CHAPTER - VII

Conclusion

Indian society, before the establishment of French settlements, functioned on the basis of certain interdependence. The French colonial regime introduced representative institutions and innovations of administration, law, education and politics. All this resulted in the creation of an institutional framework within which society functioned. The earlier system of interdependence was replaced by a system of dependence on the State. The French political institutions and legislative bodies constituted an important component of the State, and therefore attracted landlords, privileged sections of society, joined in due course of time, by the educated and professionals, mainly on account of their economic clout and prominence. The domination of the privileged sections virtually created the political elite, a new rank in the colonial society. The political elite of French India, though they constituted a small portion of the total population of the French Indian settlements, dominated the political scene and the French-Indian administration and enjoyed the manifold benevolence of French rule. They participated in the institutional framework put in place by the French as subordinates and as instruments serving French colonial interests. They competed against one another for power and position within this institutional framework. However, the Political elite were never committed to any ideals and principles; had no value in their politics; and what really counted was power and profits for their self-advancement. The French colonial system did not oppose this, but actually intended things to be like that, as these political elite were a great asset for sustaining French colonial rule in India.
In the post World War II scenario, the French introduced more reforms in their Indian colonies in order to win over the local political elite and to strengthen the bonds of the newly constituted French Union by bringing the representatives of the French Indian settlements within its orbit. The French settlements in India constituted one of the overseas territories of the French Union enjoying a sizeable amount of self-government. Since French administrative and political reforms provided enough accommodation and privileges to the local political elite in a proportional manner, every one of them stood for the colony remaining within the new French Union on the basis of a certain notion of equality between the colony and France. The National Democratic Front, formed by Communists in 1946 and joined by French India Socialist Party in 1947 was in favour of French India remaining fully a self-governing national unit within the French Republic. It demanded adequate representation for French Indians in the representative institutions to be newly formed in France and in French India. A common theme was set on the appreciation of French civilization tied to a rejection of French colonialism. Even those who were opposed to the continuance of French colonial rule wanted to maintain as such the State structure put in place by the French. Their prime target was the machinery of the Colonial State, i.e., the State controlled by officials from metropolitan France. Though some would have liked to reform it to some extent, they in fact, aimed to Indianise the entire bureaucracy of the state, preferring at the same time to maintain the existing State structure because manifold advantages were enjoyed from by them under such a structure. That’s the reason why some wanted the merger to take place through a treaty of cession. They were allowed to participate in the negotiation in order to safeguard the special interests of the people of the settlements. They wanted a period of transition of 25
to 30 years. But this was acceptable neither to India, nor to France. More precisely, the local political elite wanted the separate identity of French Indian settlements to be maintained and respected. They hesitated to join the Indian Union until they were assured that their position in the new regime was safeguarded. They played diplomatic chess games with both the French and Indian governments and delayed the merger process.

The process of decolonization of French India is described often as the “freedom movement” or “liberation movement” by historians who gave different connotations from different ideological perspectives. For instance the nationalist school of historians glorified decolonization of French India as a ‘Freedom Movement’ against French colonialism and some of them even propounded the notion of a continuance of India’s struggle for independence. The historians who belonged to the Marxist school described the decolonization of French India as a ‘Liberation Movement’ from French imperialism. However, the local people generally viewed it as a movement for merger of these settlements with the Indian Union. Until India’s independence, there was no anti-French movement in French India. The Indian National Congress advised the people of French India not to do anything hostile to the French as the latter gave shelter to Indian patriots who had taken refuge in the settlements and who continued their struggle from these secure places.¹ When independence from Britain became certain, the Indian press began a diatribe against what they called foreign possessions in India. Soon after independence, the Indian government declared in its turn that it did not recognise the right of France on the settlements. Indian National Congress strengthened its cadres in French India and started mobilizing the local population against the French. The local population viewed it...

as a merger with India while the congress nationalists called it as a freedom movement. The nationalists of French Indian settlements demanded that they be transferred to, or merged with, the Union of India. What made them to do this was the consciousness of being ‘Indian’. The notion of nationalism in French India persisted on a feeling of oneness or sharing the same culture, language, social, religious and ethnic bonds with other Indians in the sub continent. In fact, it was a spontaneous movement of the nationalist forces inspired by the extreme desire of forcing the French out of India and joining India immediately. Their strategy was to incorporate the French Indian settlements into the Indian Union, inspired by India’s independence from Britain. However, the pro-merger movement which sprang into action in the French Indian settlements under the patronage of Indian government did not take the form of a nationalist movement but rather proceeded as the political struggle against French political domination (not against French culture and French language). The difference between the Indian freedom struggle and French Indian struggle must be understood in the context of the nature of French colonialism in India. M. M. Hussaine, one of the oldest members of the Pondicherry Harijan Seva Sangh and a veteran politician argued that there was no protest against the French in the form of freedom movement in these territories. He agreed with Lambert Saravane’s opinion that the nature of French colonialism in India was not political but rather cultural.\footnote{M. M. Hussaine, Lecture on Freedom Movement in Pondicherry in Saturday, the 30th Sept., 1972, 7.00 P.M.} Actually, perhaps apart from some heated and emotional statements pronounced during the course of the merger movement, there was generally not the slightest hatred of French people and their country. Even some of the participants in the merger movement, in their interview with
the researcher, did not fail to appreciate the efficiency of French bureaucracy and administration and France’s great commitment to the love of its overseas people. Although the colonial influence in French Indian settlements was quite different from that of British India, the people here showed considerable zeal for liberation from French rule and to become an integral part of the Indian Union. Thus, the notion of an anti-colonial struggle persisted in the form of pro-Indian merger movement and merger organisations.

The French contended that the pro-merger leaders did not have support among the local population. This argument came from the fact that the French Indians made many sacrifices for France during World War I and II and remained more loyal to the cause of France than for the cause of the Indian Union. An explanation to this argument can be found from a close study of the pro-merger elements in French Indian settlements. Most of the pro-merger leaders were senior advocates and veteran politicians who were inactive as they were not ready to take any risks against the Socialist party goondas. The Indian authorities tried to gear up the pro-merger activities in French India. Pro-merger committees were set up in Pondicherry and Karaikal to intensify the agitation and to unite against the anti-merger forces, but the pro-mergerists lacked unity. The pro-merger committees consisted of diverse elements having little in common had almost become a spent-force 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. They were frightened

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because they knew that they could be crushed in a minute if they raised their heads. Hence they preferred to remain inactive rather than to come out in the open. S.K. Banerjee, the Indian Consul General at Pondicherry, felt that they are not prepared to put up a fight against the anti-mergerists unless India backs them with force, material as well as moral support. The Student Congress, an active organisation till 1948, was ruthlessly and callously crushed and the students were jailed. Some of the students were won over by offer of appointments, while others felt frustrated due to French colonialism. In Mahe the Mahajana Sabha, under the leaderships of I.K. Kumaran and C.E. Bharatan had done good work by uniting a large section of the people and securing their support for the cause of merger with India. The pro-mergerists of Mahe who spearheaded the riot or revolt of Mahe in 1948 were in exile outside Indian territories. They were dedicated workers and worked hard for the merger with the Indian Union. But as the leaders were either in exile or in jail, there was little evidence of their old activities. Moreover, the Indian leaders did not put much faith in the local pro-merger elements mainly due to the lack of unity among them and the absence of any consistent ideologies. Only the defection in 1954 of the Socialist leaders, who finally changed their stand for the merger cause, gave a new impetus to the pro-merger movement and quickened the process of the merger of the French settlements with the Indian Union.

Caste, religion and profession were vital factors in gaining support for political elites. Charismatic leadership, along with wealth and power wielded in the locality determined the support of the general population for political elite. It is very difficult to

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judge which section of the general population participated in the anti-merger movement and which section supported the merger movement. On the whole, available evidence reveals that the politically active section of the population stood divided on the issue. The mass of the population suffered during the difficult times and remained as silent spectators of the events. In the absence of Indian or French government’s assurance about their future status, with the possibility of a violent confrontation with goondas supported by the French police, they remained aloof from the struggle for merger with India. In the contemporary sources of the period, which this researcher has analysed, it could be noticed that the Muslim community in French Indian settlements was highly influenced by the development of communal politics in India. They were in a state of shock after the partition of India. The French, by showing their willingness to raise the Pakistan flag along with the Indian and French flags on the Municipal building, catered to their religious feelings. This and other related moves led many Muslims to believe that they and their interests were safer under French rule than under the imminent Indian rule. Political events in the sub-continent contributed largely to the general aloofness of the Muslims from the merger movement.\(^8\)

The French efforts of conversion to Christianity and the legal assimilation (Renonciation) of native Indians created a loyal community of Indian Christians, Renonçants, and a sizable numbers of untouchables, who enjoyed a certain amount of social promotion under the French.\(^9\) Nevertheless, some of them had always sympathized with the French rule and the French Union. N. Marimuthu an employee of French Indian

\(^8\) There were some pro-Indian Muslims of Pondicherry and Karaikal, who willingly participated in the merger movement at a later stage.

\(^9\) Their population made up about 10 to 15% of the total population of French India.
administration who turned to politics after retirement belonged to the depressed caste. In his interview with the researcher, he admitted that there was no struggle for equality of the depressed caste people under French rule. According to him, the French were genuine champions of equality of all men. Certainly the depressed caste people always sided with the French but he did not rule out that some of the leaders among this caste were influenced by Indian nationalism and supported merger with India.\textsuperscript{10} The anti-merger movement in the settlements was forged into a strong platform for rallying the citizens of French India around Edouard Goubert and the French India Socialist Party. When the party made a complete volte-face and supported the merger, the pro-French supporters were in utter shock and found themselves without an organisational support to hold on together. The French India Socialist Party apart, which finally shifted its position, the Franco Indian community and the Muslims of French India, remained pro-French under Du Tamby’s Democratic Party. When the French India Socialist Party betrayed them in 1954, they were deserted and virtually discounted. Actually, there is slightest evidence either in the official records or in the newspapers, to indicate that the anti-merger movement was pre-meditated and organized. On the contrary, everything points out to its spontaneous nature. The anti-merger movement emerged as a force because of the intention of the anti-mergerists to protect French influence and maintain a separate identity with French collaboration.

Despite all the pro-merger activities, the French Indian people (Chandernagore aside) consistently voted for anti-merger candidates and political parties. This raises the question whether the clamour of opposition to merger represented a majority of French

\textsuperscript{10} N. Marimuthu, Dated of Interview 20, August 2005.
Indian population or did it voice the stand of a powerful few. An analysis of the elections was held in French Indian settlements since Indian independence reveals the following facts. In the Municipal elections held in 1948, the French India Socialist Party, an anti-merger political party swept all 102 seats, despite multiple opposition by pro-merger parties. Some years later, in the Député election of 1951, Edouard Goubert, the pro-French candidate, crushed his pro-merger rival Lambert Saravane and won by a huge margin (90,053 votes against 149 votes). Again in the elections to the French India Assemblée Représentative some months later, the French India Socialist Party candidates captured almost all the seats. In the above elections, the French India Socialist Party representing the Renonçants, civil servants, a portion of Muslims community, portion of Christian’s community, ruling political elite, pensioners, depressed caste people, retired military persons, and smugglers dominated the French Indian electorate and demonstrated the majority of the pro-French and anti-merger sentiments. But the way in which the above elections were conducted clearly showed the methods of coercion used by the French India Socialist Party to the suppress opposition. The elections were fraudulently executed and the results were dishonestly obtained. N.V. Rajkumar, who monitored the 1948 elections as the representatives of the All India Congress Committee observed that, “Elections have always been a mockery there (in French India) might was right, and a handful of political bosses with their goonda (i.e., hooligan) followers, aided by the liberal use of money and liquor, could win them easily for themselves.” Under such circumstances, the government of India was neither prepared to recognize the election results, nor ready to read into them an anti-merger sentiment. At the same time,

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11 See Chapter IV, Table no: 4.2, p.170 and Chapter V, Table no.5.4, pp.239-241.
12 N. V. Rajkumar. The Problem of the French India. All India Congress Committee, 1951. pp. 4-5.
the government of India was also aware that the vote in favour of the *de-facto* transfer in 1954 was not given in normal circumstances and whole-heartedly. India kept silent, when the same fraudulent and pro-French elected members voted in favour of an immediate transfer without popular referendum of French Indian settlements to Indian sovereignty at the controversial Congress which met on 18th October 1954 at Kizhur.

The role of the political elite in the movements was inevitable; they took full advantage of the situation, indulged in double dealing with both India and France, hoping to enjoy the best of both the worlds and delayed the solution. The political manoeuvres of the ruling clique confused both France and India, making it difficult for them to take the right direction in their diplomatic relations, and worsened and delayed the merger process. Edouard Goubert was the kingpin of the initial pro-French and later pro-merger movement. Goubert was a rank opportunist. In the final stage when he changed his stand he had muzzled other pro-mergerists and took the lead in the Quit French India movement of 1954. He survived throughout the period under all circumstances and was quite well experienced in exploiting the French Indian situation. Some of his colleagues like Muthu Pillai, Karunendra Mudaliar and Muthukumarappa Reddiar too were no strangers to this kind of politics and always remained behind his methods of action. They had never committed themselves to any ideals and principles and always sought political gains for their self-advancement. In fact, as merger approached in 1954, many members of anti-merger parties in the French Indian settlements abandoned the sinking French ship and swam into the arms of the pro-mergerist forces without much difficulty. It should be also noted that the pro-mergerists were not moulded by uniform principles, ideals and ideologies. In fact, some were committed to the Nehruvian principles and ideas, some to
the militant brand of Indian nationalism and still others to various other ideologies. The Communists, who theoretically stood for opposition to colonialism, at one point of time (1946-49) supported the French Union and wanted the French to remain in India at least for some time for their own convenience, because, during this period the Communists were being hunted down by the Indian government on ideological grounds. This contributed in no small measure for the turning of the ire of the pro-mergerists against the Communists in French India. The plight of the Communists illustrated how foreign policy and national interests may overlap, and be compromised by, local politics.

The French India National Congress felt that Nehru patronised French India Socialist Party under Goubert at the cost of the Congress based organisations that toiled and moiled for merger of French Indian settlements with Indian Union. Firstly, it should be pointed out that Nehru turned out to be a prisoner of circumstances that prevailed in French India at that juncture. Secondly, as far as the choice of Goubert was concerned, Nehru was forced to accept him since pro-merger elements especially in south Indian settlements were weak, divided, always involved in personal rivalry and competition, and never succeeded in organising a network which India expected from them. The only two political parties in French India which had the potential and mechanism of controlling the grave situation were the French India Socialist Party and the French India Communist Party, both having a wide network at the grass root level, essential for controlling the population. Since Nehru was not prepared to allow the Communists to lead the merger movement and to take credit for securing Independence, his choice naturally fell on Goubert, because of his anti-Communist stand and ability to crush the Communists squarely. A political opportunist and a clever maneuverer, Goubert was very clear about
his political career prospects in the post 1954 period than any body else in French India. He was a shrewd politician, who staked everything the game from 1947 onwards. In the manifesto published by the French India Socialist Party in 1947, Goubert made it clear that French India should become part of the Indian Union some time in the future. However, he believed that the time had not ripened yet, since he feared that the immediate merger of French India with Indian Union would result in the loss of its separate identity. So, his idea was to wait for as long as it was needed so that the Indian government would offer a political status, which would ensure the separate identity of French India. He was pro-French till it was profitable and switched side at the right moment and was rewarded by Nehru, as he expected. To be precise, Goubert was successful in his political game, as the French in the initial stages, and Nehru in the later stages, made it possible for him to win it by using him to serve their vested interests.

The government of India was inspired by a metaphysical concept of Bharat (Greater India) and embarked upon a project of building the nation. Proud of their experience of having absorbed 552 princely states at one stroke, they were surprised by the claims of these tiny establishments. They were not prepared to understand the apprehensions of the people of French India. India had adopted a bad strategy towards the French Indian settlements, when it issued a notice on 29-3-1948 putting an end to the Customs Agreement of 1941 from 1-4-1949, thinking that it would cause inconvenience to the population and impel it to opt for merger with India. This step boomeranged. Merchants on both sides of the border found a golden opportunity for smuggling. Huge quantities of gold and diamonds imported to Pondicherry were smuggled into India. Several persons could become immensely rich overnight. The common man was happy to
have a free harbour in Pondicherry and get all foreign articles at low prices. The government of India realized its error and proposed to re-establish the customs union. But France was not ready to accept it as it did not want to lose the benefit of the unexpected wind in favour of the French presence. The political elite in French India indulged in large scale corruption which the French Indian government helplessly tolerated in order to keep them in good humour and in favour of the French presence. The Indian government, at last realised its mistake, started sealing the frontiers of the French Indian settlements using barbed wire for fencing and stopped the supply of electricity and petroleum products. After an initial period of euphoria in French India, problems started accumulating. On account of a severe economic blockade by India, the anti-mergerists were compelled to realize the situation and that merger with India was inevitable. As smuggling became very difficult, businessmen who supported the pro-French party turned cool. The pro-French political group feeling the wind of change started establishing contacts with the Indian authorities.

Ultimately, it was the Indian government’s pressure of economic and administrative blockade on the French Indian territories, which finally paved the way for the integration of French Indian settlements with India. The Indian government knew that France had less need of India than India had of France. India had some difficulties in Kashmir and elsewhere, and needed the backing of France in international bodies. So, the Indian government pursued a cautious, conscious and calculative policy towards French India. One of the calculative policies of the Indian government was the economic blockade. The termination of Customs Union agreement in March 1949 was the first step toward what would become an economic blockade of French India by India. April and
May 1949 witnessed the first economic blockade of Pondicherry and Karaikal. Such blockades were repeatedly and unexpectedly lifted and re-imposed. French India’s material dependence on India’s supply was exploited on all levels. The Indian government cut off supply of electricity from Indian Union and put a ban on the movement of petroleum products. At the same time, the Indian government considerably reduced its export of vegetables and fruits and other essential food commodities to French India. A system of permits to control and limit travel into India from French Indian settlements was introduced. Further India officially prohibited the French Indian police from crossing into Indian territory in order to reach the French enclaves, which were intercepted by Indian territories. When French Indian administration faced troubles, on the border, they could not send forces to those areas. It was conceived that such economic pressure was necessary and inevitable for creating a genuine enthusiasm for merger among the population and the political elite. Such kind of Indian economic and administrative blockade made life difficult in the enclaves which were separated from the regional centres and virtually choked off the settlements. The Indian economic pressure, as expected created a consensus among the population especially the villages, that merger with India were inevitable in order to end the material hardship brought on by the Indian blockade.

The Indian government directly or indirectly patronised the pro-mergerists by means of moral and financial support but at the same time refused to recognise their spontaneous and undirected actions. In Chandernagore and Mahe, where pro-mergerists was stormed the local gendarmerie and unilaterally declared their liberation and asked India to integrate territories. They were totally ignored and even disarmed and repudiated.
by the Indian police. It seems that as far as French India was concerned India applied two faces and two policies; India was encouraging pro-mergerist activities as a means to make the French administration realise the futility of continuing in India. But India did not want the pro-mergerists to directly assume control of the administration without the acquiescence of the French.

France had lacked the genuine desire to solve the French India problem. In the post World War II scenario, France was generally more preoccupied with its own problems in France both economic and political. In fact, they had hardly any thought or place for their colonies in India, which though being the oldest of their colonies, constituted the last in their priorities. Further, there was hardly any talk of decolonization in France, in spite of rebellions in Indo-China, Madagascar, Vietnam etc. Instead every political party in France was harping on the new-found ideas of “French Union” and “Overseas France” to keep their colonies within the orbit in a permanent manner and render irrelevant all nationalist struggles in them. France had always considered its colonies as its national patrimony or possession and any damage to this patrimony or loss in its possession was considered as the lessening of France’s national prestige and role in the world. Naturally, French nationalist sentiments were very reluctant to allow this to happen and means were devised to preserve French national prestige and status in the world. This could be preserved, only by suppressing nationalist upsurges in the colonies. But what France failed to realize that decolonisation was a global process and French decolonisation was also part of it. Old nations were reasserting themselves and new nations were emerging in every part of the world. In French India, the French Indian authorities survived on the muscle power and support of the French India Socialist Party
and other such groups of political renegades. The Commissaire was upset by their corrupt practices and started taking action against those found responsible, even though they worked for the continuance of French presence. When Goubert, their ring leader crossed the floor and went to the Indian side, the French rulers lost their major source of support. Soon they had to accept the fact that the French settlements in India were small, distant, dispersed, economically insignificant and virtually un-defendable. France finally reconciled itself to the idea of transfer of power, and invited the Indian government to transfer the establishments without referendum according to the wish of the Indian government. A new government in France headed by Mendés France, a government that lasted only eight months and collapsed three months after agreeing to give up French India, took up deliberately and boldly a policy of decolonisation. The principle of previous referendum of the people was circumvented by recourse to a consultation of the members of the Assemblée Représentative and the Municipal Councils. There was another immediate reason that led to the decolonisation of French India. Pondicherry served as a connecting link in the long chain of colonies under French empire in the East, and especially, as an entrepôt between the home country and Indo-China. Apart from this utilitarian aspect, the Indian settlements were an economic liability to the French. When the French lost Indo-China, the French found their Indian colonies less attractive. Even the meagre necessity of maintaining a presence in India was gone. According to D. Zivarattinam, the grand old politician of French India, French officials at the time of Indian independence in 1947, told D. Zivarattinam that "as long as we keep Indo-China, we would also maintain Pondicherry … as a link between France and Indo-China."

Moreover, the French policy towards French India from the times Laniel and Bidault to those of Mendés France proved that they all were motivated by the same objective, namely, the transfer of French settlements to Nehru for winning him over or for obtaining at least his neutrality in the Indo-China conflict. Thus, the peaceful negotiated settlement of the French Indian problem between France and India was also influenced by the developments in the international arena and the national scene of France. Viewed in terms of noble gestures and policies of the governments of India and France, however, it ensured fruitful co-operation between France and India, in the years to come.

The final negotiation between India and France raised many thorny questions, even among its supporters. One of important argument was about the validation of the indirect consultation of elected members of the Assemblée Représentative and Municipalities of French Indian settlements in place of the formerly agreed formula that the will of the people would be taken in the form of a referendum and the consequent violation of the French constitutional procedure in the process of transfer of French Indian sovereignty to the government of India. Article 27(2) of the French Constitution of 1946 states; “Nulle cession, nul échange, nulle adjunction de territoire n’est valable sans le consentement des populations intéressées”. (“No transfer, no exchange, no addition of territory is valid without the consent of the interested populations”). Maurice Couve de Murville, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, justified in 1962 that “the Constitution does not specifically lay down the method in which the interested populations should give their consent; it does not mention whether it should be by a
direct suffrage or by indirect suffrage.\(^\text{14}\) At the same time, making a strict application of the texts and of Article 53 of the French Constitution, it can be argued that the transfer of sovereignty, not having been done after ascertaining directly the wishes of the populations, is illegal. It could be also argued that if France relinquished its rights over loges in India, over which it claimed sovereignty, without consulting the local populations, then why the same procedure couldn’t be applied in the case of the five colonies, instead of insisting on a referendum. Leon St. Jean, one of the pro-merger leaders of Karaikal too argued that the French constitution only stated that the consent of the people was necessary for the cessation of any part of French territory and not a formal referendum or plebiscite, as insisted upon by the French government.\(^\text{15}\) And the decision of the Members of the Municipalities and Assemblée Réprésentative, who were elected by popular representatives ‘is valid, lawful and sufficient’ for authorising France to make a treaty with India to transfer their Indian territories to the government of Indian Union.

The disputed point is not the validity of the French decision but the moral authority of the Kizhur congress to decide on the merger issue. Previously most of them have been elected on an anti-merger platform. But in the last minute they voted for merger of the French Indian settlements with the Indian Union. It is a foregone conclusion that the transfer of French Indian settlements to India has been done against Article 27 of the French constitution. The wishes of the population were never consulted; nor has any referendum been organised in the four south Indian settlements, which were transferred only by virtue of a simple treaty concluded between India and France, firstly \textit{de facto} and then \textit{de jure}. Though the problem of French India was resolved by diplomatic


\(^\text{15}\) \textit{The Hindu}, 9 April 1954.
negotiations between India and France, the way it was resolved proved that both the
governments had acted with the support of the elite and failed to gain the complete
confidence or unanimous agreement of the local population.

India and France felicitated each other for resolving the issue through the process
of negotiations. Of course there was no bloodshed in the process of negotiations between
the two countries, as both India and France averted any kind of military actions.
However, an analysis of the long drawn merger politics clearly brings out the fact that the
narrow interests of the French Indian political elite and political parties led to violent
conflicts in French India. Throughout the period, the population was subjected to
suffering by way of economic blockade, bloodshed, detentions, violence, and
assassinations. Violence was unilaterally directed by the advocates of anti-merger and
merger against each other in their rivalry for domination. Pro-merger sympathisers and
Communists were repeatedly assaulted by French India Socialist Party workers through-
out the period. One hundred and twenty-five homes of pro-mergerists, including that of
V. Subbiah, the leader of Communist party were destroyed in 1950. Often pro-mergerists
were severely beaten up by French Indian police and anti-merger supporters. Other
nationalist leaders were also attacked. Many were killed in the rivalry between French
India Socialist Party and French India Communist Party. Much greater violence occurred
in 1952 and 1954. Atrocities, arson and pillaging were registered when the refugee camps
at borders turned out to be pro-merger camps. Violent clashes between pro-mergerists
and anti-mergerists occurred almost daily in the borders and as goondas lurked in the
darkness to fire upon pro-mergerists. In these clashes many, including Indian nationals,
were killed. In 1954 when the French India Socialist Party reversed its anti-merger
position its leaders’ homes and properties were attacked. In the rivalry between political parties and struggle for personal domination, both pro-mergerists and anti-mergerists contributed an equal share of violence.

The available sources (official records, pamphlets of the political parties, autobiographies, diaries and personal interviews) provided either a little information as to the role of the respective party in the events that happened during 1952 and 1954 or else suppressed one’s own role in the violence but loudly proclaimed the other’s role. Some of the participants in the merger movement, whom the researcher interviewed, claimed up when they were asked to talk about the period from 1952 to 1954, while a few of them even claimed to have got out of the scene by that time. The reasons for this behaviour can be understood by looking into the roots of post merger politics. After the merger, individuals and political parties vied with each other in laying claims to privileges and positions of power. Once merger with India became a fait accompli, fear of reprisals against French loyalists motivated the deliberate destruction of any evidence of participation in the anti-merger cause.

Immediately after the de facto merger, Pondicherry faced a deep political crisis as the integration of the settlements into the administrative structure of India proved to be a complex and difficult process. There ensued a cut throat competition and rivalry among the political elite to find a berth in the new structure to be established. The political party workers who had been loyal to their masters now claimed their rewards and were provided with positions in the state services in violation of all rules and regulations,
irrespective of their qualification and seniority.\textsuperscript{16} The Congress Party claimed and had the potential to form the new government. But an open rivalry emerged in Pondicherry between the leaders of the Congress Party and Goubert and his Socialist party colleagues who had now joined the rank and file of the Congress Party. The later overwhelmed the former and the Congress Party came to be dominated by ex-Socialists, ex-Communists, and ex-rivals of Congress who pushed the veterans to the back. As a result of this rivalry, Pondicherry witnessed an unstable administration for the next two decades, resulting in frequent local governmental break ups and the imposition of President’s Rule.

Interviews with the senior citizens of the period reveal that the systematic erosion of the distinctive identity of the administrative status by the government of India started from the very date of the \textit{de facto} merger.\textsuperscript{17} Many rights enjoyed by the different sections of the people and assured in the articles of the treaty were violated. The textile mill managements of Pondicherry were encouraged to seek for the abolition of the pension right of the mill workers and a drastic cut in the pension quantum of the retired workers. The ignorance of French labour codes and customary practices in the French possessions on the part of arbiters of settlement in cases of industrial dispute adversely affected the working classes. The right to continue practice of learned professions, ensured in the treaty, was violated in the case of the \textit{Notaires} and Dentists. The administrative institutions which evolved in the long history of the region such as the Municipal bodies, lost their vitality and distinctive identity as their powers and functions such as the

\textsuperscript{16} For example Ranga Pillai, former leader of the French India Student Congress, found employment in the State Information Department. Damodaran of the former French India Socialist Party was given an employment in the government school as a physical educator.

\textsuperscript{17} Interview with D.K. Ramanujam, Kamalakannan, Rayalou Turgot and N. Marimuthu.
comprehensive maintenance of registers of Birth, Death and Marriages, were all abolished.

The decision to join India was far from being unanimous among the local population some of whom still remember the French connection with nostalgia. After seven years of resistance since India’s independence in 1947, the French yielded to India’s economic and political pressure and withdrew their administrative and security apparatus from the country. France took another eight years to ratify the transfer of power and the treaty so ratified in 1962 had long-term ramifications for both India and France. An important legal guarantee that France had ensured in the treaty was the continued administrative unity and territorial integrity of the erstwhile French settlements in the newly established Union Territory of Pondicherry. The only factor that united the former Comptoirs was the French colonial status. Otherwise they shared nothing in common. But France insisted on guaranteeing the special character of French India and continuing the administrative distinctiveness despite its overall integration into the Indian Union. India also promised that Pondicherry shall remain as a window on French culture and agreed to maintain the administrative and territorial identity of the territories. Because of such terms of its integration into India, Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam were not united with the neighbouring states, unlike Chandernagore which was merged with Bengal, but instead constituted the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Since that time, it has not been possible for the Indian government to territorially integrate the geographically diverse territories with the adjacent Indian states with which they have historical, linguistic, economic and cultural ties. Inspite of a gradual and permanent decay of the distinctiveness of the region, the people continue to successfully resist complete
integration with the Indian Union and its adjacent states. The separate existence of the
territories has been preserved as per the assurances given by the government of India and
repeatedly honoured till date. The continued existence of a separate identity for the
erstwhile French Comptoirs in the postcolonial era exemplifies the anomalous process of
their integration with India.

The relevance of the French Indian problem to international events was a
significant one. In the post World War II scenario French colonial possessions in Asia
and Africa were rendering France position precarious. The period since 1946 was a
history of tortuous negotiations of the colonial people with a French attempt to silence
them with the offer of reforms which actually kept all the powers in the hands of the
French administration. France confronted an increasingly grave situation in her Asian
possessions in Indo-China as the Vietnam forces had thrown a mighty challenge to her.
French Indian footholds were considered useful to her maintaining her precarious hold in
Indo-China. India had already denied French military planes permission to fly over India
on way to Indo-China since November 1947. This had greatly jeopardized French
military operations in Indo-China. French policy in North Africa and India’s deep
concern for it led to a fissure in the relations between the two countries. Violent and
deliberate destruction of the nationalist movements in North Africa and bloody events of
Algeria were indications to the world that something was gravely wrong with the French
colonial policy. Nehru’s sympathy for Asian and African nationalist leaders in their quest
for independence was behind his determination to raise French colonial questions in
international forums much to the embarrassment of France. Nehru had confirmed on
many occasions his solidarity with the Afro-Asian nationalist movements. In a
conference of the Asian countries held at New Delhi in January 1949 Nehru had again demonstrated his solidarity with the Indonesian struggle for liberation from the Dutch.\footnote{\textit{The Hindustan Times}, 8 January 1949.} France feared that if India adopted a hostile attitude towards France, its consequences would be far reaching even in countries outside her frontiers.

Nehru’s thinking was influenced by the non-violent doctrine of Mahatma Gandhi and he did not hesitate to denounce the method of violence and terrorism resorted to both by the colonisers and colonised. As a result the Indian approach had two essential aspects: support to freedom movements and adherence to a peaceful approach. Inspite of his image as a crusader for the cause of the subjected people of Asia and Africa and the fact that his comrades in Asia and Africa expected him to come out openly in support of their cause, Nehru reacted cautiously in the cases of Vietnam, Anamite countries as well as Laos and Cambodia and north African countries like Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia’s struggle for independence from the French colonial yoke. The fear of expansion of communism from Vietnam to the whole of south-east Asia and its eventual repercussions in India worried the Indian Prime Minister. Throughout the diplomatic relations India maintained a low profile and rather appealed to the French government to bring about a peaceful settlement of the French colonial issues without delay. Even while reacting to the news of the bombing of the village Sakiet in Tunisia near the Algerian border in February 1958, which resulted in high civilian casualty, Nehru professed friendship to France, “a country with its history, with its struggles for freedom and with its culture and
high intellectuality.”

However, he suggested the French government to negotiate with the Provincial Government of Algeria and pointed out that the only feasible solution would be Algerian freedom, with full protection to the large French minority there.

This act of defiance however on the face of heavy pressure did not fail to earn the appreciation of the French Government and of some French parliamentarians for Nehru and India. At the same time, he sent a message to Nasser, Egyptian President, asking him to use his influence with the leaders of the FLN (Front de libération nationale) to get them to accept the invitation extended by the French government to visit Paris for negotiations.

However India had recognised Algerian independence on 3rd July 1962 only after the French National Assembly ratified the de jure transfer of French Indian establishment on 12th July 1962.

The peaceful solution to the much protracted problem of the French Indian settlements had its impact on Goans. In fact it brought nearer own their goal of liberation from the Portuguese rule. The withdrawal of the French had virtually weakened the position of Portugal in India; for it had deprived her of the moral support of France since the fate of the Portuguese possessions was not different from that of the French Indian settlements. The Portuguese had been left alone in the absurd position of their continued domination in a country over which powerful nations like England and France had ceased to rule. Their position became desperate. In spite of their boast of heroic resistance they

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had to accept that resistance of whatever kind was useless and compelled them to negotiate with India which left them with no other way out but to surrender. 23

The Portuguese at last came to realise how sensible was the stand taken by France in negotiating with India about the future of their settlements in India. From the very beginning, the French recognised the right of the people of their settlements to secede from France in order to join India. They entertained no illusions about these small territories which could not remain under foreign rule when the whole of India had attained independence. But Portuguese authorities, on the contrary, had tried to use the constitutional trick of declaring Portuguese possessions to be an integral part of far away Portugal. In doing this, they simply ignored the right of self-determination which is inherent in the subject people. France, a nation far more powerful than Portugal, did not threaten India with the use of force. She did not send a single soldier, white or black, to frighten India. Although she was one of the most important members of the NATO, she did not seek the intervention of this military alliance in her dispute with India, as it was done by Portugal. She conducted her negotiations on a highly diplomatic level, without resorting to cheap polemics and insults in the press.

The lesson gained from French India motivated the government of India to speed up the integration of Portuguese settlements in India. The economic and administrative cordon thrown around the French settlements proved their worth. More than anything else, these economic measures forced the French authorities to come to terms with India. Identical measures would also paralyse the Portuguese administration in Goa to speed up the solution to the problem. These measures showed the French and the Portuguese who

hardly understood the real conditions of their possessions and how much they depended on India to run their administration. They were made to realise that they could not rule their colonies once they were deprived of the Indian currency. They on their part realised their incapacity to pay and feed their army with which they defied India, when they were deprived of the help they received in various ways from the Indian side. However India had to resort to military action to solve the Portuguese problem. On the contrary there was no need for such an action in the case of French India.

The transfer of the French Indian settlements to the Indian Union is rather unique in the history of decolonization. The maturity that the two governments showed in approaching and handling the issue in a cautious and conscious manner was highly appreciable. The Indo-French Treaty of Cession of May 1956 of French India was ratified by India in July 1956 and it was placed on the table of the French National Assembly on 2nd August 1956. There was an undue delay in the ratification process by France. This was mainly due to the reason that France had to pass through a difficult period because of her precarious position in North Africa and her uncertain future in Indo-China, The French delayed the ratification fearing the repercussions it might have on their overseas possessions. The political incoherence was further exacerbated by the chronic governmental instability which plagued the fourth Republic. Moreover the surrender of sovereignty also involved the need of obtaining parliamentary approval, a long-drawn process.

The scale of priorities given to the French Indian settlements by the metropolitan government in France can be judged by the fact that the formal transfer of these territories to the government of India did not take place until 1954, that is, after the withdrawal of France from Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. The cession of these territories was not legally ratified by the French parliament until after the resolution of the Algerian crisis in 1962. When the issue of the *de jure* transfer of the French Indian settlements to the Indian Union was taken for discussion before the French National Assembly on 12th July 1962, there was severe criticism from the members of the opposition on the Treaty of May 1956. However, the ruling party members hailed the Indian stand on the issue of Algerian war of independence and advocated a favourable consideration of the *de jure* transfer. After a lot of heat, the French parliament ratified the Treaty of transfer of French Indian settlements to the Indian Union on 12th July 1962. The instruments of ratification were exchanged subsequently in New Delhi on 16th August 1962.