed by the French authorities as unhappy with their fate and desperate to enjoy the welfare entitlements associated with French citizenship.

This thesis has contributed to the history of French colonisation and decolonisation by highlighting the uniqueness of French India in the empire and in the post-war era because of its specific temporal and spatial factors. Withdrawal from one of the smallest and the oldest overseas territories posed a challenge partly because of France’s historical presence in India and the disparity between the territories, and partly because of the historical dimensions of Franco-British relations in India, which resulted in France’s special status in India as a subordinate coloniser. France’s colonial discourse was defined by her own colonial failures in India, which helped create the vision of French India as greater than it really was. The study has also brought to light the importance of regional variations within the entity referred to as French India, and, in particular, exposed the case of Chandernagor in opposition to the other four southern territories that would form the Union Territory of Pondichery, making the decolonisation of French India atypical. Like other anomalous annexations such as Macau, Hong Kong, and Zanzibar, the new

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18 Miles, op.cit., p. 125.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
Union Territory of Pondicherry enjoyed a ‘particular’ status within the nation, a direct effect of its colonial past, which also raised the issue of citizenship.

What my analysis of the decolonisation of French India in this thesis shows is that the transfer of sovereignty did not create for a clean slate, but instead promoted the allocation of preferential treatments, often in the form of financial aid, in order to smother any discontent. My analysis highlights that territorial oddities, such as the non-contiguous parcels of the UTP, were never incorporated into the neighbouring states, and that they still retain the territorial peculiarities that characterised them while under French control. They now look like vestiges of a colonial past. But this distinction also points to the difficulties posed by India’s nation-building process. The merger of foreign possessions required a considerable amount of negotiating and was entangled with internal (Jammu-Kashmir) and external (Indochina) factors influencing the diplomatic process. While images and representations of French India helped shape national identities, voices emerging from opposition in the form of regionalism and sub-nationalism threatened the nation-state’s goals. Finally, this study has also pointed out that because the merger of these small territories was carried out in a rather peaceful manner, the particularities of the event have been left unacknowledged in the history of decolonisation, if not altogether forgotten, thus contributing to France’s colonial amnesia about her long presence in India.
Glossary of non-English terms

Afrique Equatoriale Française (AEF): consisted of present-day Congo, Gabon, Central African Republic and Chad

Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF): consisted of present-day Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso (former Upper Volta), Niger, Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Benin (former Dahomey).

Arrack: distilled alcoholic drink made of coconut palm tree

Ashram: a hermitage, spiritual retreat

Bibliothèque nationale de France: French National Library

Brahmins: the first group in the hierarchy of castes, they are scholars and priests

Charkha: spinning wheel, symbol of Gandhi’s independent movement

Cipahi: sepoy, term given to the local French police after the 1857 Mutiny

Collège: establishment that provides secondary education (first cycle)

Comptoirs: outposts, territories, enclaves

Créole or métis: mixed blood person

Darbar, Durbar: the official reception of the native ruler or British viceroy or British ruler

Département: administrative division of France created after the 1789 Revolution

DOM-TOM: départements d’outre-mer – territoires d’outre-mer, French overseas departments and territories were created in 1946.

École: school

École de droit: Law school

École de médecine: School of Medicine

Église: church

Les Établissements français de l’Inde: official name of French India or French Indian Establishments

Dhoti: cloth draped around the lower part of the male, from waist to fee

Factorerie: office or warehouse of former colonial power

Goonda: criminal, thug
**Harijan**: ‘Child of God’, a term used by Gandhi for Dalits or Untouchables

**Hartal**: general strike

**Jati**: communities and sub-communities in India that are often associated with a tradition job, religion or tribe.

**Journal Officiel de l’Inde française**: official gazette of French India

**Journal Officiel de la République française**: official gazette of the French Republic

**Khadi, Khaddar**: cloth made from homespun yarn

**Kṣatriya**: the second group in the caste hierarchy, they are warriors and administrators

**La Compagnie des Indes Orientales**: French East India Company

**Lok Sabha**: Indian Lower House

**Loges**: strips of land over which France claimed sovereignty, acquired in seventeenth and eighteenth century

**Lycée**: establishment that provides secondary education (second cycle) leading to the baccalaureate

**Mala**: a garland

**Mamool**: traditional

**Métis or créole**: mixed blood person

**Ministère des Affaires Étrangères**: Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

**Ministère de la France d’outre-mer**: Ministry of Overseas France, formerly known until 1946 as Ministry of Colonies

**Pandal**: a tent or marquee

**Pettah**: a village, often used to refer to the loges

**Préfet**: the State’s representative in a department of a region

**Renonçant**: a person who has renounced customary law

**Sabha**: a body or an association

**Sari**: draped clothing worn by women of India

**Satyagraha**: truth force

**Satyagrahi**: a follower of satyagraha

**Sepoy**: armed forces recruited locally
Sūdra: the fourth and last group in the hierarchy of castes, they are craftsmen and labourers

Swadesh: of one's own country; swadeshi (adj.)

Swaraj: self-rule, home rule; independence from the occupier

Terrain: strip of land on which French colonial warehouse/s once stood

Toddy: alcoholic drink made from palm tree

Topi: a cap, usually referred as the Gandhian cap

Vaiśyas: the third group in the caste hierarchy, they are merchants and farmers

Varna: caste, consists of four main groups: Brahmin, Kṣatriya, Vaiśya and Sūdra

Vieilles colonies: remnants of the first French colonial empire (1600 to 1814) and included Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Saint-Pierre et Miquelon, the Quatre Communes of Senegal, Île de La Réunion, and the French Indian territories.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1673</td>
<td><em>Compagnie des Indes</em> establishes an enclave in Pondichéry</td>
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<tr>
<td>1688</td>
<td>François Martin obtains authorisation to engage in trade in Karikal</td>
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<td>1690</td>
<td>Chandernagor is founded</td>
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<td>1701</td>
<td><em>Compagnie des Indes</em> establishes its headquarters in Pondichéry</td>
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<td></td>
<td>eight loges are set up and include Cassimbazar, Jougdia, Dacca,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Balassore, Patna, Masulipatam near Yanaoun, Calicut near Mahé, and</td>
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<td>Surat.</td>
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<td>1721</td>
<td>Mahé is established</td>
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<td>1731</td>
<td>an enclave is created at Yanaon</td>
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<td>1756-1763</td>
<td>Seven Years’ War, Treaty of Paris left France with only the five</td>
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<td></td>
<td>enclaves</td>
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<td>1757</td>
<td>Battle of Plassey, assertion of British commercial hegemony over</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>other European powers</td>
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<tr>
<td>1791</td>
<td>Right to elect a deputy is granted to the colonies</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 May</td>
<td>Treaty of Paris: British restored the loges and enclaves of every</td>
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<tr>
<td>1814</td>
<td>kind which were possessed by France on 1 January 1792; they are not</td>
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<td></td>
<td>to erect any fortifications and to maintain only such troops as</td>
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<td></td>
<td>might be necessary for police purposes.</td>
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<td>1815-1830</td>
<td>Bourbon restoration: Louis XVIII rules from 1814 to 1824, then his</td>
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<td></td>
<td>younger brother Charles X reigns from 1824 to 1830</td>
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<td>1830-1848</td>
<td>July Monarchy headed by Louis–Philippe</td>
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<td>Year</td>
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<td>1840</td>
<td>Ordonnance organique grants French India first local representation Assemblée des Notables consists of nominated French and native members on the basis of land ownership. First anti-French campaign caused by underrepresentation of local population</td>
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<td>1845</td>
<td>Karikal riots caused by interference with local customs, British are called to provide military assistance</td>
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<td>1848-1851</td>
<td>Second Republic: French Indian men are allowed to elect a deputy, election takes place in 1849 but the seat is withdrawn. This first exercise of the electoral process causes havoc in French India as the idea of equality challenges French Indian social hierarchies</td>
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<td>1857</td>
<td>Mayor of Pondichéry presents letter to governor of French India supporting French colonialism</td>
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<td>1858</td>
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<td>1860s-1880s</td>
<td>Decree of 1 February calls for the election of a deputy – maintenance of the college system based on two lists of electors.</td>
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<td>1871</td>
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<td>1874</td>
<td>Decree of 24 February calls for the election of a senator</td>
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<td>1877</td>
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<td>1880</td>
<td>Introduction of new administrative system based on communes and local councils</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<tr>
<td>1880-1907</td>
<td>Chanenougam ‘King of French India’, the leader of the Sūdra and a strong partisan of preserving traditional Indian social organisation</td>
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<td>1885</td>
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<td>1905-1911</td>
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<td>1919</td>
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<td>March 1930</td>
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<td>May 1936 – Oct 1938</td>
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<td>June 1936</td>
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<td>30 July 1936</td>
<td>La fusillade de Pondichéry (Pondichéry Shooting Day), twelve dead due to police repression after French Indian workers went on strike demanding the same rights that their co-workers in France</td>
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<td>Sept. 1939-May 1940</td>
<td>'Phoney war' (drôle de guerre)</td>
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<td>June 1940</td>
<td>Charles de Gaulle’s speech on BBC calling for continued resistance to the Germans</td>
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<td>18 June 1940</td>
<td>Chandernagor rallies to de Gaulle, followed six weeks later by the other enclaves</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 June 1940</td>
<td>Chandernagor rallies to de Gaulle, followed six weeks later by the other enclaves</td>
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<td>8 August 1942</td>
<td>'Quit India' campaign is launched by Gandhi and the INC</td>
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<td>Nov 1943-25 July 1944</td>
<td>Deiva Zivaratinam sent as the French Indian delegate to the Assemblée constituante provisoire in Algiers</td>
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<td>Jan-Feb 1944</td>
<td>Brazzaville conference</td>
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<td>6 June 1944</td>
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<td>25 Aug 1944</td>
<td>Liberation of Paris</td>
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<td>8 May 1945</td>
<td>Victory Day marks the end of WWII</td>
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<td>23 August 1945</td>
<td>Sétif repression (Algeria)</td>
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<td>October 1946</td>
<td>Second Referendum: Constitution of Fourth Republic narrowly accepted, French Union replaces the former colonial empire</td>
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<td>1946</td>
<td>Lebanon and Syria granted independence</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>End of tripartism with the expulsion of the Communist ministers</td>
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<td>15 Aug 1947</td>
<td>End of tripartism with the expulsion of the Communist ministers</td>
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<td>1947</td>
<td>End of tripartism with the Madagascar insurrection (March-July 1947)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>Clement Attlee announces in February that Britain will withdraw from India</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 Aug 1947</td>
<td>India becomes independent, with Nehru as Prime Minister</td>
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<td>Date</td>
<td>Event</td>
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<td>28 Aug 1947</td>
<td>joint Franco-Indian declaration expressing desire to amicably settle the future of enclaves</td>
</tr>
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<td>6 Oct 1947</td>
<td>eight loges are returned to India</td>
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<td>20 Jan 1948</td>
<td>Chandernagor claims right to secede</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Jan 1948</td>
<td>assassination of Gandhi</td>
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<td>1 April 1948</td>
<td>denunciation of Customs Union Agreement</td>
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<td>18 June 1948</td>
<td>French Overseas Ministry announces in French national assembly that government will grant right to self-determination</td>
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<td>18 September</td>
<td>Hyderabad joins the Indian Union after a five-day armed campaign</td>
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<td>19 June 1949</td>
<td>referendum of Chandernagor, votes to join the Union</td>
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<td>January 1950</td>
<td>Constitution of the Republic of India is proclaimed</td>
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<td>2 Feb 1951</td>
<td>Cession Treaty of Chandernagor is signed</td>
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<td>May 1954</td>
<td>French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, Indochina</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 July 1954</td>
<td>move towards autonomous status for Tunisia</td>
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<tr>
<td>21 Oct 1954</td>
<td>recognised by Mendès-France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Nov 1954</td>
<td>India’s French Establishments (change of name) order, 1954 changes the name of the enclaves to the State of Pondicherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Start of Algerian war</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 March 1955</td>
<td>inauguration of the Institut Français de Pondichery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 May 1956</td>
<td>Treaty of Cession signed by France and India, India ratifies the Treaty two days later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1962</td>
<td>following the Evian accord of March, a referendum is held on 1 July which approves the independence of Algeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1962</td>
<td>French Parliament ratifies the Treaty of Cession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 August</td>
<td>de jure transfer of French Indian enclaves</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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