

## CHAPTER - VI

### Merger Movement and the Transfer of Power

The demand for merger of the French Indian settlements with Indian Union without a referendum became the central controversy around which India and France fenced over the next three years. The *Député* and the *Assemblée Représentative* elections in 1951 witnessed large scale violence and in the absence of congenial conditions, the holding of free and fair referendum was rendered impossible. The rivalry among Lambert Saravane, V. Subbiah and Edouard Goubert and the clashes between pro-mergerists and anti-mergerists during the time of elections and after saw large number of exodus of people from French Indian settlements to the border villages of Indian territories in order to escape the harassment and humiliation from anti-mergerists and the French Indian authorities. About 1051 families from Pondicherry alone had taken refuge in Indian Union territory.<sup>1</sup> These refugee camps became the centres of pro-merger activities.

The government of India, Indian Consul General at Pondicherry, the Provincial Congress Committees, the Indian press and other organisations were firm in continuing to give formidable support to the pro-merger activists and giving shelter to political refugees. The merger movement in French India suffered from many limitations. Earlier in 1950 S.K. Banerjee, the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry reported that “the Government of France is determined to keep French India in any case. It is a matter of prestige and the local officials including members of the police force and the judiciary have been given definite instructions to see to it that India does

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<sup>1</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, Vol.III, Part- I, 18 April 1953, p.2228.

not win the referendum.”<sup>2</sup> The Indian authorities tried to gear up the pro-merger activities in French India. With the efforts of N.V. Rajkumar the pro-merger committees of Pondicherry and Karaikal were formed to intensify pro-merger activities and to unite against the anti-merger forces, but the pro-mergerists could not do so. The pro-merger committees formed by N.V. Rajkumar consisted of diverse elements, having little in common, had almost become spent forces and refused to bestir themselves. There was complete inactivity on the part of the various pro-merger groups either due to personal differences or fear of violence at the hands of French India Socialist Party. Denial of civil rights and *goondaism* unleashed by the ruling Socialist party and anti-mergerist ruffians enjoying the patronage of the French authorities, were no doubt major obstacles for pro-mergerists. The later were frightened because they knew that they could be crushed in a minute if they raised their heads.<sup>3</sup> Hence they preferred to remain inactive rather than to come out in the open.

The lack of honesty and integrity as well as shady deals on the part of the leaders of French India prompted S.K. Banerjee to reach a conclusion that “these conditions in French India were hardly favourable for a fair referendum, and India stood little chance of winning the vote if a referendum did come about...the only solution to the French Indian problem would be by way of negotiation at Government level, and in the meanwhile our objective might be to wriggle out on the June 1948 agreement with as good as grace as possible.”<sup>4</sup> The policy of terrorism had virtually stopped pro-merger political activities. There was desperate need for intensification of popular movement in French India and the government of India tried several methods

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<sup>2</sup> File No: D. 167/50, (35) R&I Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I., New Delhi.

<sup>3</sup> File No: D. 2349/50, (35) R&I Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I., New Delhi.

<sup>4</sup> File No: D. 1262/50, (35) R&I Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I., New Delhi.

to encourage pro-merger leaders to organize a mass movement. The pro-merger Congress leaders of Pondicherry and Karaikal - Sellane and Ambroise, Xavéry and Léon St. Jean - were averse to fighting against the French authorities and reluctant to take any risk. Saravane had already become irrelevant. A leader capable of facing the challenge was necessary.

An important decision was taken in the middle of 1951 by the government of India for the withdrawal of the arrest warrant in force against V. Subbiah. Almost along with the French Indian authorities the government of India had issued warrant of arrest on him on many counts and more particularly to prevent the extension of Communist activities in South Arcot district. Since 1948 he had to go under ground and had to move from place to place to evade arrest. He was a good organiser. He had still a good network in and around Pondicherry. In spite of the strong-arm policy of Goubert many mill-hands were still loyal to V. Subbiah.<sup>5</sup> It was around July 1951 V.V. Giri, then Indian High Commissioner in Ceylon, visited Pondicherry at the behest of Nehru with a view to making an on the spot study of the situation. He expressed his desire to meet V. Subbiah who was at that time hiding in Madras. A meeting between them, however, took place at Madras and they discussed about the “freedom movement” inside the French Indian settlements.<sup>6</sup> Soon after this the warrant of arrest on V. Subbiah was revoked. Giri might have had a hand in the withdrawal of the warrant of arrest. The cancellation of the arrest warrant against V. Subbiah by the government of India was a crucial turning point in the history of merger movement of French India. V. Subbiah, now staunchly anti-French and a formidable foe of Goubert, geared up his activities along the borders of Pondicherry,

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<sup>5</sup> File No: D. 1467/50, (35) R&I Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I., New Delhi.

<sup>6</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, p. 295.

Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. He began to co-ordinate the activities of the Communist party workers as well as the pro-merger people who were living as refugees in camps on the border villages. The pro-merger movement entered a new phase from the middle of 1951.

### **Merger Movement: Tension on the Borders**

V. Subbiah and the Communists established liberation camps in places like Villupuram, Kottakuppam and Cuddalore near Pondicherry; Tranquebar, Porayar, Nagapatinam and Nannilam near Karaikal; and in places like Tellicherry and Badagara near Mahe.<sup>7</sup> The *Sudandiram* (Communist press) was clandestinely transported from Pondicherry to Villupuram and started functioning from there. V. Subbiah called all the pro-merger leaders to unite and to forge a united front to fulfil the historic task of liberating French India from French domination and its unification with Indian Union.<sup>8</sup>

As days progressed the tension on the borders of French Indian settlements had been increasing and skirmishes between the refugees camping on the borders and anti-mergerists occurred. In Pondicherry, gangs of *goondas* crossed the border in pursuit of some political vendetta and assaults and intimidation directed against those known to be working against Goubert, the Socialist party leader, in the elections. The border incident at Moratandi (Indian territory near Pondicherry) on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1951 testifies to the high handed manner resorted to by the French India Socialist Party to put down all opposition. Four hundred supporters of Goubert assembled at Moratandi to receive Goubert who was returning from Paris. Before his arrival, this

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<sup>7</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, pp. 295-296.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Cyril Antony, ed. *Gazetteer of India: Union Territory of Pondicherry*. Vol. I, Pondicherry, 1982, p. 260.

crowd, among who were some *goondas*, attacked the refugees' camps at the border, most of the refugees being Lambert Saravanes' supporters.<sup>9</sup> Daylight assaults were also made on pro-mergerists, including textile workers staying in Pondicherry. To this was also added the tense situation which had developed in the Kottakuppam frontier, the nearest Indian territory bordering the town of Pondicherry, following the posting of armed police on the Indian soil and of French police units on the French Indian territory with a distance of only a few yards in between the two forces. The anti-mergerists conducted border raids from the French India territory causing assault on persons and damage of property.<sup>10</sup> As *goondaism* went on unabated, even diplomatic personnel and their associates had to pass their days under the shadow of fear. A police force was stationed in front of the house of the Indian Consul General and his attaché.<sup>11</sup>

While, V. Subbiah started to hold meetings at the borders, not far from the settlements, exhorting the people of French India to merge with the Indian Union. There was another person who was doing the same but in a different way. He was none other than Dadala Ramanayya who believed some strong-arm methods to bring about the merger of French India with the Indian Union. Dadala was an extremely independent minded man to put himself at the service of any political party was a long time friend of the veteran politician Sellane Naicker and had close rapport with Lambert Saravane and other pro-mergerists. A Volunteer Corps was organised under his bid to mobilize the masses in the French Indian settlements. He had been actively operating on the borders of Pondicherry with the pro-mergerist refugees in places like Villupuram, Vallavanur, Sinna Kenganankupam, Pallianelianour, and Suramangalam

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<sup>9</sup> *Indian Express*, 9 December 1951 and *French Pockets in India*. Free India Publications, 1952, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> *French Pockets in India*. Free India Publications, 1952, p.19.

<sup>11</sup> *The Hindu*, 1 November 1951.

and on Bahour borders. Dadala began to harass bus passengers who were not favourable to merger with the Indian Union when they were travelling on the way to Villupuram. He targeted Goubert and his men especially. His group even prevented merchant-peddlers from entering the French territory. In this he seems to have had the support of some Indian government officials such as R.K. Tandon, the Indian Consul General in Pondicherry.<sup>12</sup> There was no doubt that Dadala sometimes committed excesses and naturally V. Subbiah was infuriated by the activities of Dadala and went against him and his group, calling them “brigands”. Ménard lodged a strong protest to R.K. Tandon to take measures necessary for stopping the agitation, spearheaded by Dadala on Pondicherry borders and urged him to restrain Dadala. But the Consul General dismissed the complaints of the French authorities and certified that he had not committed any act of violence or terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

The tension in French India settlements was in the ascendancy after 1951 and the differences between India and France went on widening. French charge of not reducing economic pressures by India and Indian charge of French failure to improve the standard of political life in French India stood in the way of reconciliation. To this was added the border skirmishes in which the two governments’ levelled charges and counter-charges against each other and which further vitiated the Indo-French relations. It was in a meeting of the Indian Foreign Affairs Committee of the cabinet held on 6<sup>th</sup> March 1952 that the Indian government’s policy towards Portuguese and French settlements in India was discussed. In the meeting Nehru stressed on “the necessity of making the maximum use of any incidents which may come to our notice (Indian government) regarding the ill-treatment of Portuguese and French Indians

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<sup>12</sup> *Indian Express*, 22, October 1952 and J.B.P. More. *The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam from French rule to integration with India*. M.S., 2007, pp. 173-174.

<sup>13</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India, Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-1954*. Institute Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 201.

(they were, to use the Nehru's words, 'potential' Indians) by giving them publicity both in the Indian and the foreign press, and by making a strong protest to the Governments concerned."<sup>14</sup> Turning to the proposals made in the Ministry of External Affairs note, Nehru said:

no stress should be laid by India on the holding of a referendum or the visit of the neutral observers to French India. If the question of referendum is raised, we can say that we have long waited for it but the proper conditions for it have not been created yet and are not likely to be created. He added, we should offer the French a Custom Union in order to restore normal economic conditions between French India and India and to put a stop to smuggling. If the French did not agree to this, we should take such restrictive measures as were financially and administratively possible.

He believed that such measures may have a good effect on the morale of the pro-Indian elements in French India, and would also enhance the prestige of the government of India.<sup>15</sup> This clearly indicated the changing attitude of the Indian government's policy towards foreign settlements in India. It was in the meeting that a strong and clear cut policy was drawn. Unable to tolerate the growing violence against pro-mergerists in French India, the government of India went on publishing (May 1952) certain portions of the neutral observers' report to the press.<sup>16</sup> This provoked a rift between the two governments. The French Foreign Ministry found itself embarrassed and it charged the government of India of "bad faith," of violation of norms of secrecy and of misleading the population and of tendentious publication of the report. This, the former observed, was done with a view to justifying the impossibility of holding the referendum in French India and expressed its displeasure and lodged a strong protest to the government of India.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-17, Series II, p.563.

<sup>15</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-17, Series II, pp. 563-564.

<sup>16</sup> France had supplied the report to India "by courtesy," it was considered as confidential and not for public consumption.

<sup>17</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India, Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-1954*. Institute Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 200.

The virulent act of repressive measures on pro-mergerists went on unabated, in the commune of Bahour. The people of the commune had been feeling the pinch of economic restrictions imposed by the Indian government. They had been suffering from acute shortage of food and essential commodities. They protested. At a public meeting held on May 1952, the people of the commune demanded merger with Indian Union. They believed that by joining the Indian Union regular supply of food would be assured. Some elected Municipal members of Bahour also threatened to resign and declared openly in favour of merger with Indian Union without referendum.<sup>18</sup> The French authorities retaliated by adopting repressive measures and anti-merger elements terrorised them. The death of Venkatesa Padayachi, a pro-French Municipal Councillor of Bahour in Cuddalore hospital, caused by a wound inflicted by some unknown persons further enraged the anti-mergerists. E. Thangavelu Gounder, the Deputy Mayor of Bahour Municipality, was blacklisted for having expressed his pro-Indian sentiments and asked the French to quit the settlements without referendum. He was harassed by the French police. It was further reported that Chinnaswami Iyer, the French police Inspector, aided by ruffians, had been going from house to house, beating men and women and threatening to drive them out of their homes. Signatures were obtained under threat on a memorandum which made out that the villagers were shown as pro-French. This resulted in daily exodus of pro-merger French nationals from Bahour leaving their un-harvested crops and their houses with cattle and properties behind to adjoining Indian Union villages.<sup>19</sup> Dadala later established his camp there, holding meetings and passing resolutions condemning *goondaism* in French Indian territories.

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<sup>18</sup> *Indian Express*, 5 October 1952.

<sup>19</sup> *Indian Express*, 5 October 1952 and *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, p. 673.

Ménard banned all the political activities in French India. He refused to give permission to a Students' Congress demonstration on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1952 against the French proposal to remove sea customs in Pondicherry.<sup>20</sup> V. Subbiah who was active in Madras was visiting the borders and holding meetings at Cuddalore and other places. A French Indian Refugees conference was called at Cuddalore on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1952. He was trying to forge a "Democratic Front" and appealed to the leaders of the political parties to sink their difference and join together "for the common cause of liberating our country from the French imperialist rule."<sup>21</sup> Sellane Naicker, the Pondicherry Merger Committee leader, wanted to give wide publicity to the various mishappenings in French India and was busy meeting with Indian Union leaders and press people. He acquainted them with the problems, particularly the atrocities of the French police, anti-mergerists and their leaders.<sup>22</sup> This angered the anti-mergerists. He was warned several times not to lead the pro-merger movement.<sup>23</sup> The anti-mergerists wanted to punish Sellane Naicker and impede the progress of the merger movement. On 29<sup>th</sup> August 1952, some hooligans entered the house of Sellane Naicker and shot him. Fortunately for him the bullet hit him on of his left thigh and he was removed to Madras for treatment. This heinous act shocked everyone and it again proved the prevalence of organised *goondaism* in French India. It was a political move by the party in power which had sent a team of *goondas* under Saigon Rajamanickam for that dastardly act.<sup>24</sup> R.K. Tandon, Indian Consul General, was also a target of attack. A plot to kill him was hatched by a group of men who were known to Ménard and this surprised Stanislas Ostrorog, the French Ambassador at New Delhi, when Ménard

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<sup>20</sup> *Indian Express*, 15 August 1952.

<sup>21</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 1, July 1952 and V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, p. 297.

<sup>22</sup> Sellane Naicker's Personal Diary, unpublished, pp.18-20.

<sup>23</sup> *The Hindu*, 31 August 1952.

<sup>24</sup> Sellane Naicker's Personal Diary, unpublished, pp.18-20.





broke the news to him.<sup>25</sup> The policy of persecution continued in the border villages. By October 1952, the total situation in Bahour deteriorated; the armed goondas often raided the refugee camps, there were clashes between refugees on the one hand and French Indian police and aided ruffians on the other. The French Indian police aimed to arrest Dadala and his men when they entered French Indian territory. Detention and interrogation of Indian nationals and arrest of pro-mergerists continued. It was reported that often clashes occurred between French Indian *goondas* and Indian police injuring several police men.<sup>26</sup>

### **Jawaharlal Nehru and the End of Plebiscite**

Since the activities of the French authorities and anti-mergerists affected the people and the government of India directly, it was no longer possible for them to remain silent spectators. The government of India lodged strong protests to the French government in Paris. Soon Nehru visited Madras, the French Indian leaders including Sellane Naicker, Dadala and R.K. Tandon met him there and again brought to his attention the daily story of oppression and denial of civil liberties and also the heinous attempt made on the life of Sellane Naicker. They stated that under the present conditions of repression by the French government and terrorism through *goondas*, no political activity was possible and strongly urged Nehru to arrive at a settlement. Sellane Naicker even stated that if Nehru so ordered, they could occupy the outlying French enclaves as there were about 7,000 to 8,000 refugees dispersed all along the frontier and there was in addition the Indian population to help them.<sup>27</sup> Nehru however ruled out the use of force to resolve the problem.<sup>28</sup> He explained to them that

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<sup>25</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India, Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-1954*. Institute Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> *Indian Express*, 5 and 12 October 1952.

<sup>27</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 675-677.

<sup>28</sup> Already apart from the Communists, Congressmen themselves criticized Nehru's policy of moderation so far.

the policy of India was determined by India's national interests and these interests demanded that French India must integrate with India. Even if the pro-mergerists inside French India were helpless, merger must take place. For this he suggested the pro-mergerists to build up their strength and advised to do anything else that was possible inside French India.<sup>29</sup>

The Very next day on 9<sup>th</sup> October 1952, in a public meeting Nehru declared that the foreign settlements like Pondicherry and Goa must inevitably become parts of Indian Union. "It is fantastic for any one to imagine that bits of Portuguese and French Empire can continue in India," he remarked. Referring to French India he added

Three years ago there was some kind of an agreement between us and the French Government about some plebiscite and preparations were made. That has not taken place yet. Meanwhile, methods of gangsterism have flourished. An atmosphere of goondaism has been created there, and if a person talks about merger with India, goondas are likely to smash his head. It is an extraordinary state of affairs.<sup>30</sup>

He further added

The idea of plebiscite had been crushed by the other side through fraud and deceit...and attempts had been made to create conditions of terrorism in order to prevent people from voting for merger with India.

So Nehru ended by saying that "There is then an end of plebiscite business."<sup>31</sup>

Nehru's declaration was followed by a note of protestation to the French government. Nehru's open declaration of denunciation of the idea of a referendum in French India created such a sensation and carried special significances. This was not only meant as a moral boost to the pro-merger elements in French India but also was an obvious reference to India's stand on the question of holding a plebiscite in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

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<sup>29</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 675-677.

<sup>30</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 677-678.

<sup>31</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 677-678.

As a reaction to Nehru's Madras declaration, Pierre Pflimlin, French Overseas Minister, replying to a question before the National Assembly's Overseas Territorial Committee, said that the methods of violence which the Prime Minister of India had referred to existed "exclusively on Indian territories" and he particularly pointed out the activities of Dadala who, accompanied by a band of armed people, had been creating havoc along the Franco-Indian borders as well as in the French enclaves and complained that the government of India had taken no steps whatsoever to stop his activities. He denied the existence of such *goondaism* in French India. He further said that Nehru, whose moral authority was universally respected, had been "misinformed."<sup>32</sup> He also declared that the French government would soon prepare a dossier of incidents which would belie the statement of Nehru. He remarked France, for her part, stands by the 1948 Agreement. She could never accept claims to dispose of peoples forming part of the French community against their will. This would be contrary to the Constitution of the French Republic and to the democratic principles guaranteed by the United Nations.<sup>33</sup>

Nehru's Madras declaration was followed by the *Communiqué* (12<sup>th</sup> October 1952) of the government of India to the French government in which India again deplored the failure of the French government to take any step to set right the defects in the political life of the French settlements.<sup>34</sup> The political life of the French Indian settlements was already marked by the absence of freedom of speech, press or association and by the outbreak of political terrorism. Numerous incidents had taken place due to the inactivity or in connivance with the local authorities in Indian territory bordering the settlements and the various representations made by the Indian

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<sup>32</sup> *Indian Express*, 22 October 1952.

<sup>33</sup> *Indian Express*, 22 October 1952.

<sup>34</sup> *Indian Express*, 12 October 1952 and *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 679-680.

Consul General in Pondicherry and the Indian Embassy at Paris which had gone unheeded. The existing state of affairs, the Indian note averred, had convinced the government of India that no useful purpose would be served by proceeding further on the basis of having a referendum in the French settlements. Under such a situation the government of India was constrained to inform the French government that the government of India did not consider themselves bound any longer by the 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1948 Agreement. The government of India however favoured negotiations to take place between the two governments on the basis of direct transfer of territories to India leaving constitutional and other matters to be settled by negotiations.<sup>35</sup> For India any negotiations on this basis would be welcome.

France, in reply to India's note apprised that it was impossible on the part of the French government to agree to Indian demand of direct transfer of the French Indian settlements to Indian Union without a referendum. The French note pointed out that the inhabitants of the French settlements, whatever their origin, had been taking part in the political life of France since the Third Republic by being elected to the French National Assembly, the Council of Republic and the Assembly of French Union. Hence it would not be possible to dispose of their future without their consent. The same note had suggested an enquiry by the neutral observers' corps to study the situation in her settlements in south India and to enquire into India's allegation that the conditions prevailing there were not conducive to holding a free and fair referendum.<sup>36</sup> By suggesting an enquiry by neutrals France believed that it would put India in a difficult position and alleged that India was now opposed to holding a referendum because even if it were favourable to India, it could set a precedent which

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<sup>35</sup> *Indian Express*, 12 October 1952 and *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-19, Series II, pp. 679-680.

<sup>36</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-20, p. 528.

would affect Indian interests elsewhere (especially in Kashmir).<sup>37</sup> India however rejected the French suggestion for an enquiry by neutral observers' corps and Nehru said "we have mentioned certain specific cases and we are convinced that if the French Government wants to have any enquiry into it is entirely for them to decide."<sup>38</sup>

In the meantime the French Indian government prepared a list of incidents that had taken place since the month of November 1951 and forwarded it (13<sup>th</sup> October) to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. The list included 98 incidents of which one French Indian inhabitant died and 70 were wounded. The list particularly recounted the misdeeds of Dadala.<sup>39</sup> The government of India, on the other hand, released an official *Communiqué* on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1952, evidently in reply to the French list, detailing therein, "350 grave cases of aggression, incendiarism and acts of banditry" in the French settlements. The complicity of the French police in these cases, India held, rendered referendum to determine the future of the French settlements impossible.<sup>40</sup> The *Communiqué* claimed that during this period in Mahe 84 percent of the population had fled on account of "terror" stalking the tiny settlements and had taken in shelter in India. The *Communiqué* further added that

The prevalence of smuggling had created a criminal class in the French settlements but organized use of goondas for political purpose to terrorise people known for their desire to merge with India started only when the political party in power found that it could not survive against the resurgence of national feeling without the use of force.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Aloo J. Dastur, "India and Foreign Possessions in India" in M.S. Rajan, ed. *India's Foreign Relations during the Nehru Era*. p. 175.

<sup>38</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-20, p. 528.

<sup>39</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India, Liberation Movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-1954*. Institute Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 205.

<sup>40</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-20, p. 524 and *French Pockets in India*. Free India Publications, 1952, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-20, p. 524 and *French Pockets in India*. Free India Publications, 1952, p. 18.

So, Nehru again in a press conference (2<sup>nd</sup> November) said that “the whole idea of a plebiscite is just dead and gone, it can’t be done.”<sup>42</sup> Nehru’s denunciation of the June 1948 agreement and India’s rejection to accept referendum as a means to solve the fate of the French settlements closed one chapter of the Indo-French relations and opened a new one – a chapter which facilitated the gradual process of merger with Indian Union through a tortuous process of negotiations.

### **Economic Measures and the Continuation of the Stalemate**

There was another factor which gave a jolt to Franco-Indian relations. This was born out of the economic conditions of French India which was badly affected by the measures taken by the government of India to prevent smuggling. This prompted France to accuse the Indian government of having imposed a complete blockade on French India. In 1952 the volume of contraband trade increased and huge quantities of gold, diamond, watches, textile, and luxury goods food stuff etc; flowed into Pondicherry to be smuggled to Indian territories.<sup>43</sup> The government of India had to enforce strict measures to stop it. This was the creation of barbed wire fences (See Appendix-XII) on land frontiers around French India to prevent smuggling, the introduction of permit system to check the traffic of contraband between the French establishments and the Indian Union, etc. The adaptation of tougher administrative measures of India to prevent illegal exports and imports ended in the imposition of more restrictions on the movements of men and merchandises between French India and its enclaves and the Indian Union.

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<sup>42</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-20, p. 524.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, 15 tonnes of gold were imported into Pondicherry in 1951-1952 and this was 25 per cent higher than in 1949-1950. The actual need of Pondicherry was 500 kilograms per year. A substantial portion of the imported gold was smuggled into Indian Union where its imports were prohibited (Georges Chaffard. *Les Carnets secrets de la decolonization*. Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1965, p. 216).

Following these measures prices of food stuff—a majority of them were available only in Indian Union and exported to French India—had gone up. Merchants of Pondicherry and Karaikal demanded prices well over 60 percent of those obtaining in Indian border villages.<sup>44</sup> Moreover failure of seasonal rains had further worsened the food position in French India. Mayors of the communes who were mostly pro-French denied landholders who had pro-Indian feelings to take or sell their produce in the French settlements by refusing to give them necessary permits. Pro-French elements were putting all sorts of obstacles in the way of pro-Indians cultivating their lands. Contracts for Municipal and other development works were given only to those who were pro-French. Such people were also given licence for running ration shops in the communes.<sup>45</sup> The same practice was, of course, followed by the Indian Consul General. Licence for kerosene, coal etc. were given to those who were recommended by Merger Committee leaders and who agreed to pay for it.<sup>46</sup> The ration system had collapsed. To this was added the November (1952) cyclone which further reduced stock of food grains by 5,000 tonnes. Prices of rice and other provisions had reached an unprecedented height. To meet the deficit, the members of the *Assemblée Représentative* demanded an aid of 1,50,000 rupees from Paris. Rice had to be imported from Siam and Burma during February 1953.<sup>47</sup>

Another important reason which put the economic conditions of French Indian settlements in utter doldrums was an acute shortage of Indian currency notes and coins of small denominations in Pondicherry. A study of the problem by the local French government revealed that the main cause was the deficit of French India's commercial balance with India. The Indian Indo-China Bank, which issued currencies

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<sup>44</sup> *Indian Express*, 2 February 1953.

<sup>45</sup> *Indian Express*, 26 February 1953.

<sup>46</sup> *Karai Mail*, 1 December 1953.

<sup>47</sup> *Le trait d'union*, January 1953.

of rupees 1, 2 and 50 denominations,<sup>48</sup> was responsible for over-issuing Indo-China Bank notes and the encouragement it gave to clandestine gold and silver trade.<sup>49</sup> This naturally led to a high demand for Indian currency and French currency was converted by the people at a heavy discount. This shortage of Indian currency badly hit trade with India. The picture became gloomier by November of 1952 as the exchange rate of 2 percent in May for Indo-China Bank notes rose to 15 percent by November.<sup>50</sup> The people of Pondicherry were all inconvenienced by the shortage of small denomination coins. Prices of commodities imported from Indian Union to Pondicherry had risen.

This state of things had aggravated the distress of the poor and middle class people and consequent on this the employees of the French Indian government demanded a 75 percent dearness allowance.<sup>51</sup> The condition of the labourers in Pondicherry was extremely bad. Weaving industry had already become extinct. The French Indian administration did nothing for improving yarn and cotton for the local handloom weavers and many hundred weavers had left the French Indian territory in order to eke out a living. Strikes were going on in Anglo-French Textile Company and in Savanna Mill. The striking workers were demanding bonus to cope up with the erratic behaviour of French India economy. In Karaikal labourers were also demanding enhanced wages and salaried employees higher dearness allowances.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> These as well as the Indian currency notes and coins were in circulation. The Indo-China Bank notes were valid only in Pondicherry and not in other three settlements where Indian currency was the sole legal tender.

<sup>49</sup> Since the abolition of sea customs of the war time on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1949, Pondicherry again became one of the world's five free ports, enjoying absolute immunity from restrictions of imports and currencies. Naturally it attracted all kinds of commercial adventurers, monetary speculators and smugglers. They all flourished under the encouragement of the Indo-China Bank which gave practically unrestricted credit against imports for a commission on boom time basis. That it was able to do by inflating its currency issue by eight times.

<sup>50</sup> *Indian Express*, 23 May 1953.

<sup>51</sup> *The Hindu*, 6 May 1953.

<sup>52</sup> *Indian Express*, 16 February 1953.

The poverty of the peasants and the workers badly affected the social life of French India. The moral fabric of the society was tainted and virtually led a good part of the population to practise smuggling on a scale, small or large.

When this was the economic condition, the French Indian administration proposed to enhance taxes. Already house tax had been increased. People had to bear the brunt of licence fees, taxes from landed goods and income tax. The French India *Assemblée Représentative* opposed the move and rejected the proposal.<sup>53</sup> For the first time in French Indian history, members of the *Assemblée Représentative* took a firm stand and rejected the government's proposal. The *Assemblée Représentative* demanded that Indo-China Bank should stop issue of currency for the time being and finally passed a resolution.<sup>54</sup> Later the same assembly had to retrace its steps in connection with turnover tax. It was a tax of 3 percent imposed on all foreign imported goods. But in the face of strong protest from the merchants of Pondicherry, Karaikal and Yanam the *Assemblée Représentative* had to exempt Indian goods from the purview of the tax.<sup>55</sup> The merchants and students of Karaikal observed a total *hartal* (strike) against the turnover tax.<sup>56</sup>

Economy of French Mahe and Yanam was badly hit by measures taken by the government of India. There had been a large scale smuggling of consumer's goods from these settlements to Indian territory.<sup>57</sup> This prompted the government of India to strengthen the customs regulations since 21<sup>st</sup> May 1953 and to redouble the customs forces at the border for their stricter enforcement. The government of India had to

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<sup>53</sup> *Dinamani*, 13 February 1953.

<sup>54</sup> *Dinamani*, 13 February 1953.

<sup>55</sup> *Karai Mail*, 1 December 1953.

<sup>56</sup> *Karai Mail*, 15 October 1953.

<sup>57</sup> The value of the goods detected by Indian customs while being smuggled out of Yanam during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 1952 to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1953 was rupees 1, 25, 000 and the duty involved was rupees 51,000 (Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, 21 April 1953).

take these measures to check or prevent smuggling. This also resulted in the stoppage of the entry of all goods of Indian origin, liable to export duty or cess, into Mahe and Yanam. The French Indian government complained that these measures had adversely affected the economic condition of Mahe and accused the government of India of having imposed a complete blockade on Mahe. The French authorities strongly protested against these arbitrary and unilateral measures and pointed out that the Indian action amounted to a violation of the July agreement of 1918 which placed Mahe in Customs Union with India.<sup>58</sup> R.K. Tandon visited Mahe for the purpose of studying on the spot the “hardship” alleged to have been caused to the people of Mahe consequent on the institution of customs restrictions by the government of India in the Mahe borders.<sup>59</sup> However, R.K. Tandon in his report refuted the charge that India had imposed economic blockade on Mahe. He pointed out that only luxury goods had been interdicted for exportation to Mahe. No food item, except tea, figured in the prohibited list. He also maintained that it did not appear to him that the inhabitants of Mahe were experiencing any particular inconvenience or difficulty.<sup>60</sup> R.K. Tandon also strongly refuted the French contention that the convention of 1918 had been violated because the Indian customs cordon was situated on Indian borders. C. E. Bharatan, the leader of *Mahajana Sabha* also said that there was no blockade in Mahe. “The Mahe Administrators and the French supporters are making a mountain out of a mole ... with the intention of creating a sensation in foreign countries....,” he added.<sup>61</sup> However, the Indian government felt that a complete embargo on food exports would hit the common people and, with the French exploiting the situation,

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<sup>58</sup> *The Hindu*, 13 June 1953.

<sup>59</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 21 June 1953.

<sup>60</sup> *The Hindu*, 20 June 1953.

<sup>61</sup> *The Hindu*, 20 June 1953.

the pro-merger movement might suffer. Certain relaxations were made in order to mitigate the hardships of the people.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, the French government, on request from French Indian government, sent two French financial experts in January 1953. They visited Pondicherry, studied the economic situation and along with other suggestions and recommended the establishment of Indian sea custom at Pondicherry as the only means of averting economic crisis in French India.<sup>63</sup> Ménard during his visit to France in March (1953) also discussed the economic crisis along with other problems. In its note of 26<sup>th</sup> October 1953 the French Indian authorities informed the French Overseas Ministry that French India's participation in the sea custom union would usher in better economic relations between French Indian settlements and Indian Union. Nevertheless, it might generate political consequences affecting the maintenance of French sovereignty over the settlements. They feared that it might also enhance Indian interference into the administrative affairs of French India.<sup>64</sup> Because of the misconception of the French government, the Indian offer of the re-establishment of the sea customs union was twisted and practically turned down.

Political and economic crises in Pondicherry were deepening and there was a fresh outbreak of violence since the middle of 1953 following the formation of a new political party called "French India Labour Party". Disgusted with the misrule of French India Socialist Party, André Gaebélé founded the French India Labour Party with a view to ending injustice and maintaining self-respect and appealed to the people to join his party fearlessly. This new party was, in fact, propped up by Ménard

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<sup>62</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-23, p. 550.

<sup>63</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 28 February 1953.

<sup>64</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India: Liberation movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-54*. Institut Française de Pondichéry, 1997, pp. 215-217.

to undermine the preponderance of the Socialist party which had been enjoying uninterrupted patronage of the French authorities. Ménard who was already disillusioned both with Goubert and V. Subbiah, in his note to the Minister of the French Overseas Empire, observed that if the Socialist party was abandoned (for their excesses), the Communists would reappear and continue to play among the workers the same role they had played in 1948 and in such an eventuality the integration of French settlements with India could hardly be avoided. In his opinion, the Communists were more intransigent than the Congressites in this respect.<sup>65</sup> Tired of the misdeeds of the French India Socialist Party, Ménard was determined to throw it from its position of primacy. Ménard supported André Gaebélé-a loyal Franco-Indian, to organize the French India Labour Party. Since the 1948 Municipal elections, the French India Socialist Party had practically become the arbiter of the French Indian situation. The French Indian authorities became totally dependant on this party for its survival and fully identified with it. They believed that on Goubert alone depended the results of the referendum because he alone could bag the huge support necessary to win the electoral contest. Actually the leaders of the party utilised the opportunity in a skilful manner. Murder, arson, intimidation, corruption, misrule of power and involvement in smuggling went on unhindered. The misdeeds of the party were passed on as misdeeds committed by the French. This seemed embarrassing to the French Indian government. It is really unfortunate that it took the French authorities such a long time to unearth the true character of the French India Socialist Party and its leaders. Differences were just coming to surface. Differences between the two partners of power deepened resulting in a complete parting thereof.

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<sup>65</sup> Cited in Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India: Liberation movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-54*. Institut Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p.202.

However, the formation of a new party in the French Indian political scene was a challenge to Goubert. Jittery of criticism and intolerant of rivals, the Socialist party *goondas* swooped down upon the members and sympathisers of the French India Labour Party. They unleashed a wave of terror by attacking the newly founded party's members in Pondicherry town and also at Thengaithittu, Odiampetu, Periapet, Pillaithottam, Panttakkadai, Thandavankupam and other villages. Apart from this, a party of 60 *goondas* raided the house of Tangavel Gramani at Pillaithottam, assaulted him as well as the members of his family and drove them away from their house. The house, garden and all other belongings to Tangavel were also looted. The *goondas* also raided 8 other houses in different villages and did similar havoc.<sup>66</sup> A member of the Pondicherry Merger Committee said, as reported by *The Hindu*, that the situation was rapidly deteriorating and labourers and workers were suffering. It was reported that even French officials had sought the permission of Paris authorities to be relieved of their posts even before the expiry of the terms of their appointment.<sup>67</sup>

In a conference held at Cuddalore, the French India Refugees Committee presided over by V. Subbiah and Mourougassamy Clémenceau, leaders of the French India Communist Party, adopted a resolution demanding immediate fusion of French Indian settlements with India. They called for united action among all the pro-merger elements and to accelerate the phase of the movement.<sup>68</sup> V. Subbiah, in a memorandum submitted to the Indian Prime Minister, urged the government of India to take up the question of merger without further delay and pending merger, the government of India should urge the government of French India to fully restore civil

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<sup>66</sup> *The Hindu*, 8 June 1953.

<sup>67</sup> *The Hindu*, 8 June 1953.

<sup>68</sup> *Janasakthi*, 23 August 1953.

liberties and democratic and trade union rights in the territory.<sup>69</sup> The Karaikal Merger Congress also adopted a resolution demanding immediate fusion of all foreign possessions with India. It celebrated the Indian “Independence Day” on 15<sup>th</sup> August (1953) and observed “Bharathi Day”<sup>70</sup> when the pro-mergerists took pledge to free themselves from foreign rule.<sup>71</sup> Badagara *Praja* Socialist Party (Mahe) also demanded the union of the French pockets with India.<sup>72</sup> The National Convention of Foreign Pockets, held under the auspices of The Bombay Peace Committee at Madras (13<sup>th</sup> December) requested the government of India to take firm steps to put an end to foreign pockets in India and looked upon the French settlements “a menace to the independence and sovereignty of India.”<sup>73</sup> Raymond Aron, a French academician and a spokesman of the liberal opinion in France, who was on a lecture tour in India at the invitation of the Indian Committee of Cultural Freedom, said at Nagpur that France should cultivate better friendship with India.<sup>74</sup> He remarked that France should give back to India the settlements which had a “mythological value” and to him Indian friendship was more important than some patches of territory.<sup>75</sup>

Yanam, so long peaceful, became restless. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1953 was formed a Merger Congress Committee consisting of pro-merger leaders of Yanam with Kamichetty Parasuramarao as President. Kamichetty declared that the Yanam Merger Committee would work as a component of the Pondicherry Merger Committee, presided over by Sellane Naicker. He said at Kakinada that the inhabitants of Yanam were in a state of panic and were living under miserable conditions and that the

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<sup>69</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 September 1953.

<sup>70</sup> Subramania Bharathi was a nationalist and Tamil poet; he came to Pondicherry as a refugee in 1908.

<sup>71</sup> *Karai Mail*, 15 August 1953 and 15 September 1953.

<sup>72</sup> *The Hindu*, 21 September 1953.

<sup>73</sup> *Janasakthi*, 20 December 1953.

<sup>74</sup> *Indian Express*, 10 November 1953.

<sup>75</sup> *Indian Express*, 10 November 1953.

merger committee was to start a movement in the border areas of Yanam for effecting the merger of the settlement with Indian Union. Kamichetty held that the local French authorities had been subjecting the pro-merger elements in Yanam to severe persecution in collusion with some of the French stooges who were interested in prolonging French rule for personal ends. He added that cases without sufficient grounds have been foisted on them.<sup>76</sup>

In October 1953, Kewal Singh assumed charge as the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry in the place of R.K. Tandon. The incoming Consul General was a shrewd diplomat. He knew his task well. The merger movement began to take a definite shape under his leadership. He fully exploited the situation within the French camp as well as the situation prevailing along the border. His arrival synchronized with the launching of the final phase of the merger movement of French Indian settlements with Indian Union. The most important development towards the goal was the formation of a common front of the pro-merger parties at Cuddalore known as *Congrès central de fusion de l'Inde française* (French India Central Merger Congress) under the leadership of Sellane Naicker and Dadala was chosen as its General-Secretary. The objective of the new party was to bring under one common programme different pro-Indian elements of French India. Prominent personalities like Lambert Saravane and D. Zivarattinam, former *Députés* of French India played an important role in the making of the common front.<sup>77</sup> This was the first step for starting a mass campaign in favour of merger of the French Indian settlements with Indian Union. Lambert Saravane, who had been a zealous advocate of merger without referendum, demanded that "France should accept the principle of transfer of sovereignty of French India to the Indian Union and enter into negotiation with the Government of

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<sup>76</sup> *Indian Express*, 3 March 1953 and 20 May 1953.

<sup>77</sup> Sellane Naicker's Personal Diary, unpublished, p.22.

India for that purpose.” This, he believed, would help avoid a lot of bitterness and unpleasantness. He remarked in a press conference:

Unfortunately the French Government is still hesitating and failed to show statesmanship in dealing with this question. It is painful to see that France should allow herself a political regime which is contrary to democratic principles in order to retain her hold on these tiny possessions.

Saravane added that they had in French India a government which was “humiliating” even to Frenchmen. Sellane Naicker said that though French India had a democracy in name, they were, in fact, subjected to all sorts of tyranny.<sup>78</sup>

The government of India wanted an immediate solution to the French Indian problem and therefore in its note of 16<sup>th</sup> December 1953 the Indian Embassy at Paris again urged the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs to review the question of directly transferring the French settlements to Indian Union without referendum.<sup>79</sup> Following the note in the middle of January 1954 the Indian Ambassador in Paris requested the French Foreign Ministry for a quick reply to India’s proposal of direct transfer of the settlements without referendum. But France responded in the negative.<sup>80</sup> Since the diplomatic negotiations did not yield the desired result, the government of India took steps which further tightened her grip on the economic life of the people in the French Indian settlements. In January 1954 the government of India had cut off electricity supply to Pondicherry communes, refused to renew the licence for the supply of petroleum products and reduced the quotas of supply of certain other commodities (medicine, rice, cooking oil, fire wood etc.).<sup>81</sup> From the beginning of March 1954 all economic activities between Pondicherry and the adjoining French communes

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<sup>78</sup> *The Hindu*, 12 January 1954.

<sup>79</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, 1954, Vol. II, pp.2789-2798 and 2801-2803.

<sup>80</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, 1954, Vol. II, pp.2789-2798 and 2801-2803.

<sup>81</sup> *Puduvai Murasu*, 15 February 1954 and 1 March 1954.

remained suspended. The Indian government started pressurizing the French Indian administration by reintroducing the passport system, enforced strict collection of toll duties and restricted the number of trips by the Indian Railway from Villupuram to Pondicherry to one.<sup>82</sup> Pondicherry was totally dislocated and so too was the French Indian economy. The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs described this policy as another example of economic pressure being exerted by India in retaliation for the rejection of Indian offer for re-establishing the sea custom union as well as the merger of the French Indian settlement without referendum. While these developments were occurring in quick succession, much worse things happens causing worry for France. Most important was the 'rift' between Ménard and the French India Socialist Party leaders which set in motion a series of events resulting finally in the overthrow of French rule in India.

### **The Volte-face of French India Socialist Party**

The personal animosity between the French *Commissaire* Ménard and Edouard Goubert the French India *Député* gradually led to deterioration in their relations. Their relations, by March 1954, had gone down to such an extent that Goubert, during Ménard's sojourn in Paris, sent a telegram to the French authorities demanding his recall from India.<sup>83</sup> Actually the French India Socialist Party was a party of hoodlums created by the French Indian authorities to serve their purpose. It was a gang of selfish and greedy people who acted as stooges of French Indian administration and blindly supported all its activities. In return the party leaders were enjoyed manifold privileges like social recognition, political status and economic opulence. The party's supremo Goubert had established himself as a powerful man in

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<sup>82</sup> *Puduvai Murasu*, 15 February 1954 and 1 March 1954.

<sup>83</sup> A. Vincent Row. *Inside Pondicherry an intimate report: Volte face by the ruling clique*. Madras: Aries Publication, 1954, p. 12.

the French Indian settlements mainly through manipulation of electoral rolls and well organised *goondaism* with the support of the French authorities and with the active support and co-operation of the French police. Even though it is common knowledge among all those who were involved in the merger issue, none of the contemporaries of Goubert talk openly about his role. Only A. Vincent Row dared to openly express and bring to light Goubert's double dealing and volte face. Vincent Row was a journalist and the correspondent of the *Blitz* at Pondicherry in 1954. He played a significant role in converting the pro-French groups into pro-Indian. His report, "Inside Pondicherry; An Intimate report: Volte face by the Ruling Clique" is the only published report available to bring out the part played by Edouard Goubert in French Indian politics in the 1950's. According to A. Vincent Row Goubert divided the entire settlements into small sections and appointed well-known *goondas* to control the different sections. All opponents were bullied into submission or chased out of the settlements. Apart from his closest political associates like Muthukumarappa Reddiar, Karunendra Mudaliar and Sivasubramanian, members of *Conseil du gouvernement* and Muthu Pillai, the Mayor of Pondicherry, Laksmana Gramani, Boopathi, Saigon Rajamanikam, and Marious Fife were the names of his dreaded gangsters. The party *goondas* performed acts of vindictive cruelty against any and everyone who dared to oppose the Socialist leaders and crushed down all the political opponents. Murder, arson and general lawlessness went on unhindered. The French Indian administration preferred to keep their eyes closed to their activities because they actually needed a capable force working against the pro-merger groups which were critical of French rule.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> A. Vincent Row. *Inside Pondicherry an intimate report: Volte-face by the ruling clique*. Madras: Aries Publication, 1954, pp.4-18.

The financial requirement of the Socialist party men was meted out through corrupt practices and smuggling activities. The party members indulged in all sorts of political black-mail, murder, robbery, nepotism and corruption which eventually led to the embezzlement of public funds. Since the termination of Customs Union Agreement (1949) with Indian Union, the French government made huge financial investments in various constructive programmes in order to overcome the prevailing financial crisis in French India. A substantial portion of the public fund was squandered away by the members of *Conseil du gouvernement* represented by the Socialist party. In addition, charges of monopoly in trade, hoarding of essential commodities, black-marketing of food stuff, smuggling, fixing up of governmental auctions had been brought against the members by Ménard. All export permits for onions, groundnut and groundnut oils-all the three scarce commodities were imported from the Indian Union for meeting the needs of the people-were the sole monopoly of Muthu Pillai who either on his own exported the entire quantity or sold out the permits at a very high premium to any of the regular merchants through the ring of supporters planted in every important field of activity. Rice and other items of food stuff, fuel, fruits, and vegetables etc, imported to Pondicherry, were cornered by the party of gangsters and stored in *godowns* (storage place). A state of artificial scarcity was created whereas political advantage was reaped by the Socialist party as well as the French Indian administration accusing the Indian government of an economic blockade that, in true sense of the term, never at any time existed. Socialist party men, in fact, controlled the market of French Indian settlements and made huge fortunes.<sup>85</sup>

Series of charges against the misdeeds of Socialist party reached both French Indian and Paris authorities. In March 1954, the Inspector General of Colonies

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<sup>85</sup> A. Vincent Row. *Inside Pondicherry an intimate report: Volte-face by the ruling clique*. Madras: Aries Publication, 1954, p. pp.4-18.

submitted to the French government a report on financial mismanagement in Pondicherry. The report unearthed many financial misdeeds of the Socialist party rule. The probe into governmental auction of tobacco stalls and *toddy*-shops brought to light the shady deals of the Socialist party. When henchmen of the Socialist party bid in the auction, others dared not participate. They were afraid that such an attempt would result in the destruction of their property, sustaining physical injury and even loss of life by them or their families. Once the auction was over, the *goondas* sold their shops under private treaty to the regular merchants at exorbitantly high prices. From each of these shops the Socialist party *goondas* earned anywhere between rupees 1,000 and rupees 2,000. The loss to the government and therefore to the general public could well be imagined as there were about 231 such shops in the settlements. The sale of *toddy* shops was even more atrocious. Goubert and his party men profited, according to government estimate, 15,000 rupees per shop on an average which meant a loss to the tune of rupees 15,00,000 to the state. This caused great embarrassment to Ménard.<sup>86</sup>

There were other reasons for the outbreak of hostility between Ménard and Goubert. Early in March 1954 nearly 1,800 textile workers of Rodier mill were served with notices of retrenchment. After routing V. Subbiah, it was Goubert who had set up his fiefdom over the working class population of Pondicherry. They constituted the sinews of his power. He, therefore, sharply reacted against their summary dismissal. Goubert organized, in violation of the ban imposed by Ménard, demonstrations against the dismissal which the French Indian authorities condemned as anti-European. The French Indian police, however, dispersed the demonstrators by

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<sup>86</sup> A. Vincent Row. *Inside Pondicherry an intimate report: Volte-face by the ruling clique*. Madras: Aries Publication, 1954, pp.4-18.

ruthless application of force.<sup>87</sup> Goubert's growing preponderance in French Indian administration was also causing embarrassment to Ménard. For example, Goubert and his Councillors asked Ménard for the transfer of the two reserved subjects, namely, police and law and justice to their charges.<sup>88</sup> Tired of past misdeeds of the French India Socialist Party and the present financial irregularities, Ménard was determined to throw the party off from its position of primacy. Meanwhile, some *goondas* who had been enjoying patronage of Goubert were arrested following a judicial enquiry in connection with the fraud practised in the auction of indigenous liquors in *toddy* shops. Ménard reported to the French Overseas Ministry that they were the same persons against whom the Indian government had issued warrant of arrest for indulging in *goondaism* in early 1952. Investigations were also made into alleged malpractices of Goubert with a view to taking legal action against him.<sup>89</sup> Thus the rift which had developed between the French *Commissaire* and the French India Socialist Party, having become too widened, turned out to be no less than a complete and final break. The ardent anti-merger and persistent pro-French Goubert defected to the pro-merger group along with his followers demanding immediate merger of French Indian settlements with Indian Union.

These developments occurred in quick succession. The most unbelievable change had taken place in French India. The resourceful Goubert and his political mercenaries negotiated with Kewal Singh and repeated the assurance once made at New Delhi but this time certainly, in all sincerity. He also assured the Indian Consul General that the liberation movement in Pondicherry under his inspiration would start

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<sup>87</sup> *The Hindustan Standard*, 8 March 1954.

<sup>88</sup> File No: D. 2620/50, (35) R&I Branch, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I., New Delhi.

<sup>89</sup> *Indian Express*, 17 March 1954.

from 18<sup>th</sup> March 1954.<sup>90</sup> In a dramatic move, separate but identically worded resolutions were passed on 19<sup>th</sup> March 1954 by the Municipal Councillors of the 8 communes of Pondicherry demanding merger with Indian Union without referendum and urging the French government to take necessary measures for fulfilling their wishes.<sup>91</sup> Copies of the resolutions had been cabled to the President of the Republic of France, the President of the Council of Ministers, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Overseas Territories and to the President of the Houses of the French parliament. Indian Prime Minister Nehru also received copies of the resolution. Goubert and 4 members of the *Conseil du gouvernement* “whole heartedly” endorsed the resolution. Goubert said that a meeting of the French India Cabinet (*Conseil du gouvernement*) which was to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> March would pass a resolution unanimously demanding the merger of the French Indian settlements with Indian Union without referendum. He also said that the decision on the merger issue “was irrevocable, whatever might be the consequences” and “we resort to all peaceful and non-violent methods of agitation till we achieve our objective” and concluded hoping that the French government would respect “our legitimate demand for merger.”<sup>92</sup> Although the Socialist party said the resolution was adopted on its own merit and had nothing to do with the “rift” between the *Commissaire* and Goubert, there was no doubt that the rift quickened the pace. A similar resolution was passed by the Mayor and the Municipal Councillors of Pondicherry. Goubert also proposed as a first move to initiate the merger resolution at the *Assemblée Représentative* on 27<sup>th</sup> March, as 37 of the 39 members of that body being Indians, were sure to support it.<sup>93</sup> The President of the *Assemblée Représentative* gave full support to the resolution. The Councillors of

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<sup>90</sup> *The Hindu*, 23 March 1954.

<sup>91</sup> *The Times of India*, 20 March 1954.

<sup>92</sup> *The Times of India*, 20 March 1954.

<sup>93</sup> *Swedesamitran*, 21 March 1954.

Karaikal Municipality, including Pakkirisamy Pillai and its six communes did the same thing on 24<sup>th</sup> March 1954. They further announced that the liberation movement would be inaugurated on the eve of the opening of the *Assemblée Représentative* on 27<sup>th</sup> April 1954.<sup>94</sup> The *Assemblée Représentative* did not meet, but the liberation movement was launched on the appointed date. With the passing of the merger resolutions by the Municipal councils of Pondicherry and Karaikal, 14 out of the 17 councils representing 90 percent of the total population of the French India settlements, had declared, through their electoral representatives their decision to merge with the Indian Union without a referendum. The remaining 3 Municipal councils of French India-2 in Mahe and 1 in Yanam-were also expected to follow them in passing similar resolutions.<sup>95</sup> A spontaneous movement for merger started inside the settlements. Over 8,000 Socialist party sponsored workers of the three textile mills in Pondicherry pledged their support to the movement for integration with Indian Union.<sup>96</sup> The defection of Goubert and his Socialist party followers, who had so long hammered the pro-mergerists, gave a new dimension to the ongoing merger movement. Goubert became a pro-Indian, a pro-mergerist, and his followers' liberation volunteers. He also liberated himself and made amends for his former misdeeds by renouncing his European name and assuming an Indian one.<sup>97</sup> He now came to be known as E.G. Pillai. However, the identification of the French India Socialist Party with the merger movement was looked upon as humiliating by the true sympathisers of India and as an attempt at hijacking leadership by pro-merger organisations. Goubert's action was again described as "betrayal" by the *Renonçants*, the *Métis*, a section of the Muslims, military personnel and the local officials.

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<sup>94</sup> *The Hindu*, 23 March 1954.

<sup>95</sup> It must be remembered that these Municipal councils of French India were elected in 1948 for deciding the future of French India and above 90 percent of the members was anti-mergerists.

<sup>96</sup> *The Times of India*, 21 March 1954.

<sup>97</sup> His full name was Antoine Joseph Benzamin Goubert. He was born on 29<sup>th</sup> July 1894.

The French Indian authorities ignored the resolutions and adopted, instead, repressive measures against the merger movement. Elaborate police arrangements, maintenance of a strong vigil, ban on meetings and demonstrations and the free hand given to the *goondas* kept French India peaceful. To gain and retain the goodwill of the French Indian population, Ménard had announced on 7<sup>th</sup> March 1954 that the French government had agreed to make an unprecedented contribution of rupees 1,50,00,000 for the economic relief and rehabilitation of the people. He also disclosed that he had received a letter from Jacquino, the French Overseas Minister, declaring France had no intention to quit the possessions in India.<sup>98</sup> Ménard's announcement that France had no intention to abandon her possessions was a challenge which was promptly taken up by the pro-mergerists. The rash declaration of the *Commissaire* rather gave a new fillip to the merger movement. The decision of French India Socialist Party in favour of India came as a big surprise to France and India as well as people of French India. Nehru said in the Indian parliament that "a very spontaneous movement inside the French Indian settlements" was going on for merger with Indian Union.<sup>99</sup> Rajagopalachari, Chief Minister of Madras, expressed that "although everyone knew that this integration must come about one day. I did not think that matters would take such rapid shape."<sup>100</sup> No doubt, the steadily deteriorating economic condition, coupled with the absence of any positive move to resolve the uncertainty surrounding the seven-year old problem of the political status of the settlements had been largely responsible for the sudden upheaval. The defection of French India Socialist Party precipitated the process.

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<sup>98</sup> *The Hindu*, 11 March 1954.

<sup>99</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, Vol-II, Part-II, 1954, pp.2978-2983.

<sup>100</sup> Insight, *Practical Politics: A Documentary of the French India Socialist Party*. 1954.

## Merger Movement for the Liberation of Communes

Immediately after the adaptation of the resolutions, the French India police started arresting the pro-merger elements. On the night of 20<sup>th</sup> March 1954 a P.T.I. (Press Trust of India) correspondent was attacked by *goonda* elements in front of Goubert's house.<sup>101</sup> The Pondicherry authorities sent police to different parts of the settlements warning people against indulging in any demonstration. Repression was renewed with vengeance. Police and paid *goonda* harassments increased. The police was instructed to use arms for stamping out the movement—a movement, according to French Indian government, supported by the Indian government.<sup>102</sup> Instructions were issued to watch the movements of the pro-merger leaders. Many of them had to leave Pondicherry. Even the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry was placed under close surveillance. The pro-French elements tried various methods of intimidation to frighten the people, the Mayors and Councillors, and other leaders of the merger movement and to make them retract and to generally make out that the people of French settlements were not in favour of integration with India. The Pondicherry administration went about asking all their officials and pensioners to send telegrams to Paris requesting continuation of the French rule, and officers were sent to other communes in Pondicherry to get further declarations from pensioners in favour of France. Paid *goondas* were sent to the houses of the Mayors and Councillors and tried to frighten them by shouting abusive slogans. The library attached to the building of Indian Consul General at Pondicherry was attacked. The French Indian police took part in this, going about all these communes and telling people that if they demonstrate in favour of merger or if they express any pro-Indian sentiment, they will

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<sup>101</sup> *The Hindu*, 22 March 1954.

<sup>102</sup> *The Hindu*, 22 March 1954.

meet with a dire fate. Some of the French India Socialist Party *goondas* were arrested and they were subjected to shameful treatment.<sup>103</sup>

Immediately India had lodged its protest with French Ambassador at New Delhi as well as the Pondicherry authorities against intimidation of people supporting merger movement. In a note of 22<sup>nd</sup> March (1954) to the French government, taking into account the “popular movement” in the French settlements, the government of India pointed out that the resolutions passed by the *Assemblée Représentative* and Mayors of the communes, demanding immediate merger of the settlements without referendum, were an expression of the wishes of the people of the French Indian settlements; and proposed that a *de facto* transfer of authority to India should take place immediately, pending a *de jure* transfer and constitutional and other matters can be settled by negotiations. The same note also protested against attempts by the police to intimidate the people of Pondicherry, including the arrests of supporters of the merger movement.<sup>104</sup>

On 24<sup>th</sup> March 1954, another incident occurred which was of an even more serious character. The French Indian police, who had on many occasions crossed Franco-Indian border, recklessly swooped down upon the pro-mergerists living in French Indian villages or upon those who had taken shelter in Indian villages across the border. They, having crossed the Indian territory, arrested Nandagopal, Mayor of Modéliarpét commune and two more Indian citizens, who apparently had given him hospitality, from the Indian village of Kattupalayam. The government of India adopted a strong attitude against this outrage and R.K. Nehru, External Affairs Secretary, handed over a note to the French Ambassador demanding the release of

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<sup>103</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, Vol-II, Part-II, 1954, pp. 2978-2983.

<sup>104</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 514.

Nandagopal and two other Indians indicating India's concern over the attempts on the part of the French authorities in Pondicherry to intimidate the people for supporting the merger movement.<sup>105</sup> India had taken certain measures in order to prevent the French Indian police from crossing the Indian territory, which included posting of armed Indian police on all the routes leading from the French settlements to the Indian territory and complete stoppage of supply of petrol and other petroleum products from India to French Indian settlements.<sup>106</sup>

In reply to the Indian note of 22<sup>nd</sup> March, the French Embassy sent a note to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs on 25<sup>th</sup> March proposing to discuss the question of establishing normal economic and political relations with India as a prelude to the holding of the referendum.<sup>107</sup> The note pointed out that France was willing and ready to organise a referendum in the four settlements preferably under international control and India should lift economic pressures and restrictions on the territories before referendum was organized. The note rejected the Indian allegations that conditions in the settlements did not permit pro-Indian elements to express their opinions freely and declared that recent measures by the Indian government to “deprive the inhabitants of a normal economic life” were an attempt to bring pressure on them.<sup>108</sup> In an *Aide-mémoire* to the French government on 26<sup>th</sup> March 1954 the government of India again demanded the release of the three arrested persons and punishment of the police officials responsible for the arrest. The *Aide-mémoire* again urged that *de facto* transfer of administration could be given effect to immediately “leaving constitutional and other matters to be settled by negotiations”. The *Aide-mémoire* also informed that

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<sup>105</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 516.

<sup>106</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, Vol-III, Part-II, 1954, pp. 4142-4143.

<sup>107</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 515.

<sup>108</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 515.

The Government of India consider that it is in the interest both of the police officials of the French establishments as well as of the inhabitants of the surrounding Indian territories that so long as the present tension lasts, all armed members of the police of the French establishments should be prohibited from entering Indian territories.<sup>109</sup>

But the French government did not listen to it and they believed that it was India's economic pressure that was responsible for the recent developments.

Meantime the French Indian administration charged some of the French India Socialist party leaders with corruption. Many went underground. There were also serious charges of financial irregularities and corruption against the top leaders of the party viz. Goubert, Muthukumarappa Reddiar and Muthu Pillai.<sup>110</sup> The followers of Goubert became the target of attack and some of them were assaulted by the French Indian police and paid *goondas*. The top leaders of the Socialist party no longer found Pondicherry a safe haven to live in. They fled from Pondicherry and took shelter in the adjacent communes which were beyond the access of French Indian police on account of their isolation from Pondicherry and refusal of the Indian government to allow the French Indian police to march through Indian territories. The isolated communes became the centres of activities of the Socialist leaders. Leaders of the Socialist party held secret consultations with the Indian leaders and other pro-mergerists of French India on a joint plan of action to deliver the people of French India from foreign yoke.<sup>111</sup> It was decided to extend the merger movement by way of capturing communes in the French enclaves encircling Pondicherry other than those in Pondicherry town, setting up a parallel administration and eventually marching to Pondicherry. 27<sup>th</sup> March 1954 was fixed as the date for launching the mass movement. Ménard immediately banned all public meetings and demonstrations and

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<sup>109</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 516.

<sup>110</sup> *The Hindu*, 27 March 1954.

<sup>111</sup> *The Times of India*, 29 March 1954.

prohibited the entry of Indian newspapers in Pondicherry. He also postponed indefinitely the session of the *Assemblée Représentative* which was scheduled to be held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 1954.<sup>112</sup>

The liberation movement was launched on the appointed date. Led by the French India Socialist Party and joined by the pro-merger parties, the movement began simultaneously in the four communes of Ozhukarai, Bahour, Nettapakkam and Mannadipeth. Initially the movement took the shape of organizing demonstrations, taking out processions, holding meetings, hoisting Indian national flags and shouting pro-merger slogans.<sup>113</sup> The French India administration precipitated the crisis by an *Arrêté* issued on 30<sup>th</sup> March dismissing Goubert and Muthukomarappa Reddiar from the *Conseil du gouvernement*. It also suspended Muthu Pillai, Mayor of Pondicherry.<sup>114</sup> Towards the end of March 1954, Goubert and his lieutenants captured the commune of Nettapakkam-an outlying commune about 12 miles south west of Pondicherry-and set up a parallel government. Nettapakkam commune with a population of 14,000 came under the control of Goubert and his lieutenants, on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1954. The police station and the mayoral office of the commune were taken and the Indian national flag was hoisted on the buildings. Police men and police officials surrendered their arms and joined the merger movement.<sup>115</sup> Later a Provisional government functioned from there. The French government in its note of 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1954 protested against the restrictions imposed by the Indian government on the movement of French Indian police across the Indian territory. The note remarked

Taking advantage of this state of affairs, persons controlled by Goubert, Deputy of Pondicherry, have just attacked the public stations of Nettapakkam and have proclaimed the merger of this commune with the Indian Union. It

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<sup>112</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 27 March 1954.

<sup>113</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 27 March 1954.

<sup>114</sup> *Namnadu*, 1 April 1954.

<sup>115</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, 1 April 1954.

appears from information received at Paris that here are grounds for apprehension of similar acts of violence in other Enclaves.<sup>116</sup>

But the India government argued that it could not allow foreign troops to pass through its territories for suppressing a peaceful and popular movement.<sup>117</sup>

Karaikal's response to the final round of the merger movement was no less impressive. In January 1954, Kewal Singh visited Karaikal. He met many leaders of political parties and tried to forge a United Merger Front comprising of the Congress, the *Dravida Kazhagam*, Communist party and various pro-merger associations headed by such men as R.M.A.S. Venkatachalapathi, Léon St. Jean etc.<sup>118</sup> The formation of United Merger Front gave a new fillip to the merger movement in Karaikal. A full-scale mass movement was started on 21<sup>st</sup> March 1954. Léon St. Jean and Venkatachalapathi led the anti-French demonstration along with about 3,000 volunteers. The French Indian police ruthlessly dispersed the demonstrators. Venkatachalapathi and few others were beaten with batons when they took out the procession.<sup>119</sup> Pakkirisamy Pillai, the *Sénateur* and Mayor of Karaikal, in an open letter to the *Commissaire*, expressed his support for the merger movement with Indian Union. He did not think that the present situation, particularly the economic difficulties, was conducive for the maintenance of pure French rule in the French Indian pockets.<sup>120</sup> Ramasrinivasan, the President of the Youth Congress, who flagged off the merger movement on 27<sup>th</sup> March, entered the town of Karaikal from Nagapatinam with a small batch of persons unfurling Indian national flag and shouting anti-French slogans. French Indian police confronted them and after a baton

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<sup>116</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in R. L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.

<sup>117</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in R. L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.

<sup>118</sup> *Karai Mail*, 1 February 1954

<sup>119</sup> *Karai Mail*, 7 April 1954.

<sup>120</sup> *The Hindu*, 23 March 1954.

charge which followed their refusal to disperse, took them into custody.<sup>121</sup> On the same day, in response to the appeal of Léon St. Jean, Secretary General of the United Merger Front, many habitants of Karaikal hoisted the Indian flag atop their houses. The public were asked by the Front to keep on flying the flags till the French quit their soil and merger materialised.<sup>122</sup> The Merchants' Association of Karaikal also demanded merger. R. Pakkirisamy, an office bearer of the Merchants' Association, said that "prices of foodstuffs have risen to 300 percent of Indian Union prices and this is due to the settlements being foreign pockets in Indian soil and so their merger has become a necessity."<sup>123</sup> The Muslim community of Karaikal did not lag behind to join the merger movement, which the French administration believed that the entire community was with them. Shaik Madari Saheb Maaricar, Vice-President, Thirunalrayanampattinam National Congress and member of the Karaikal Merger Congress, categorically declared that "the Muslims are second to none in patriotism and will not fail to stand shoulder to shoulder with other communities in the national struggle."<sup>124</sup> A week later, Madari Saheb Maaricar and 14 other leaders of the Karaikal National Congress were arrested by French Indian police for having launched a mass movement.<sup>125</sup> The *Tribunal Correctionnel* (petty sessions) of Karaikal convicted Shaik Madari Saheb Maaricar and Nagarajan, each to three months' imprisonment and a fine of 100 *francs* for rebellion, resistance to police and for organising demonstration defying the government ban on processions. They were

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<sup>121</sup> *Karai Mail*, 7 April 1954.

<sup>122</sup> *The Hindu*, 28 March 1954.

<sup>123</sup> Cited in Saroja Sundarajan. *Glimpses of the History of Karaikal*. Madras: Lalitha Publication, 1985, p. 174.

<sup>124</sup> *The Hindu*, 5 April 1954.

<sup>125</sup> *The Times of India*, 20 April 1954.

ordered to be expelled from certain parts of French settlements in India for a further period of two years after the term of imprisonment was over.<sup>126</sup>

The merger movement which had been going on in full swing in Pondicherry and Karaikal also had its repercussion in Mahe and activated the inhabitants of Mahe whose rebellion in 1948 had temporarily dethroned the French rule. Since then, the pro-mergerists were systematically suppressed, tortured and imprisoned and their properties were seized or robbed by the anti-merger elements. Many had actually taken refuge in Indian Union territory. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1954, a conference of the refugees was organised by the *Mahajana Sabha* at Azhiyur (an Indian village) near Mahe. I.K. Kumaran, C.E. Barathan, Mangalat Raghavan, P.K. Raman and P. Kumaran were made part of a new executive committee, resolved to carry on an organized freedom struggle for the unconditional merger of Mahe with the Indian Union.<sup>127</sup> Balan of the French Indian military police serving in Mahe was dismissed from service for suspected sympathies with the pro-mergerists. On 9<sup>th</sup> April 1954, prominent *Mahajana Sabha* and Indian Socialist members like P.K. Usman, and N.C. Kannan raised the slogan, 'French, Quit India,' in Mahe town. They were arrested and beaten up mercilessly by pro-French elements and admitted to Tellicherry civil hospital. P.K. Usman who never recovered from this torture died in Vellore hospital, four years later due to backbone injury sustained while in custody.<sup>128</sup> A token *Satyagraha*-a new struggle for liberation from French rule-was also observed by Keloth Madhava Kurup and Pondayat Balan Nair, both Congressmen, sympathetic to the *Mahajana Sabha*, at Naluthara. They were arrested, ill-treated and dropped in Indian territory.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> *The Hindu*, 21 April 1954.

<sup>127</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 April 1954.

<sup>128</sup> *Namnadu*, 8 April 1954; *The Hindu*, 13 April 1954 and J.B.P. More. *Freedom Movement in French India: The Mahe Revolt of 1948*. Tellicherry: IRISH, 2001, p. 184.

<sup>129</sup> *Indian Express*, 11 April 1954 and *the Hindu*, 13 April 1954.

The situation in Yanam was still calm and unaffected by the pro-merger agitation in other parts of the settlements. In spite of the defection of the French India Socialist Party, the Municipal council in Yanam adopted a resolution on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1954 in favour of French and in order to maintain French presence there. This resolution seems to have had the vehement support of pro-French elements like Samatam Kristaya, Kapaganty and their followers in the council.<sup>130</sup> But there was an under-current of strong resentment among the people of Yanam against French administration. The French administrator Georges Sala convened a meeting of the leading citizens of the settlement. He appealed to them not to start a pro-merger agitation, for according to him it would have no effect. He assured them that any decision resulting from agitation in other parts of French India would apply to Yanam also.<sup>131</sup> He also prohibited the entry of Indian newspapers in Yanam. It seems that the French Indian police threatened to confiscate the properties and lands owned by Indians in Yanam, if they supported the merger movement.<sup>132</sup> Through out the months of April, May, June and July French India witnessed a series of meetings and demonstrations demanding withdrawal of the French from her settlements in India.

While these developments were occurring in French India, France had send Tézanas du Montcel, Inspector General in the Colonial Office of the Overseas Department, to oversee the situation in French India. Tézanas reached Pondicherry towards the end of March 1954. “He was instructed to study the circumstances under which the meetings for merger with India without referendum had taken place. He was to judge the mood of other settlements and to suggest measures appropriate to deal with the situation. He was also instructed to explore the possibility of reversing

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<sup>130</sup> Georges Chaffard. *Les Carnets secrets de la décolonization*. Paris: Calmann Lévy, 1965, p. 224.

<sup>131</sup> *The Hindu*, 7 April 1954.

<sup>132</sup> *The Hindu*, 7 and 22 April 1954.

the resolution for merger with Indian Union and examine the means of maintaining the status quo until the installation of a new regime followed by a negotiation with the Government of India.”<sup>133</sup> It seems that Tézanas tried to woo the rebel Socialist party leaders back to their side. But he failed, in an open letter to Tézanas du Montcel, the Socialist leaders declared:

The first fact that you can never blink is that all these pockets are of India, Indian. They are spots in a vast land, and we, the residents are connected indissolubly with our brethren of the Indian soil culturally, historically and economically in such a way that no political separation could any longer be tolerated...Our decision is, as you know, we shall merge with the Indian Union without the dilatory pretext of a referendum, insisted upon by your Government.<sup>134</sup>

On the failure of their attempts and in order to survive the challenge the French Indian authorities’ encouraged Du Thamby, a retired judge and a pensioner of French government to start a new party called “Democratic Party,” a body of retired officers and government servants. They organised pro-French demonstrations and processions with hired *goondas* and by forcing the villagers and merchants to join them.<sup>135</sup> Like wise, in Karaikal, a *Comité francophile*, a group consisted of government officials and big merchants, was organised by men like Robert Saint Sultan Maricar, Hamider Maricar, Appadore etc. with a view to retaining French India within French Union. They indulged in scathing attack on the government of India and in unrestricted pro-French propaganda.<sup>136</sup>

The ongoing merger movement was further strengthened when a group of leading political personalities of Pondicherry Karunendra Mudaliar, Balasubramanian, Deivasigamony, Ratnasahapathy, Danaraja, Emmanuel Tetta, Cassim Sinnata

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<sup>133</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India: Liberation movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-54*. Institut Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 236.

<sup>134</sup> Insight. *Practical Politics: A Documentary of the French India Socialist Party*. 1954, pp.27-28.

<sup>135</sup> *Puduvai Murasu*, 15, April 1954.

<sup>136</sup> Ramasrinivasan, R. *Karaikal in Freedom Struggle*. Pondicherry, 1998, p.114.

Mudaliar, Arokinadin, Venkatasami Reddiar, Rathanam Chettiar, Lakshminarayana Reddiar, Theagaraja Nayagar, Venkatasubba Reddiar-sent telegrams to the French government reaffirming on the urgent necessity of the cession of the French Indian pockets to Indian Union on ethnic, geographical, historical, economic and cultural grounds which united the two countries.<sup>137</sup> The liberation movement which started in Nettapakkam commune soon spilled over to the adjacent commune of Bahour-about 16 miles west of Pondicherry, having a population of 23,000 where the liberation volunteers captured all the villages under the direction of Goubert and Muthukumarappa Reddiar. The French Indian police emulated here the example of their Nettapakkam colleagues by surrendering their arms and joining their ranks and hoisting Indian national flag on all buildings on which French flags fluttered a few hours before.<sup>138</sup>

The merger movement was in full swing in French India, no doubt, the defection of French India Socialist Party leaders and their participation in the merger movement overnight changed the whole situation. In addition the steps taken by the government of India encouraged the determination of the pro-merger groups and gave a new complexion to the whole movement. The French contention of economic pressure exerted by the government of India was responsible for the present state of things. Nehru in a speech in Indian parliament on 6<sup>th</sup> April 1954 discounted all the French charges. Wherein, he clearly stated that India had taken certain economic measures to protect her economic interests. They had been directed against the smugglers and other nefarious activities encouraged by particular methods and policy of the local administration. He strongly remarked that there was no foundation at all to the French charge that India had exerted economic pressure over the territories.

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<sup>137</sup> Insight. *Practical Politics: A Documentary of the French India Socialist Party*. 1954.

<sup>138</sup> *The Hindu*, 5 April 1954.

Numerous essential commodities were entering the French possessions from India except petroleum because it was reported that in distributing this petrol there was a great deal of discrimination—that is, the so-called pro-merger people did not get petrol and those whom the French government there favoured got petrol. Moreover, in regard to stopping the French police from crossing the Indian territory Nehru categorically made it clear that the Indian government could not allow its territory for the use of French police to suppress a popular movement.<sup>139</sup> French Indian authorities retaliated to the Indian measures by directing the French police to interrogate Indian nationals coming by trains and buses and restricting activities of Indian press people who were also closely shadowed by C.I.D and policemen.<sup>140</sup> Upon this the government of India decided to re-introduce the passport system for travel to and from the French Indian settlements of Pondicherry and Karaikal, with effect from 19<sup>th</sup> April 1954. All persons domiciled in these two settlements desiring to enter or pass through Indian territory were required to have certificates of identity with photographs of the holders of the persons fixed on them and validated by the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry.<sup>141</sup> This measure inflicted considerable hardships and consequently caused dissatisfaction among the people. Already French Indian population was deeply affected by the political crisis, economic difficulties and violence of hooligans, now by these measures they were completely isolated from the rest of world.

### **Merger Movement: The Final Phase**

The merger movement took a new turn when V. Subbiah, whose entry into French Indian settlements was banned by the French Indian government and who had

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<sup>139</sup> Proceedings of the Parliamentary Debates of the *Lok Sabha*, Vol-III, Part-II, 1954, pp. 4140-4152.

<sup>140</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 3 April 1954.

<sup>141</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 3 April 1954.



been all these months working in the border villages, decided to jump into the vortex of the merger movement with all his resources. He called a conference of all pro-merger parties at Cuddalore on 4<sup>th</sup> April 1954 and the result of the Cuddalore meeting was the formation of the United Merger Front of various pro-merger groups.<sup>142</sup> He appealed to French Indian refugees, totalling about 10,000 who had taken refugees in Indian territory, since 1948, to come and join the movement.<sup>143</sup> He also announced 7<sup>th</sup> April 1954 as the date for launching the final battle against French imperialism.<sup>144</sup> Accordingly “Operation Pondicherry” was launched on 7<sup>th</sup> April by the French India Communist Party led by V. Subbiah. Hundreds of volunteers, mill workers and handloom workers participated in the “direct action” day by way of hoisting Indian national flag and holding demonstrations right from dawn demanding final fusion of the French pockets with India.<sup>145</sup> To cope up with the situation the French Indian administration called French military personnel, who were on leave in Pondicherry but destined to leave for the Indo-China war. Military pensioners in Pondicherry had also been called on duty as precautionary measures against any trouble in the town. These men patrolled the streets of Pondicherry throughout the night of 6<sup>th</sup> April.<sup>146</sup> The procession started in four corners of the French Indian capital and converged on *odiyansalai maidan* to hold a meeting. Shops were forced to pull down their shutters. The French Indian police and army personnel dragged down the Indian flags, swooped upon the demonstrators and made a large number of arrests.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> *Namnadu*, 1 April 1954.

<sup>143</sup> *Namnadu*, 9 April 1954.

<sup>144</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, p. 309.

<sup>145</sup> *The Hindu*, 8 April 1954.

<sup>146</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 7 April 1954.

<sup>147</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, pp. 311-312.

The merger movement acquired new feathers when 22 villages of the Mannadipet commune (Pondicherry) with a population of 23,000 threw off the yoke of French rule. On 6<sup>th</sup> April the armed Communist volunteers led by the political leader of the commune seized the Thribuvanai police station, captured the arms from the French police and set up their trained Communist contingents, hoisting the Indian national flag over the police station.<sup>148</sup> Goubert and other leaders requested the Indian government to accept the merger of the liberated communes with Indian Union and to arrange for the supply of essential commodities to the local population.<sup>149</sup> The government of India expressed full sympathy for the movement, but set aside the demand of the liberation leaders to incorporate the liberated communes with Indian Union or take over their administration. For the purpose of preserving law and order as well as maintaining continuity in the normal life of the people in the liberated communes, they set up administration of their own. Temporary United Front government was formed at Nettappakam consisting of 3 members belonging to the Merger Congress and Socialist party. Leading political leaders of the Mannadipeth commune Narayanasamy (Communist), Manicka Gounder (Merger Congress) and Manavala Reddiar (French India Socialist Party) were constituted into a government as Ministers with portfolio.<sup>150</sup> However the political rivalry between Goubert, V. Subbiah and Congress could not be averted. The Socialists led by Goubert liberated Nettappakam and Bahour and the Communists liberated Mannadipeth. Goubert accused the Communist party of resorting to pinpricks towards those engaged in the liberation struggle. V. Subbiah accused the Socialist party workers of indulging in

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<sup>148</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, pp. 309-310.

<sup>149</sup> *Namnadu*, 23 April 1954.

<sup>150</sup> *Dinathanthi*, 12 April 1954.

violent acts in Mannadipeth.<sup>151</sup> ‘*Puduvaimurasu*’, a Congress sponsored journal accused Goubert’s defection from the French Indian government as “political gambling” and doubted the sudden patriotism of the Socialist party leaders and their decision of merger of French Indian settlements with Indian Union. It demanded the French India Socialist Party members to resign from their posts in the French government to prove their solidarity.<sup>152</sup> In this crucial time Kewal Singh played a key role in maintaining a balance among the various merger groups and leaders. He acted as the main link between the merger leaders and the Indian government.

Soon, the Congress groups jumped into the fray of direct action. The French India Central Merger Congress with Sellane Naicker as President decided to conduct the *Satyagraha* in Pondicherry.<sup>153</sup> This was in contrast to the radical movements organised by Goubert and V. Subbiah and its aim was to eschew violence of any kind that might defeat the merger cause. The Central Merger Congress, the French India National Congress and the Youth Congress organized a massive demonstration in Pondicherry on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1954 on the occasion of Tamil New Year day and thousand of textile operatives and students joined it. It was a big rally and the most spectacular phenomenon was the participation of women in the demonstration. The French Indian administration admitted all kinds of brutality to suppress the demonstration. The police *lathi*-charged indiscriminately and many were arrested. Munussamy of the French India Youth Congress was taken into custody. Sellane Naicker was besieged in his house and he was asked to haul down the Indian flag from his house by police. He refused to do so. *Goondas* were engaged to pelt stones at his house. The house of Swami Lourdes, Bharat Yuvak Sangha leader, was surrounded by *goondas* armed

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<sup>151</sup> V. Subbiah. *Saga of Freedom of French India: Testament of my life*. Madras: New Century Book House, 1990, pp. 309-310.

<sup>152</sup> *Puduvai Murasu*, 1 April 1954.

<sup>153</sup> *Dinathanthi*, 12 April 1954.

with draggers.<sup>154</sup> Tensions in Pondicherry further shot up when a party of French Indian police, trespassed the Indian territory, opened fire in the Indian part of Pillaichavadi village -7 miles north of Pondicherry where French Indian citizens and refugees had taken shelter. The injured persons had to be removed to the government Hospital at Tindivanam in South Arcot district. The government of India took a serious notice of this incident and sent a strong protest note to the French Ambassador in New Delhi demanding punishment of the policemen responsible for the outrage, compensation for the damage of property and personal injury suffered by Indian nationals.<sup>155</sup> An all-party conference convened by the French India National Congress on 26<sup>th</sup> April condemned the French India administration for its all-round failure and brutal use of force on peaceful pro-mergerists.<sup>156</sup> A 'Joint Front' composed of French India Communist Party, the Central Merger Congress, the French India National Congress, the Youth Congress, *Dravidar Kazagam*, *Dravida Munnetra Kazagam* and various pro-merger organisations was formed on 29<sup>th</sup> April to intensify the merger movement. The leaders expressed the view that party differences should not come in the way of carrying on the fight and the movement should be intensified with redoubled vigour adhering strictly to the tenets of the Gandhian principle of non-violence.<sup>157</sup>

Meanwhile, Henri Jacquier, member of the *Assemblée de l'union française* and Pakkirisamy Pillai, *Sénateur* representing French India had reached Paris. On 15<sup>th</sup> April they had serious discussions with French officials of the French Overseas Ministry as well as the French Foreign Ministry in search of a solution to the

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<sup>154</sup> *Indian Express*, 14 April 1954.

<sup>155</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 16 April 1954.

<sup>156</sup> Francis Cyril Antony, ed. *Gazetteer of India: Union Territory of Pondicherry*. Vol.I, Pondicherry, 1982, p. 266.

<sup>157</sup> *Namnadu*, 4 June 1954.

problems of French India. They put forward a “Condominium Plan” on which Jacquier said that because “difficulties have suddenly flared up in India,” he was proposing the condominium solution in which the administration of the territory would be equally divided between the Indian and the French governments. He also said

I believe that the destiny of the settlements is not to be anonymous canton isolated in an immense country [...]. Their destiny is to be a commercial link, a free area between India and France. The development of the standard of life in the Settlements depends on this liaison. It is essential to work in an atmosphere of good understanding with India to gain this end [...]. The French Government has realised what the position is in French India and has agreed with the condominium principle [...]. I am sure the economic interests of the settlements can be understood by France and India.<sup>158</sup>

The condominium plan was a non-official proposal and originally a brain-child of the former French India Governor Baron. All political parties in French India voiced their strong disapproval of this proposal, it was curious enough not a single political leader of French India was consulted in this matter. The French India Socialist Party remarked

The idea should have come from Ménard, the present French India Commissioner, who had once served in a condominium in New Hebrides, where both the French colonial office and the British colonial office had equal opportunity owing to considerable portions of the population being respectively of British and French origin. The principle of condominium may have been possible between colonial powers in some unknown area with only a military importance, but it would be ridiculous to think of a condominium as proposed now between a colonial power and a nation pledged to fight colonialism over a cent per cent Indian area, which is part and parcel of the mother land. The proposal for condominium would again make the settlements the venue for draining away India’s wealth by smuggling out goods and currency.<sup>159</sup>

Condominium plan was criticised by the pro-merger leaders of every political and ideological leaning and stoutly rejected by them, as they felt that it was one more of the delaying tactics of the French officials.

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<sup>158</sup> *The Hindu*, 20 April 1954.

<sup>159</sup> *The Hindu*, 20 April 1954.

The merger movement in Mahe and Yanam was gaining a tempo as it was passing through the final phase of the struggle. Probably taking the cue from V. Subbiah and the Communists of Pondicherry, the Communists, who were always strong in Malabar, infiltrated into Mahe on the night of 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> April with the intention of seizing the French Indian village of Kallayi, and liberate it from French rule. The French authorities opened fire on the Communists who wanted to take over the enclave of Cherukallai.<sup>160</sup> This resulted in the death of P.P. Anandan, M. Achuthan and another Communist. The government of India protested against this incident both to the French government and the French India authorities. Later, T. Bhaskaran and T. Balan, both Communists, were expelled from Mahe by the French administration. The *Mahajana Sabha* under I.K. Kumaran stepped in and liberated the enclave of Cherukallai on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1954. I.K. Kumaran hoisted the Indian national flag over the Cherukallai police station.<sup>161</sup> This was followed by the adaptation of a resolution (1<sup>st</sup> May 1954) by the Municipality demanding immediate merger without referendum. Following this on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1954, Pallur, Chembra and Pandakkal in Naluthara were also freed from French rule by the volunteers of *Mahajana Sabha* and the Mahe wing of the French India Socialist Party, despite brutal attacks of *goondas* on pro-mergerists. A 7 men council comprising of Councillors from Naluthara assumed charge of the administration. With the fall of Cherukallai and Naluthara and the liberation of Pallur, Chembra and Pandakkal what remained in French hands was the port-town of Mahe.

Uncomfortable situation prevailed in French Yanam. In spite of the Georges Sala's, the Yanam administrator, strict vigilance on all pro-merger activities in Yanam, an Action Committee for the merger of Yanam was formed in Kakinada

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<sup>160</sup> *The Hindu*, 28 April 1954.

<sup>161</sup> *The Hindu*, 28 April 1954.

within the Indian Union, with Pydah Venkatanarayana, a member of the Indian parliament as President and Bhayankarachari as Secretary. Dadala who travelled from Pondicherry to Kakinada on 14<sup>th</sup> April 1954 played an important role in the forming of the Action Committee.<sup>162</sup> At a meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> April 1954 Dadala declared that volunteers would enter Yanam on 24<sup>th</sup> April to start a *Satyagraha* movement.<sup>163</sup> The formation of Action Committee certainly intensified the merger movement in Yanam. Public meetings and demonstrations were held daily urging immediate merger of Yanam with Indian Union. Anti-merger elements frequently attacked pro-merger volunteers under the guidance of Georges Sala. A new pro-French party led by Samatam Kristaya was created to suppress growing agitations.<sup>164</sup> It seems that the Yanam administrator pressurised four prominent leaders of Yanam, Madhimchetty Sathya, Kanakala Tataya, Kamichetty Parasuramarao and Erra Sathyanarayanamurthy to form an alliance against the Indian economic blockade and to oppose merger movement initiated by Dadala.<sup>165</sup> But the later decided to go against the Mahe Administrator and joined the merger movement. In a meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1954, the Mayor, the Deputy Mayors and several Municipal Councillors of the Yanam commune adopted a resolution towards merger with the Indian Union. The resolution remarked

Firmly attached and sympathetic towards the Indian Union, our Motherland, we the elected representatives of this establishment, ardently and unanimously desire the immediate integration and without referendum of the territory of our establishment with that of the Indian Union to which our territory is tied geographically, economically, ethnically and culturally.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Raphael Ramanayya Dadala. *My Struggle for the Freedom of French India*. Kakinada, 1974, pp. 25-29.

<sup>163</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 24 April 1954, and J. B. P. More. *The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam from French rule to integration with India*, M.S, 2007, p. 179.

<sup>164</sup> *Journal officiel des établissements français dans l'Inde*, November 1954, p. 187.

<sup>165</sup> J. B. P. More. *The Telugus of Yanam and Masulipatnam from French rule to integration with India*, M.S, 2007, p. 183-184.

<sup>166</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 May 1954.

The resolution was cabled to the President of the French National Assembly, the Council of the Republic and the Assembly of the French Union. A copy of the resolution was also forwarded to Indian Prime Minister Nehru. Following this a mammoth meeting was held on 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1954 at the Yanam Bridge in Indian territory under the Presidentship of Madhimchetty Sathya. Hundreds of inhabitants of Yanam crossed the Indian territory and attended the meeting.<sup>167</sup>

The French India administration retaliated. Hired ruffians were given a free-hand to teach the pro-mergerists a suitable lesson. *Goondaism* in Yanam exceeded all its limits from the first week of May 1954. This resulted in the exodus of 40 respectable families to Indian Union territory. Among them were Madhimchetty Sathya and Kanakala Tataya.<sup>168</sup> Madhimchetty Sathya, Mayor of Yanam was suspended from office on the pretext that his activities were detrimental to the security of the settlement.<sup>169</sup> It was reported that houses of pro-mergerists and Yanam leaders who had taken shelter in Indian Union came under the attack of ruffians accompanied by French police and some persons were indiscriminately arrested.<sup>170</sup> Scores of hooligans armed with sticks and daggers roamed the streets of Yanam terrorising the pro-merger elements. Villages were raided. By early June a large number of people sought refuge in the adjoining Indian territory. The Mayor accused that Georges Sala was responsible for the lawless situation in Yanam. The government of India lodged a strong protest with the French Indian authorities over the provocative incidents and acts of violence and *goondaism* taking place in Yanam.<sup>171</sup> Reports of progressive deterioration of Yanam situation and excessive

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<sup>167</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 May 1954.

<sup>168</sup> *The Hindu*, 4 May 1954.

<sup>169</sup> *Indian Express*, 4 May 1954.

<sup>170</sup> *The Hindu*, 27 May 1954.

<sup>171</sup> *The Hindu*, 27 May 1954.

brutalities let loose there had obliged Escargueil, Secretary-General (French Embassy) to visit Yanam to enquire into the reported acts of hooliganism and looting. He met the pro-merger leaders and admitted that there was truth in the allegations. He also assured the leaders that a full enquiry into the Yanam incidents would be conducted by a special officer and that compensation would be given to those who lost property in the looting.<sup>172</sup> Victimisation of the pro-merger people continued unabated in spite of the assurance given by Escargueil. Acts of terrorism and intimidation persisted despite India's gesture to create a good will by relaxation of permit system and supply of petroleum products.

### **Negotiations Resumed between India and France**

The overall situation in French India was definitely not favourable for France. By 30<sup>th</sup> April 1954, one-fourth of the French Indian possessions had been liberated by the pro-merger elements, and in the rest too, there are strong movements. Only the bigger settlements like Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam remained under French control. Moreover Indian economic pressure totally demoralised the normal economic life in the settlements. Tézanas du Montcel, who was sent by the French government to assess the political situation in French Indian settlements, too admitted in his report that if referendum had taken place in the situation existing in the French Indian settlements the results were sure to go against France. Even if the results had gone in favour of France this would not be acceptable to India.<sup>173</sup> The French government at last realized that they could not carry on the colonial business in India as they had done before. The altered situation induced the French government to opt for a solution on the basis of a negotiation with India.

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<sup>172</sup> *The Hindu*, 27 May 1954.

<sup>173</sup> Ajit K. Neogy. *Decolonization of French India: Liberation movement and Indo-French Relations 1947-54*. Institut Française de Pondichéry, 1997, p. 248.

Accordingly the French government sent Christian Belle, an emissary of the French government, to India. He reached New Delhi on 18<sup>th</sup> April with a personal letter from Joseph Laniel, the French Prime Minister, met Indian Prime Minister Nehru and handed it over to him. The letter of the French Prime Minister proposed a free and sincere exchange of views on the French India problem for the purpose of reaching an equitable solution without creating bitterness between the two countries. Laniel pointed out, “the very regrettable measures which have recently complicated the relations on a local plane,” would make it difficult to work out an agreed formula, acceptable to both the governments. He wanted reduction of measures affecting economic and social interests of the population in the French territories, and requested India to facilitate maintenance of law and order by French authorities in their territory.<sup>174</sup> Christian Belle, who met Nehru, expressed his regrets for the recent events which had complicated the relations between India and France. He told Nehru that “the French Government had to face certain difficulties and obstacles in regard to the Pondicherry situation. The chief difficulty was their Parliament. Neither the people generally, nor Parliament understood the situation fully. It was not possible for the French Government to take any step without convincing its Parliament”. He expressed his opinion that “it was conceivable that this question of Pondicherry might be settled by India unilaterally. But this would be unfortunate and affect the relations of the two countries. Hence it was desirable to deal with this matter by negotiations”.<sup>175</sup> Nehru categorically told Christian Belle that throughout these few years India had taken special care to avoid taking any step which might affect the prestige of France. India had also been anxious to settle this question in a way which would leave behind no trail of bitterness between the two countries. This pointed to

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<sup>174</sup> Cited in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 25, fn2, p. 524.

<sup>175</sup> Cited in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol. 25, p. 523.

the way of peaceful negotiations. Stanislas Ostrorog, the French Ambassador, who met Nehru along with Christian Belle, told Nehru that he had not discussed this matter with him during the last two and a half years of his stay in India, because he felt the time was not ripe for it. Now he felt that the time was ripe for such a discussion. He went on to say that the position in France at present was difficult. The French government was not very strong and there were especially internal difficulties in the French parliament. No French government could come to a decision on this matter without informing their parliament and getting their support. If parliament refused support to the government on an important matter, then the government would fall and the next government was likely to be worse in so far as that particular question was concerned. He also suggested that some kind of a token of goodwill, however small, on the part of Indian government, would have a very good effect in France. He felt sure that the result of proposed negotiations was likely to be very close to the viewpoint of the Indian government.<sup>176</sup>

Nehru replied to Joseph Laniel, in his letter dated 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1954. The Indian Prime Minister welcomed the desire of the French government for a friendly and peaceful settlement of the problems of the French Indian pockets “without leaving any ill-will or bitterness between the two nations.”<sup>177</sup> He also referred to the recent developments in the settlements which “doubtless adds to our difficulties,” but this situation, according to him, needed to be tackled with “wisdom and speed.” He admitted that India inevitably sympathized with the spontaneous movement of the people of the French Indian settlements, who desired to unite with the rest of their countrymen in India, but she had kept herself aloof and adhered strictly to

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<sup>176</sup> Cited in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol.25, p. 523.

<sup>177</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 524.

international practice and she had no desire to reach a “unilateral decision” in this matter.<sup>178</sup> He pointed out that France was aware of the Indian approach for a friendly settlement, i.e. immediate *de facto* transfer of authority to be followed later by *de jure* transfer of sovereignty, and “This approach”, he added, “appears to us to be practicable and offers a peaceful and equitable solution satisfactory to both countries”. With regard to the reference made by the French Minister about Indian... economic measures, Prime Minister Nehru wrote: “The Government of India have been constrained to take some measures in order to protect their territory and interest. It has not been, and is not, the intention of the Government of India that any of their actions should inflict hardship on the people of French Establishments in India and, so far as they are aware, no such result has occurred”. Anxious to settle the French India problem, Nehru emphasized that, “our two Governments should enter into active negotiations forthwith for the solution of this problem and thus implement as early as possible the desire of the people concerned”.<sup>179</sup>

He added that during these negotiations nothing should be done which might worsen the situation and efforts should be made to create an atmosphere helpful to those negotiations. Ready “to assist” the French Prime Minister in his “initiative”, the Indian Prime Minister concluded by suggesting the French government to appoint representatives to discuss the matters with them at New Delhi without delay. The government of India, according to him, had no difficulty to send a representative to Paris for the same purpose.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 525.

<sup>179</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p.525

<sup>180</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 526.

The exchange of letters and the willingness of the two governments to start direct negotiations for reaching a solution to the French India problem was a significant turning point in the history of French India. This actually had broken all the obstacles and barriers of prolonged problem between the two countries, heading towards a desirable conclusion. The stage was thus set right for holding direct negotiations between the governments. Indian government detracted from their earlier economic measures towards French Indian settlements and made some relaxations in the passport system, in the supply of petrol and petroleum products and release of some postal articles, intended for delivery through Indian postal offices to the French settlements were held up for completion of customs formalities, in order to create a proper climate for discussions and hoped that this might create a favourable impression on the French parliament.<sup>181</sup>

It was on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1954 during discussion in New Delhi between R.K. Nehru, the Indian Foreign Secretary, and Christian Belle, it was agreed to open negotiations in Paris regarding the French settlements on 14<sup>th</sup> May. Accordingly the conference took place at Paris from 14<sup>th</sup> May and continued till 4<sup>th</sup> June 1954. R.K. Nehru, Secretary to the Indian Foreign Ministry led the Indian delegation. M. Guy de la Tournelle, Director of Political Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, presented the French viewpoint. Some proposals and counter-proposals were put forwarded by both the delegations. The basic position of the Indian government was the immediate merger of the French Indian settlements with India without referendum, but in view of the constitutional difficulties which were repeatedly mentioned by the French government, India had suggested a compromise formula. In the first state, there should be a *de facto* transfer of administration as a whole to India. During this

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<sup>181</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 528.

transitory stage, the *de jure* sovereignty of France should continue. This stage should be of short duration and further negotiations should take place for the transfer of *de jure* sovereignty. The second stage should be completed after sovereignty had been transferred.<sup>182</sup> A counter-proposal was put forward by the French delegation. The main points of the French proposal were: (i) France was prepared to accept transfer of sovereignty in principle. But after transitory arrangements dealing with immediate situation had been made, negotiations should start for transfer of sovereignty which should be ratified by people in accordance with constitutional requirements; (ii) under transitory arrangements the French Commissioner in Pondicherry would be replaced by two delegates representing France and India. Departments of Economic Affairs, Customs and Public Works would be under the Indian delegate and the French delegate would have the departments of Police and Judiciary. Each delegate would have right to advise the other; (iii) existing Commissioner would be replaced by a new one and the Council of 84 and Municipal councils would be replaced by new members selected jointly by France and India; (iv) new Administrators in Mahe, Karaikal and Yanam would be appointed with the approval of India. Enclaves under popular control would be taken over completely by India.<sup>183</sup> These counter proposals were naturally rejected by the Indian delegation; instead they put forward the Indian Prime Minister's view at the time of negotiations. Nehru's reaction to the French proposal was (i) The French should accept transfer of sovereignty in principle and some time limit should be laid down for subsequent steps and ultimate transfer. Referendum should not be agreed to, but India might agree to the final proposal being legalised in accordance with constitutional requirements of both countries; (ii) transitory arrangements should end at the conclusion of period specified above. In

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<sup>182</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 527.

<sup>183</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 530.

these arrangements any diarchy of authority should be avoided. India might accept two delegates representing France and India respectively to take the place of French Commissioner in Pondicherry. Indian delegates must have Police and Judiciary in his charge (this because India would not be responsible for divided administration in which India directly or indirectly was responsible for the continuation of French colonial rule); (iii) there may be Indian advisers in some of the less essential departments, e.g. Economic Affairs, Public Works etc; (iv) in Mahe, Karaikal and Yanam, new Administrators must be approved by India if not appointed by India; (v) enclaves under popular control to be taken over by India completely; (vi) there seemed no reason why present council of 84 and Municipal councils should be replaced by new council. Their continuance was both desirable and proper during this transitory period which should not be lost.<sup>184</sup>

The negotiations continued till 4<sup>th</sup> June 1954 and attempts were made to reconcile the differences between the two delegations. At the end of negotiations the French delegations agreed that some immediate transfer of authority would take place as part of transitory regime. Both the delegations agreed that, during the transitory period, negotiations should take place for a final agreement between the two governments about the complete transfer of sovereignty, which would be part of arrangement to be ratified by the local people. What remained disputed between the two delegations was that the transitory administrative arrangements claimed by the Indian delegation were that the Police, Judiciary, Treasury, Economic Affairs and other essential departments should be placed under the full and undivided control of the Indian delegates. For India the complete transfer of Police and Judiciary departments was more important than any other less important departments not to be

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<sup>184</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, pp. 530-531.

transferred. The transitory arrangements claimed by the Indian delegation were not acceptable to the French delegation. The only department which the French delegations was prepared to transfer to Indian control was the Customs Department. Nehru instructed the Indian delegation that the transfer of Police and Judiciary is the crux of the matter and without that we are unable to proceed further.<sup>185</sup> As an agreement on this issue could not be reached between the two delegations, it was decided by the delegations that the negotiations would be discontinued. The three week-long (14<sup>th</sup> May to 4<sup>th</sup> June 1954) Indo-French talks at Paris with a view to reaching an amicable settlement failed. The different view points of the two delegations led to discontinuation of their talks. However, the failure of Indo-French did not affect the future diplomatic negotiations between the two governments. In the true sense this was the first attempt of the two governments to come closer to reach a compromise formula and it helped both the governments to ease up their hard attitude to carry on further negotiations.

### **Merger Movement: Liberation of Yanam and Mahe**

The news of the failure of Paris talks created a terrible disappointment in French Indian settlements. The general population who already lived under political uncertainty and economic hardships had to pass through more troubles before the settlements were finally merged with Indian Union. The plight of the population continued to worsen day by day due to short supply of essential commodities. Progressive shortage of Indian currency made it increasingly difficult to exchange French bank notes. The demand for Indian currency outstripped its supply and caused considerable inconvenience to the Pondicherry population. Kerosene disappeared from the market. Supply of electricity was snapped. Bus traffic between Pondicherry

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<sup>185</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 532.

and Madras had to be suspended due to frequent interruptions by the French India refugees.<sup>186</sup> There was complete chaos every where.

The failure of the Paris negotiations, however, caused no surprise among the pro-merger elements. The pro-merger leaders already raised doubts about French commitment to solve the problem and seek certain clarifications from France on several points such as (i) principle of transfer of sovereignty; (ii) envisaged period of transition; (iii) nature and purpose of the technical and other common issues relating to full transfer; (iv) precise nature of proposed popular consultation in place of formal referendum; (v) exact nature of financial union suggested by the French as condition for transfer of certain departments to the Indian delegate.<sup>187</sup> Since the Paris negotiations yielded no results the pro-mergerists intensified the merger movement. Arul Raj, President of the French India Youth Congress thundered that “to achieve our liberation the French Indian people should prepare for the final struggle to make foreigners quit the pockets.”<sup>188</sup> Already as the result of the popular and spontaneous movements, roughly one-fifth of the French Indian settlements were under popular control and in the rest too there were strong movements. The French India administration retorted through repressive measures on pro-mergerists and a scurrilous attack through hand bills and pamphlets was launched against Kewal Singh and the French India Socialist Party leaders.<sup>189</sup>

The most spectacular event in the aftermath of the collapse of the Paris negotiations was the capture of Yanam by pro-mergerists where tyranny of the French

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<sup>186</sup> Francis Cyril Antony, ed. *Gazetteer of India: Union Territory of Pondicherry*. Vol.I, Pondicherry, 1982, p. 269.

<sup>187</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-25, p. 531.

<sup>188</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 7 June 1954.

<sup>189</sup> *Indian Express*, 2 June 1954.

police had produced an explosive situation.<sup>190</sup> Since the formation of Yanam Action Committee the pro-mergerists had developed a rebellious mood. The repressive measures resorted to by the French Indian police and the hired ruffians in Yanam were now paid back by the pro-mergerists. As a result, a large crowd of pro-mergerists numbering about 300 accompanied by gun-wielding Indian police in civil dress and Indian national led by Dadala and some other Yanam leaders raided Yanam on 13<sup>th</sup> June 1954.<sup>191</sup> All government buildings were occupied by the insurrectional forces. Indian national flags were raised on the buildings. Yanam had been liberated from French rule. In a public meeting held on the same day pro-merger leaders passed a resolution requesting Yanam's integration with Indian Union.<sup>192</sup> The French authorities accused India for aiding and abetting the liberation of Yanam. It seems that Nehru was quite annoyed with the involvement of the Indian police in the incident. In a letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> June 1954, written to N. Sanjiva Reddy, Deputy Chief Minister of Andhra state, the Indian Prime Minister asked the immediate withdrawal of the Indian armed force from Yanam. He further added

We have to be very careful in regard to these French pockets. Everybody knows our full sympathy for the pro-merger elements, but any official association with them had to be avoided because it weakens our case and makes it appear that the people of these settlements are not so keen on merger. Please, therefore, take immediate steps in this matter.<sup>193</sup>

Soon after the fall of Yanam the French Indian administration started to increase their security by means of applying military measures. Pondicherry witnessed the arrival of 50 armed police under the command of a French officer on board the "Vietnam". The landing of French troops in the Bay of Bengal caused quite a stir among the people. The government of India lodged a strong protest note to the

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<sup>190</sup> There had been repeated assaults on the pro-mergerists by after the Yanam Municipal council resolved on 29<sup>th</sup> April 1954 in favour of an immediate integration of the settlement with Indian Union.

<sup>191</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 434 and Raphael, Ramanayya, Dadala. *My struggle for the Freedom of French India*. Kakinada, 1974, pp.29-30.

<sup>192</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 434.

<sup>193</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 435.

French Embassy in New Delhi. The French Indian administration denied the charges and maintained that they had been disembarked at Pondicherry for the maintenance of peace and order.<sup>194</sup> The French India administration increased its military strength by procuring a large quantity of arms and ammunition from Indo-China.<sup>195</sup> It was reported that trenches were dug all along the borders of Pondicherry on the French side while several French Indian police stations were equipped with wireless sets.<sup>196</sup> Trenches were also dug inside Mahe border.<sup>197</sup> This was done to prevent an internal upheaval of pro-merger volunteers marching into Pondicherry and Mahe, as happened in Yanam. Further, a full-armed French officer and 4<sup>th</sup> French Indian policemen were intercepted by the Indian police in the first week of July 1954 in Indian territorial waters near Cuddalore with a cargo of arms and ammunitions. They were taken to the shore and detained. The cargo consisting of 27 packages, were bound for Karaikal where merger movement had been gathering force.<sup>198</sup> The arrival of the French troops with arms and ammunition, the digging of trenches and the erection of barrages at borders were viewed as a direct challenge to the neighbouring Indian government.<sup>199</sup>

Discontent and disturbance reigned everywhere in Mahe. The solidarity of the pro-mergerist forces in Mahe produced another surprise to France. The Action Committee of the Mahe *Mahajana Sabha* led I.K. Kumaran met at Naluthara and decided to intensify the blockade around Mahe as part of the merger movement.<sup>200</sup> This led to economic hardships in Mahe and the exodus of large number of people including employees of the Mahe administration from it. When I.K. Kumaran's house was attacked by some pro-French elements, the Mahe administration was completely

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<sup>194</sup> *Namnadu*, 17 June 1954.

<sup>195</sup> *Indian Express*, 25 June 1954.

<sup>196</sup> *Times of India*, 21 June 1954.

<sup>197</sup> *The Hindu*, 28 June 1954.

<sup>198</sup> *Le trait d'union*, July 1954.

<sup>199</sup> *The Hindu*, 11 and 15 July 1954.

<sup>200</sup> *Indian Express*, 17 June 1954.

helpless. Even their traditional pro-French supporters including the Mayor of Mahe, Nalporeyil Sahadevan deserted them.<sup>201</sup> On 14<sup>th</sup> July 1954, the *Mahajana Sabha* and other volunteers overrun Mahe from different directions, hoisted Indian national flags and asked the French to quit Mahe. Deschamps, the Mahe Administrator, unable to wield any real power in Mahe, solicited permission from French authorities in France for evacuating the settlement. Accordingly on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1954 the Mahe Administrator handed over *de facto* governmental charge to the people of Mahe. I.K. Kumaran, President of the *Mahajana Sabha* and Joint Action Committee, took over charge of the Mahe administration on behalf of the Mahe people. Deschamps who wished the people of Mahe all happiness at a farewell party left Mahe on the same day.<sup>202</sup> Thus the more than two centuries of association of France with Mahe ended. The *Hindu* observed in its editorial on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1954

If the graceful manner in which the Administrator handed over power to the *Mahajana Sabha* leader sets the pattern for future French action in the remaining French Settlements, we may expect this vexed problem to be settled without further bitterness between India and France.<sup>203</sup>

With the fall of Yanam and Mahe, out of five French Indian settlements three had gone out of French control-Chandernagore had opted to join the Indian Union earlier in 1949 through a referendum and Yanam and Mahe by means of a popular upsurge of the local population. In Pondicherry itself, the communes of Nettapakkam and Bahour were liberated by the French India Socialist Party and Tirubuvanai by the representatives of the Merger Congress, the Socialist and the Communist parties. Parallel governments were setup in liberated communes. Chaos prevailed in Karaikal. Inspired by the events at Yanam and Mahe, the pro-mergerists of Karaikal also intensified their liberation struggle. Picketing was going on along the border of

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<sup>201</sup> J. B. P. More. *Freedom Movement in French Indian: The Mahe Revolt of 1948*. Tellicherry: IRISH, 2001, p. 185.

<sup>202</sup> *Indian Express*, 15, 16 and 17 July 1954.

<sup>203</sup> *The Hindu*, 18 July 1954.

Karaikal. No bus entered Karaikal limits from Indian Union. Entry of essential commodities and foodstuffs into Karaikal from India was interdicted. This caused terrible inconvenience to the local population.<sup>204</sup> Day by day agitations totally paralysed normal life in Karaikal. These measures were taken by the pro-mergerists to make the people understand that these hardships were due to French refusal to quit Indian soil. These altered situations prompted Du Tamby's Democratic Party to fall back from their support to the French government and to demand for the immediate merger of French India with the Indian Union without any formal referendum. The party admitted that peoples' economic life had become so intolerable and the French administration had failed to protect the people's interests, that French India's merger with the Indian Union had become an immediate necessity.<sup>205</sup> A strong current of agitations visibly went on within Pondicherry town. The student community in Pondicherry commenced a fast "to bring a change of heart in those who still lent their support to the French". The students withdrew their fasting only after a written statement from the civil servants, merchants associations and lawyers associations of Pondicherry to lend their support to the merger movement.<sup>206</sup> Excitement reached its climax when the "Massacre Day" was observed on 30<sup>th</sup> July 1954.<sup>207</sup> The volunteers of the processions were beaten by the French Indian police and the flags were forcibly taken away from them.<sup>208</sup>

### **The French Acquiescence and the Transfer of Power**

Meanwhile there was a changed attitude on the part of the French after the assumption of power by Pierre Mendès France as Prime Minister in June 1954. The

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<sup>204</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 7 July 1954.

<sup>205</sup> *Indian Express*, 19 and 20 July 1954.

<sup>206</sup> *Indian Express*, 26 July 1954.

<sup>207</sup> It was on this day in 1936 that French Indian police had shot dead some workers at the local Savanna mill for organizing a trade union to fight for their legitimate rights.

<sup>208</sup> *The Hindu*, 1 August 1954.

new French government's commitment for solution to French Indian problem was genuine. Nehru held high hopes in the new government headed by Mendès France, was in favour of moderation and reaching an amicable settlement with France. At the same time France was passing through a critical period. Her position in Indo-China was precarious. There were fresh waves of unrest in Tunisia and Morocco. There was a strong freedom movement going on there. The solving of Indo-China question had, occupied the top most position in the list of French priority. The solution to French colonial problems depended largely on the outcome of the Geneva conference. Since the French Indian problem was directly or indirectly tagged along with the fate of other French colonies, especially Indo-China, all eyes were fixed on the outcome of the Geneva conference to be held in July 1954.

At Geneva Mendès France had taken the historic decision of granting some sort of home rule in Tunisia and signing the cease-fire agreement with Indo-China on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> July 1954.<sup>209</sup> The success of the Geneva conference had created a favourable circumstance to solve the French Indian problem. The Indian Prime Minister cabled V.K. Krishna Menon, who was in Geneva to meet Mendès France at Paris, "if you think it appropriate, you might express hope on my behalf that question of French settlements in India will be settled satisfactorily soon thus promoting Indo-French goodwill."<sup>210</sup> The telegram also informed that 60 percent of French establishments in India are already freed of French control. Only Pondicherry and Karaikal remained with French and even Karaikal might not continue for long. Position of freed territories is very anomalous and something therefore should be done to solve this problem soon.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 435.

<sup>210</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 435.

<sup>211</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, pp. 435-436.

Soon after the Geneva conference was over Nehru, the Indian Prime Minister received a message from Mendès France. The message contained the French proposal of seven points to resume negotiations on a new basis. The seven-point proposition ran as follows

- (1) Acceptance by France of the principle of *de facto* cession before the *de jure* cession.
- (2) Determination between the Ambassador of France assisted by Pondicherry officials and the government of India of the modalities for transfer of power and working out a project of agreement aimed at safeguarding the cultural and economic interests of France.
- (3) Taking over by the government of India the change of administration of the territories which had escaped French control.
- (4) Meeting of the Representative Assembly and the Municipal Councils in a Congress within three months and without preliminary elections with a view to expressing their opinions on the above noted arrangements and on the conditions of transfer of power.
- (5) The vote being favourable for integration, *de facto* cession according to accepted modalities.
- (6) Preparation of an agreement for transfer of sovereignty.
- (7) Signature of the agreement and ratification of parliaments.<sup>212</sup>

The message of the French Prime Minister also had requested Nehru not to issue any statement about the proposals agreed upon till they had been approved by his parliament, where he wanted to bring them up in a debate later in the month of

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<sup>212</sup> Cited in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, pp. 436-437.

August.<sup>213</sup> This he requested to prevent premature publicity which might have unfortunate effects on French public opinion and to avoid considerable opposition from the French parliament. Nehru accepted the seven-point French proposal. To carryout further negotiations to settle the French Indian question in an amicable manner the Indian government agreed to withdraw all measures of economic pressure and Nehru instructed Kewal Singh to avoid any incidents which might lead to undesirable results. This meant an end to picketing and stoppage of essential supplies to French India by pro-mergerists on the borders.<sup>214</sup> The pro-mergerists had agreed to slacken agitations in the hope of early announcement of agreement between India and France and suggested that “the momentum of the nationalist movement should not be scotched unless we are convinced of the French Government’s sincerity.”<sup>215</sup> Ménard was recalled to Paris and Escargueil, Secretary-General of the French Embassy at New Delhi, took charge of the French Indian administration. Pierre Landy, a senior diplomat and former Consul General of Calcutta, was sent to India as diplomatic adviser. This was considered as a prelude to the imminent transfer of power.

The Indo-French negotiations, suspended in Paris in June 1954, were resumed in New Delhi on 5<sup>th</sup> August 1954.<sup>216</sup> It was expected that an official announcement for the transfer of power was to be made soon but it was delayed due to lack of active negotiations. Costilhes, Secretary General of French Ambassador in New Delhi, visited Pondicherry to establish a normal situation. He informed the people that France was negotiating with India for transferring power. He told them that this was the time for them to claim last minute concessions and privileges as transfer of power

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<sup>213</sup> Cited in *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 437.

<sup>214</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 437-438.

<sup>215</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 437.

<sup>216</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-26, p. 577.

was inevitable.<sup>217</sup> The French National Assembly debated the issue and certain interpellations had been made on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1954. In the French National Assembly Robert Buron, the French Overseas Minister, stood firm on the point that no transfer or cession of sovereignty over the French pockets in India without popular consultation could take place. If not referendum, he gave the impression that France was possibly insisting on the adoption of some kind of consultation with the people involved before the transfer of power.<sup>218</sup> Nehru in his speech on foreign affairs in Indian parliament on 25<sup>th</sup> August 1954 expressed the hope that a solution to the French Indian problem would soon be found out. He added

Exchange of views and ideas between ourselves and the Government of France have been in progress for some time and they are being pursued with good will on the both sides. The Prime Minister of France had demonstrated to the world his patriotism and boldness as well as his desire for peaceful settlement by negotiations. I have every hope that we shall before long witness the solution of this problem in the context of the full freedom of our people and of firmer friendship between India and France.<sup>219</sup>

At this crucial juncture, K. Ramasamy Iyer, the President of the French India Peoples' Welfare Protection Party, in a pamphlet dated 24-8-1954 circulated among the population condemning the French government's decision to carryout negotiations with India without consulting its population of French India. He accused the French officials for illegally trying to handover the sovereignty to India. He opined that the procedure was unconstitutional and requested the French government to conduct a referendum before commencing any negotiation with India. He added that the French government never consulted the real wishes of the population and that the referendum was the only way to know the real wishes of people. The pamphlet declared that if the French government decided to consult the wishes of the local population other than

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<sup>217</sup> This message was meant especially for the pro-French people sections of French India (*Le trait-d'union*, August 1954).

<sup>218</sup> *Il y a 50 ans: Pondichéry, L'Intégration des Etablissements française en Inde perspectives historiques et culturells*. Auroville Press Publishers, Auroville, 2004, pp. 57-61.

<sup>219</sup> *Indian Express*, 26 August 1954 and *Le trait d' union*, August 1954.

through a referendum, for instance, if the government of France decided to consult the wishes of the people through its elected representatives, he held that the present elected members of French India were corrupted and unqualified for consultation. Therefore he requested the French government to suspend the present *Assemblée Représentative's* members and to conduct fresh elections to establish a new environment. The pamphlet also appraised the French rule and its added value for the French Indian population and requested the French government to safeguard their interests.<sup>220</sup>

In spite of opposition from some section of French Indian population, on 27<sup>th</sup> August 1954, the French *Assemblée nationale* by a vote of 371 against 215 adopted a motion favouring the continuation of the negotiation having due regard to the French constitutional principles, safeguarding the interests of the French nationals and the protection of French economic and cultural interests.<sup>221</sup>

The final phase of the negotiations on the modalities for the transfer of power had commenced after the approval of the French *Assemblée nationale*. The initial difficulties which had hamstrung the Paris talks were, in the meanwhile, sorted out and the following days witnessed an elaboration of the final agreement between the representatives of the two governments. Much stress was put on the protection of French cultural, commercial and financial interests and safeguarding the right of those associated with the French Indian administration. The negotiations however resulted in complete agreement towards the end of September 1954. The text of the agreement, along with the 8 letters exchanged, was fully signed on 11<sup>th</sup> October 1954 (see

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<sup>220</sup> R.L. Purushotama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I., Pondicherry.

<sup>221</sup> *Il y a 50 ans: Pondichéry, L'Intégration des Etablissements française en Inde perspectives historiques et culturels*. Auroville Press Publishers, Auroville, 2004, pp. 57-61.

Appendix-IX). A joint *Communiqué* issued by the governments of India and France on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1954 on the French Indian settlements announced that

Desirous of reaching a final settlement on the question of the French establishments in India, the Government of India and the Government of French Republic through their representatives in Delhi have engaged in negotiations. As a result of these negotiations the two governments have agreement on the following procedure. All elected members of the Representative Assembly and the Municipal Councils of the establishments will meet at a congress on October 18 in the settlements of Pondicherry to consider the joint proposals of the two governments for a final settlement of the future of the settlements and record their decisions on these proposals as an expression of the wishes of the people.<sup>222</sup>

An *Arrêté* of the *Commissaire de la République*, published on 11<sup>th</sup> October in the *Journal officiel* of French India, summoned the elected Municipal members of the four south Indian settlements and the *Assemblée Représentative*, whose election was valid up to 1<sup>st</sup> January 1954, to meet at *Kizhur* (Kijéour) about 10 miles on the border west of Pondicherry on 18<sup>th</sup> October at 10 o'clock to decide the future of the French settlements in India.<sup>223</sup> On 17<sup>th</sup> October, the French India Socialist Party unanimously decided at a convention at Madukarai (Nettapakkam), to vote for merger with Indian Union. The party resolution runs thus:

The French India Socialist Party views with feelings of satisfaction and thankfulness the successful termination of the struggle waged by them in cause of the merger of the Settlements with the Indian Union and considering both the fact that it has achieved its present victory solely through methods such as have been adopted by the Indian National Congress and the fact that the members of the party have had for a long time direct connection with the Indian National Congress and its leaders, the conference hereby decides that the party in its present name shall forthwith be wound up and its members after duly subscribing to the creed of the Indian National Congress shall constitute a State Congress, which will seek affiliation with the present organisation immediately.<sup>224</sup>

Likewise, in Karaikal, the *Comité francophile* party announced its support to the merger of French Indian settlements with Indian Union. Mohamad Ibrahim

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<sup>222</sup> *The Hindu*, 15 October 1954.

<sup>223</sup> *Journal officiel de l'Inde français*, 11 October 1954, pp. 539-540.

<sup>224</sup> *Insight. Practical Politics: A Documentary of the French India Socialist Party*. 1954.

Marackiar, the President of the party, requested all the pro-French parties to withdraw their support for French rule and to strengthen the Indian Union.<sup>225</sup>

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1954, at *Kizhur*, Balasubramanian, President of the French India *Assemblée Représentative*, acted as the Presiding officer of the Congress. The members were given two ballot papers—one signifying merger with Indian Union bearing the Indian tri-colour emblem and the other signifying the negative vote with the French emblem. The voting slips bore the words “Are you in favour of merger of French Indian Settlements with the Indian Union according to the procedure laid down in the proposed agreement between the two Governments?” The question was printed in both Tamil and French languages. Out of 178, 170 members voted overwhelmingly in favour of merger with Indian Union and 8 voted against.<sup>226</sup> The results were declared in the presence of Pierre Landy and Kewal Singh. This was followed by the signing of the Treaty at New Delhi on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1954.

At 5.13 hours on the evening of 31<sup>st</sup> October 1954 the French national flag was lowered from the top of the Governor’s house with due military honours and Escargueil left Pondicherry on the same day after handing over charges to Pierre Landy. On 1<sup>st</sup> November of 1954 at 6.45 in the morning a document of transfer of power was signed between Pierre Landy representing France and Kewal Singh, Indian Consul General in the official residence of the former. Kewal Singh, the first Chief Commissioner designated by the government of India took charge of the administration of the settlements. In Karaikal too Boucheney handed over power to A.V. Loganathan, the first Indian Administrator.<sup>227</sup> Immediately after this the Indian

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<sup>225</sup> *The Madras Mail*, 12 October 1954.

<sup>226</sup> *The Hindu*, 18 and 19 October 1954.

<sup>227</sup> *Paris Match*, undated.

national flag was hoisted over the Government House amidst thunderous cries of *Vande Mataram* raised by the vast gathering outside and to the echo of booming guns.<sup>228</sup> Throughout the day there was jubilation everywhere in Pondicherry, in Karaikal, in Mahe and in Yanam and the rest of India joined them in this hour of joy. The people of India welcomed the residents of the erstwhile French settlements into the larger fold of Indian citizenship. “A part of India separated from the motherland is coming back to us of its own free will,” Prime Minister Nehru said in a message welcoming the people inhabiting “what used to be the French enclaves in India” “as nationals of the Republic of India.”<sup>229</sup> Thus at the dawn of 1<sup>st</sup> November thereby ending more than two centuries old French rule over the four settlements of south India. The process of decolonisation of five French Indian settlements was begun in 1947, came to a crest in 1954, but was finalized only in 1962. Though the administration of French Indian settlements were transferred to Indian government in 1954, France retained its legal sovereignty until 1962. This ambiguous position came to an end in 1962 when the government of France ratified a 1956 Treaty (of 31 Article instrument of transfer (See Appendix - X) with India, relinquishing all territorial claims. As a result of this Treaty, however, the constituent parts of former French settlements in south India were to remain united as a single administrative unit constituting at first the State of Pondicherry and then the Union Territory of Pondicherry.

The political situation in French India had repercussions in the Portuguese possessions.<sup>230</sup> In an *Aide-mémoire* presented to the Portuguese Foreign Minister on

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<sup>228</sup> *Indian Express*, 2 November 1954.

<sup>229</sup> *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol-27, p. 221.

<sup>230</sup> The Portuguese possessions in India consisted of Goa, Daman and Diu, covering an area about 1,537 sq. miles situated on the west coast (Bombay coast) of India. Goa is the largest with 1,304 sq. miles having a fine natural harbour and known to the chief emporium of commerce between the East

27<sup>th</sup> February 1950, India suggested the opening of negotiations to devise ways and means for the peaceful transfer of the Portuguese settlements. Portugal arrogantly rejected the offer and it increased and strengthened its armed forces to order back the rising tide of nationalism. The government of India patiently tried to make Portugal wake up to the realities of the new world. A second *Aide-mémoire* of 13<sup>th</sup> January 1953 warned that the nationalist urge to be united to the mother country (India) could not be thwarted. Portugal refused “to negotiate on its inalienable rights in Goa, Daman, and Diu.” Hence there was no alternative for India but to withdraw its Legation in Lisbon in June 1953.<sup>231</sup>

As in the French Indian settlements, 1954 proved to be a fateful year. The nationalists had planned to free their territories by peaceful means like *satyagraha*. The official reception was to crush any vocal or demonstrative opposition or resistance. The authorities in Goa had unleashed a reign of terror for more than a year. Such savagery and persecution gave an edge to the liberation movement. On 18<sup>th</sup> June 1954 the Indian national flag was hoisted in almost all villages of Goa, and overnight the “Quit Goa” slogan was written on the walls of houses and on the roads. There were several political groups actively working for liberation, but the United Front of Goans, with a heavy Roman Catholic majority, and the Goan People’s Party were in

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and West. It was the headquarters’ of the Portuguese government in India and enjoyed the same privileges as Lisbon. Daman covering 22 sq. miles situated about a hundred miles north of Bombay, is again a good and valuable port with possibilities of expansion as a ship-building yard. Including in it for administrative purpose was the *Pargana* of Nagar Haveli, 125 sq. miles, which is separated from it by nearly 7 miles of Indian territory. Diu is a small island, 20 sq. miles in area, off the southern coast of Saurashtra. Each of these territories had judicial department and Governor to look after its interests, the Governors being subordinate to the Governor General of Portuguese territories in India, who had headquarters in Goa. The Portuguese possessions in India were considered as “Provinces”, constituting an integral part of Portugal. The Minister for Overseas Portugal controlled the administration of the “State of India” in consultation with the Council for the Overseas. He appointed the Governor-General who administered the legislations passed by the National Assembly in Lisbon. In Goa itself there was a Legislative Council of 12 members, 7 nominated by the Governor-General and 5 elected by 40 wealthiest tax-payers

<sup>231</sup> Keesing’s Contemporary Archives 1952-54, Bristol, pp. 14200-14205.

the forefront of the struggle. The last week of July 1954 riveted attention away from Goa, first on Dadra and later on Nagar Haveli. On the night of 21<sup>st</sup> July a few leading members of the United Front of Goans entered the enclave of Dadra and called on the police to surrender.<sup>232</sup> The demand was answered by gunfire, but only for a short time, for the Goans carried out a successful assault during a lull in the firing. This signalled the liberation of Dadra. Nehru summed up this happy consummation thus:

“...the fact that 32 Portuguese police personnel armed with automatic weapons surrendered to a small body of unarmed men goes to show that the latter had the overwhelming support of the local population...”<sup>233</sup>

A week later volunteers of the Azad Gommantak Dal and the Goan People’s Party marched on another enclave, Nagar Haveli, only to find the Portuguese and the majority of the police fleeing before them. On 2<sup>nd</sup> August, Nagar Haveli and Selvasa were freed from the Portuguese control.<sup>234</sup> But it took another six years for the legal and constitutional integration of Portuguese possessions into Indian Union.<sup>235</sup> India had to fight many legal battles with Portugal to regain its territories. The violence and the Indian military presence in Goa witnessed a bloody episode of decolonisation of a foreign possession in the Indian sub-continent.

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<sup>232</sup> *Times of India* (Bombay), 22 July and 23 July 1954.

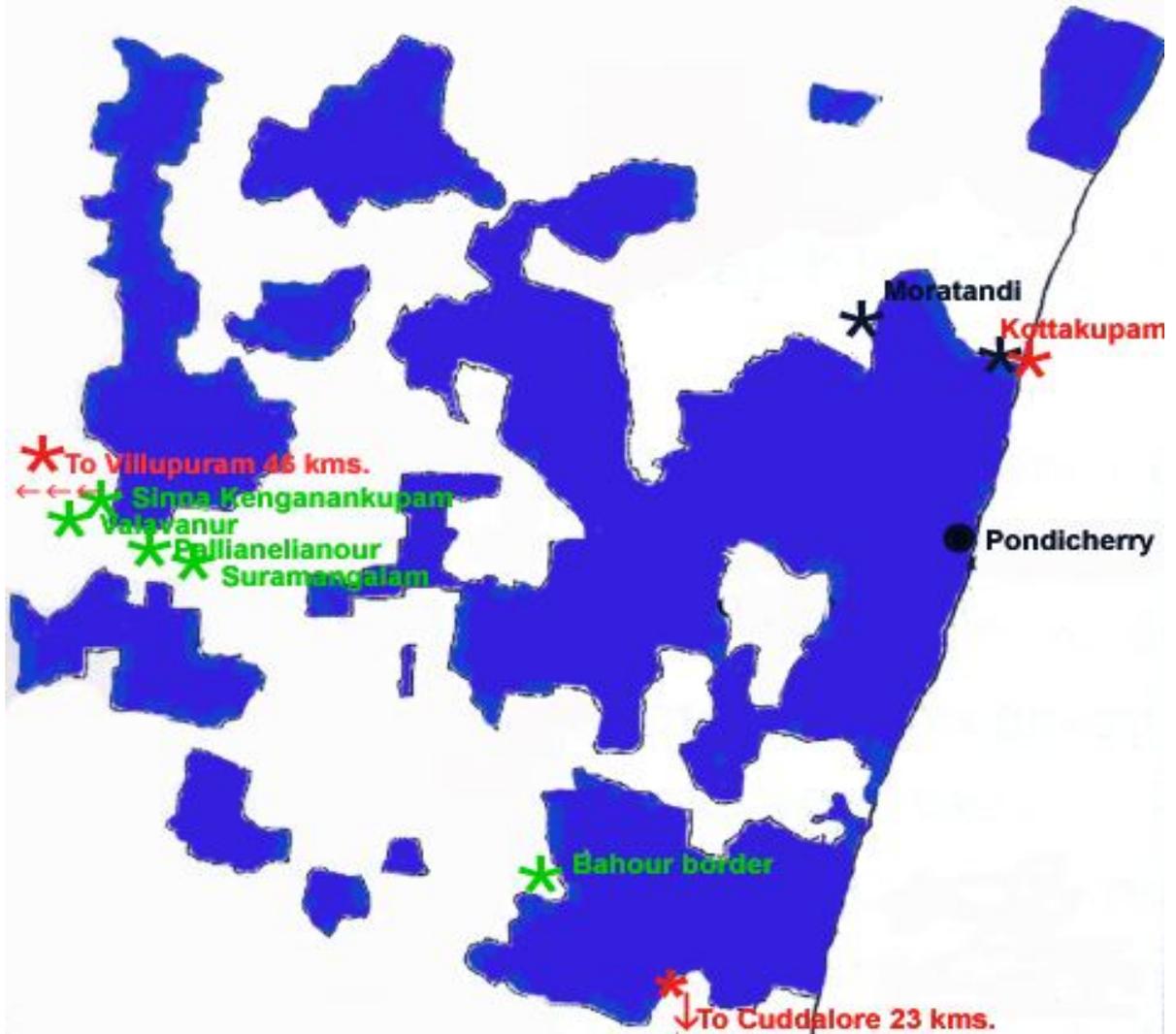
<sup>233</sup> *Times of India* (Bombay), 28 July 1954.

<sup>234</sup> *Times of India* (Bombay), 3 August 1954.

<sup>235</sup> In August 1961, Dadra and Nagar Haveli were legally and constitutionally integrated into India and less than three months later Goa, Daman and Diu were integrated by the Indian Constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Bill and the Goa, Daman and Diu (Administration) Bill of March 1963 by a unanimous vote.

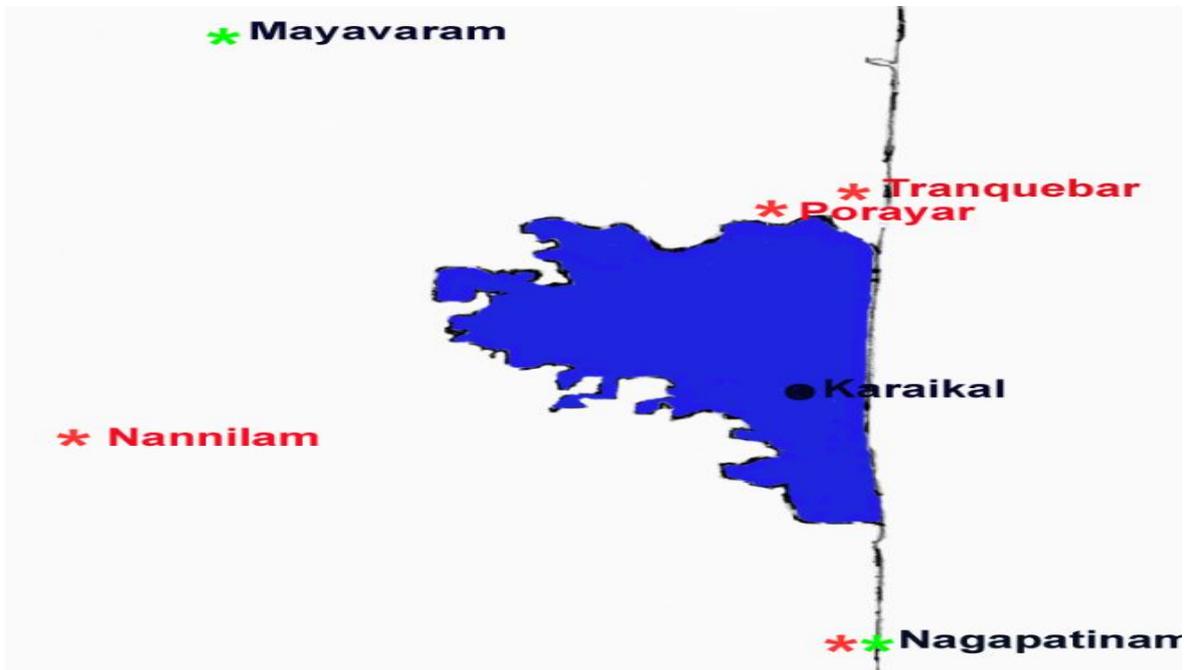
## Map4. Border camps of Pro-Mergerists

### Pondicherry



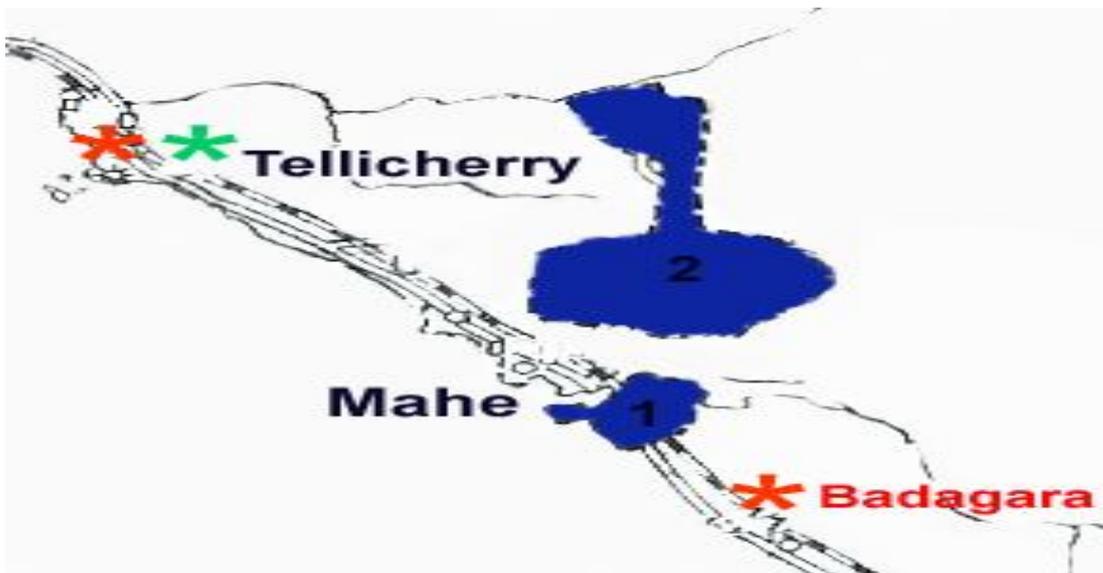
\* V.Subbiah \* Lambert Saravane \* Dadala Ramanayya

## Karaikal



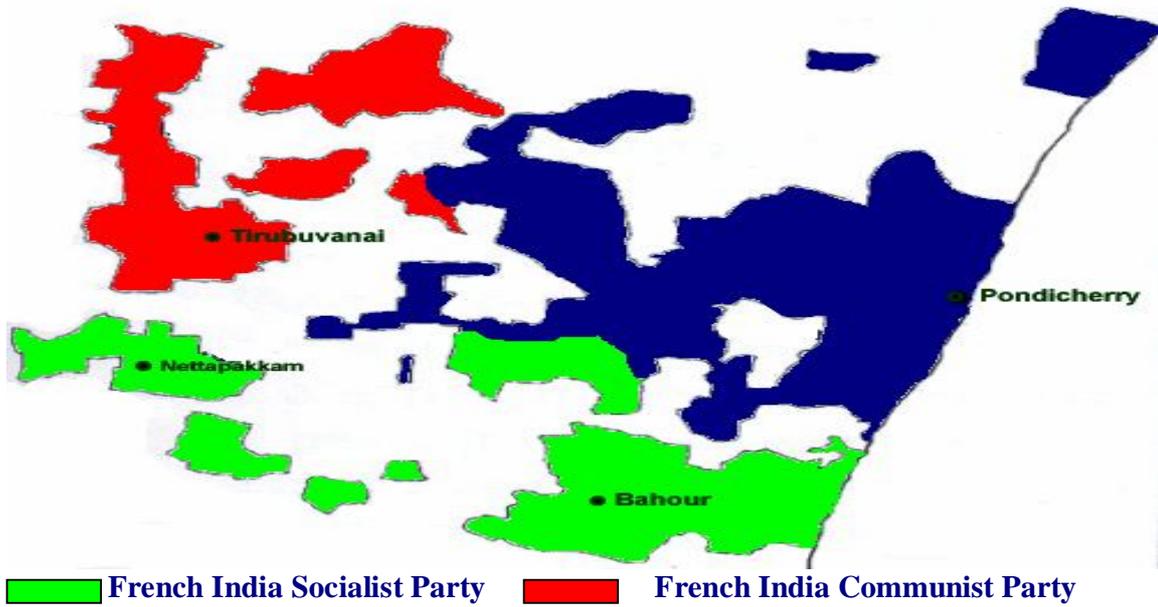
\* Communists \* Liberation Committee

## Mahe



\* Communists \* Mahajana Sabha

**Map 5. Liberated enclaves in Pondicherry**



**Map 6. Liberated French Settlements of Mahe and Yanam**

