CHAPTER VII

Conclusion

Jawaharlal Nehru had a major role in merging the French settlements in India - Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam, Mahe and Chandernagore with the union of India as a Union Territory. The French settlements were a couple of coastal settlements like Chandernagore, Yanam, Pondicherry and Karaikal in the regions of Bay of Bengal and Mahe on the shores of Arabian Sea. Pondicherry was chosen as the headquarters. Pondicherry comprised of eight communes namely Pondicherry, Mudaliarpet, Ariankuppam, Ozhukarai, Villianur, Bahour, Netapakkam and Mannadipet. In Karaikal the five communes were Karaikal, Neravy, Tirunallar, Nedoungadu and Kotucherry. In Chandernagore, Mahe and Yanam the communes were known by their respective names. The 1961 Census counted in all 388 villages spread across all the four regions of the union territory apart from the towns of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. For the purpose of revenue administration the territory was divided into 96 revenue villages.

Jawaharlal Nehru's role in the merger of the French settlements is extremely interesting and fascinating. As we know Jawaharlal Nehru who was fond of children and the India's first Prime Minister, was the chief architect of domestic and foreign policies between 1947 and 1964. Born in a wealthy Kashmiri Brahman family and educated at Oxford, Nehru embodies a synthesis of ideals: Politically an ardent nationalist, Ideologically a pragmatic socialist, and secular in religious outlook,
Nehru possessed a rare combination of intellect, breadth of vision and personal charisma that attracted support throughout India.

Jawaharlal Nehru took a lot of pain to keep the ideal of non-violence, self determination, national integrity of the subcontinent of India and the respect for French culture. There was a declaration on 20th February 1947 in the British Parliament by Mr. Atlee that independence would be granted to India before August 1948. The policy followed in the French settlements of India was part of the larger colonial policy followed by the French in other parts of the world.

The French India National Congress, a political outfit in the French India was officially established in May 1946, identical to the Indian National Congress in its aim, creed, method of action and formed with the sole aim of the liberation of French India and its integration with independent India. The Five French settlements in India, in case they remain a separate entity would be always subject to foreign domination and will give room for political and imperialist intrigues, specially when their coastal situation will be taken into account. The people therefore wanted merger with the Indian Union. The President of the French India Congress was R.L. Purushothama Reddiar of Bahour, Ansari Dorai was General Secretary, S.R. Subramanian and Vidvan Sivaprakasam were Joint Secretaries. Professor Ambady Narayanan, Sethuraman Chettiar, Andre Selvanadin J. Savarinathan, Govinda Pathar, Zevevarathinam and S.R. Subramanian were other prominent members of the congress. Some leaders like Purushothama Reddiar and S.R. Subramanian were earlier close associates of Communist Leader V. Subbiah. A student wing of the Congress was also established which spearheaded the struggle for freedom and the leaders of the National Congress were acting as advisors.
and active supporters. A band of youngsters like Antoine Vallabhb Mariadassou, Sebastin, Durai Muniswamy and Arumugham formed the French India Students Congress on 17th August 1946 to mobilise the youth to fight for the cause of freedom.

The French Administration took repressive measures following the activities and hartals organized by the French Indian Congress. A large number of the Student Congress leaders like Antoine Maraidessou were arrested. The French India Government at Pondicherry kept on changing their equations with different political parties which initially supported the Communist Party, later shifting its support to the congress party, while the work for the freedom struggle officially was attributed to the Socialist party led by the Edouard Goubert.

On 24th and 25th January 1948, the French India Congress held a two day peoples convention at Nehru Vanam to decide the future of French India which was attended by more than two hundred delegates bringing with them the mandate of more than fifteen thousand citizens above the age of eighteen. The convention which was presided over by

R. L. Purushothama Reddiar called for the unconditional withdrawal of the French from the establishment and conveyed its determination to achieve its merger with the Indian union to which it had close ethnic, cultural, economic and linguistic links.

On 30th May, while addressing news persons in Madras Mr. Chambon, Commissioner of Republic for French India stated that the “People of these settlements would assure to Pandit Nehru” in regard to the future of French India. He conveniently ignores that the people had nothing to say now to Pandit Nehru, they have something to declare to the
French, i.e. "Français Quittez" (French Quit) and that had been unequivocally and with sufficient manifestation declared to the French authorities on 25th and 26th January 1948 by the French India People’s Convention which passed unanimously the following resolutions.

“This Convention demands the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of French sovereignty from all the Five French settlements and their determination of merger into the Indian Union with which our people are linked up ethnically, culturally, economically and linguistically”.

In August 1947 Paul Radjanedassou was elected President of the Student’s Congress and Dorai Munisamy again as General Secretary. In November ‘1947’ the Youth Congress was formed by Dorai Munisam with the sole aim of securing separation of French India from France. The Youth Congress was immediately banned by Governor Baron on account of its motto of independence of French territory in India and merger with the union of India.

Following this, a monthly magazine in French called “Jeunesse” (Youth) was started in November ‘1947 by the Students Congress with the main office at Candappa Street at the residence of Paul Rajanandassou/Antoine Maraidassou to expose the power politics of the French Government. Many people such as Senior Government Servants, Professors, Advocates and Doctors contributed confidential articles on the malpractices of the Government. The Magazine was therefore often the object of summons and searches at the premises, which were pre-warned by police friends like the patriotic Police Inspector Dadala. The paper survived for only nineteen months till May ‘1949 after which it was
banned because the police could not find out, through enquiries, the real authors of anonymous virulent articles against the French Colonial Administration.

Under the leadership of Purushothama Reddiar, S.R. Subramanian, Radjamedassou and Munissamy, a 3-day convention was organized in January '1948. Students and over 200 Congress delegates from all the French territories in India took part in it. After several rounds of discussions, it was unanimously decided that French should "Quit India" like the British. The idea of a referendum whether they should remain with France or join India or opt for an independent status was categorically refused through an unanimous resolution. The Referendum was considered as an insult to the self-respect of a citizen with a genuine Indian identity, a proposal on the part of the French Government.

Many prominent leaders such as Sivagnana Gramany, Kamaraj Nadar, Ravindra Varma (President of All India Students Congress), Subbu and Rangarajan (leaders of Tamil Nadu Students Congress), addressed the plenary session along with local Congress leaders. Never before in the history of French India was such an impressive people's convention held. After this successful event, the Congress membership increased.

On the 15th of August 1947, India became free from foreign rule. The people in Pondicherry too celebrated India's Independence Day. No restrictions were imposed by the French Administration on that day. The Students Congress proposed that a huge procession of students and citizens be taken through all the main streets of Pondicherry on the evenings of 14th August. Through megaphones and microphones, people
in towns and villages were informed about the procession on the evening of the 14th and the National Flag hoisting on 15th of August morning at "Nehru Vanam. Some students leaders met the Ashram authorities and wanted their volunteers to join the procession but despite being received with due respect by the Ashram authorities, they tactfully refused the participation of their contingent in the proposed procession under the pretext that their youth would take part only under the Ashram’s banner of Lotus. Such refusal offended the Students Congress.

A procession was led by the founder President of the Student Congress, Antoine Mariadassou on white horseback, followed by Shatrugh Paramel carrying the Congress tri-colour flag with the “Chakra”. Also, the Communist Party red flags and a French flag carried by some ex-servicemen of the Reveil Social mixed with the National Flag. The whole procession was arranged in three rows, well-lit by many gas lights and, according to eye-witnesses, grand and glorious. At the stroke of midnight, when the national flag of India was hoisted on top of Red Fort in Delhi by the first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru with his famous and dignified speech of “Tryst with destiny”, in Pondicherry bells peeled, drums roared and conches blew in ecstasy in almost all saintly places, announcing that a glorious new chapter was opening in free India.

In May 1948 the members of the Council, all representing Goubert’s French Socialist Party took oath of office. The Students Congress gave a call for general strike in protest against the swearing-in ceremony. All the students assembled in front of the College Colonical (renamed then as College Français) to take out a procession to the Town Hall at 10 a.m. Paramel, the next term President of the Student Congress
and a baccalaureate student in College Français was brutally assaulted inside the college in front of the Professors. In August 1948, Shrtrugh Paramel was elected President of the Students Congress and Munissamy was retained as General Secretary for the third time. The people of Pondicherry took part in political activities under different political outfits but there was no coordinated effort on the part of the political parties for the common cause of fight against the French. The French colonial administrators extended their patronage at different times to different political parties and also put them to fight against each other. They encouraged hooliganism and provided protection to the goondas who created obstacles in the way of freedom fighters.

On 1st May 1947, the Communist Party of Pondicherry organised a huge procession at 10 a.m. followed by a demonstration at 5 p.m. through Dupleix Street (now Nehru Street) during which Ansari Dorai's restaurant was plundered by some hooligans while the Students Congress meeting was going on the 1st floor of the Cafe. Despite the presence of a strong contingent of armed Police, the assault could not be prevented.

Ansari Dorai was a staunch supporter of the Congress party who wore khadi clothes till his last day and was the only prominent leader to refuse the "Tamra Patra" and pension awarded to him by the Government of India because it was handed over by some one whom he considered as corrupt politician and not upto the mark in his rating.

During the Second World War from 1939-45, the CPI stood under the command of the international communist authority called COMINTERN for all political decisions. For instance, the CPI took a stand contrary to Gandhiji by not supporting the "Quit India" people's movement
1942 for the ideological reason of not jeopardising Soviet interest to win the War whose duration could not be foreseen.

With India's independence approaching and the French Communist Party in France resigning from the French Ministry in protest against the Vietnam war and also abiding by the clearly drawn policy of the All India Communist Party as published in the official organ "New Age", asking for "the liberation of the territories from alien rule", the CPI became active. Subbiah the leader of the C.P.I. in Pondicherry who wanted to get hold the power and play a prominent role distanced the goonda elements from the party and under his influence, the Students Federation which was Communist-oriented started to co-operate with the Students Congress. Their leaders were Arumugham, Shankaran, Sebastien among others. This was the best organised and most powerful party in French India. The French India Government fully covered them, but feared to give them open support owing to the communist challenge in Asia and the anti-communist drive in India. So, to mystify public opinion, it created the democratic and progressive party.

The Communist Party of French India was the most powerful body in Pondicherry but it was enfeebled by Goubert's incessant attacks. And its violent shifts in policy in regard to the question of merger left the public confused and bewildered the strength of the party was mainly derived from the loyalty and administration of a large portion of the French Indian working class to Mr. Subbiah, General Secretary of the Party. During the days of the National Democratic Front, the Communist leader advocated union with France with the ultimate object of fusion with India. But when the Communists were thrown overboard and the Socialist came to power Mr. Subbiah declared that the people of French
India will not accept any reform short of complete merger with Indian Union.

The Communist Party of French India had earlier called the people of the French establishments to remain in the French Union and agitate for the civil liberties of the Fourth Republic. The party later complained of the arrests of its trade union leaders and supporters and the attacks made on its press, there was no more scope for development under the French Union than under the Indian union.

Disappointed by Subbiah's Volte-face and no longer relying too much on him and his Labour movement, the French Administration created a third force with the support of some locals influenced by the Ashram- Mr. Counouma, an officer of the French Administration, and Dr. S. Lambert Saravane. The latter, for having deserted Subbiah and joining the new pro-French clan, was even attacked with shoes and chappals by the Labour Party supporters during a students demonstration. This clan failed to impress Governor Baron and split.

This party had no connection at all either with the socialist party of France (S.F.I.O) or the Indian Socialist Party. It avoided taking position in favour of either unions, but almost all its members were actually for French Union.

At Pondicherry, there was no Socialist party sponsored by the Indian Socialists. Some of the Pondicherry Congress leaders claimed that they had Socialist feelings. It was suggested to regroup within the Pondicherry Congress all socialist sympathises, in order to constitute a Socialist wing of the Congress. The leaders opposed the move, on the ground that it may lead to partition and weakening of the Congress.
The political situation in Pondicherry was fast deteriorating and urgent steps needed to be taken. The people were discouraged and they sought help from outside. The French India Government cared little about Pondicherry public opinion, on the other hand it feared very much the Indian public opinion by a press offensive on both the French India Government and the lenient congress Government.

The Socialist party’s manifesto to join the Indian Union was highly suicidal to the interests of French Indians, whereas the membership in French India had manifold advantages and a state of importance. The motivation was the fact that the French Indian National Congress was convening a People’s conference in the beginning of August 1947. The conference committee invited personally all the parties in the country and despite differences subscribed to the die of liberation and fusion. The non-party men in French land formed a good majority. The conference was attended by delegates representing all the five French settlements, on the basis of one delegate for every hundred citizens above 18 years old in French India, without difference in party. The object of the conference was to ask the French to quit the country leaving the people to join the Indian Union.

There was a lot of controversy prevailing amongst scholars in so far as the role of Pondicherreans in the freedom struggles within Pondicherry to free themselves from the French rule. There was also an opinion that there was no freedom struggle at all on the part of the people of Pondicherreans towards this end. Pondicherry which saw the French settling here in 1674 had come under permanent French rule only after the Treaty of Paris in 1814 and the British had occupied it three times and once by the Dutch in the interregnum. There were many parleys then for
the exchange of various colonial holdings between France and England which however did not materialize but Pondicherry did come under serious threat of another occupations by the British when France surrendered to Germany during the Second World War. Britain used this opportunity to effect an economic merger by imposing a customs union, shifting its customs office from its own boundaries within Pondicherry to the seashore. Till the independence of India there was actually no movement against the French in Pondicherry. The nationalists in Pondicherry worked for the liberation for India from British rule and the Indian leaders had also advised them not to antagonize the French who provided shelter to Indian patriots taking refuge in Pondicherry. Things changed immediately after independence, the Indian Government made it clear that it would not recognize the right of France to their establishment in India.

The great urge to secure self rule in colonies emerging everywhere, compelled the French government also to take a realistic view of the situation, making France declare Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam in November 1947 as free towns having full administrative powers independently of each other and placing them under the common authority of a commissioner of the Republic in Pondicherry. The only other French establishment in India, Chandernagore, in the meantime, attained a separate status in June 1947 in terms of a declaration made in the French National Assembly to allow people of the French establishments the right of self determination after a referendum and confirming the same to the Government of India. Chandernagore was the first to organize the referendum and subsequent merger with West Bengal in June 1949.
The date of holding the referendum in other parts was deferred. The task of revising the electoral rolls remained disputed. Not even any agreement on the modalities of the consultation between the two Governments took place. But the anti-merger groups under Goubert unleashed a situation culminating in the outbreak of violence unprecedented in the history of Pondicherry. Rivalry between the Socialist and the Communist parties of Pondicherry reached its peak and hounded. Goubert’s Socialist party hirelings neither spared Subbiah nor the other pro-mergerists. The National liberation front was formed under the inspiration of Rashid Ali Bag. The Students congress an active organization till 1948, did not function for some time for fear of reprisal. With the efforts of Rajkumar to the Pondicherry merger committee was formed which gained some success. The committee was further strengthened by the participation of Pro-merger leaders like D. Jeevarathinam, S. Perumal, Victor Mariadass D. Mariappa, A. Lecheche, L. Sathyamurty, Dorai Munisami, L. Selvanathan and G. Munisami. A person of the stature of Sellane Naicker was made President of the merger committee and Ambroise was made working President to help the former. A similar committee was also formed in Karaikal. Kamaraj Nadar, President of the Tamil Nadu Congress Committee, hailed the formation of the merger committee as a step forward and made a fervent appeal to the people of Pondicherry and Karaikal to forget all personal and local differences at this hour of trial and put up a united front for merger with India. But the pre-referendum political scenario of Pondicherry was suddenly changed by violence let loose by the supporters of the Socialist party.

Pro-merger sentiment in Pondicherry, though real, was less unanimous than in the far-off outpost Chandernagore. One bone of
contention was the question of popular consultation. France contended that per Article 27 of her Constitution a referendum had to be held before any cession of territory could be made. Though the date was fixed for referendum in Pondicherry, the General Assembly of Municipal Councillors of all four establishments for whom merger with India by then was a foregone conclusion, got preoccupied with the modalities of merger. The French educated elite were interested in safeguarding the special interest of the people of Pondicherry and demanded a transition period of 25 to 30 years. The reaction of both the French and Indian Government to this was lukewarm initially, the French themselves preferring the transition period demanded to extend their presence. The Government of India in the meantime put an end to the customs agreement of 1941 thinking that it will cause inconvenience to the population and compel them to opt for India. This however proved to be an error since the Pondicherry based merchants found in it a golden opportunity for smuggling of huge quantities of gold and diamonds. This unexpected windfall naturally turned the tide in favour of continuance of the French presence, prompting Jawaharlal Nehru to refuse the referendum on grounds that the local political climate was not conducive to a free vote and that pressures by French administration and elements would skew the results against merger. The Government of India thus realizing the possibility of the referendum going against its interests backed out of the principle agreed to in 1948, declaring that the only possible solution to be retrocession pure and simple to the Indian union.

The declaration made in 1947 was desirous of strengthening the bonds of friendship established since then between France and India who had manifested their intention of settling amicably the problem of the French establishments in India. The French managed to retain
Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Mahe, Karaikal and Yanam. In 1948, the people of Mahe revolted and the French Police and troops surrendered. In 1949, the newly elected members of Assembly of Chandernagore passed the resolution in favour of the merger with India. Consequently, the Government of India took over the administration. Considering the wish of the population expressed by their representatives, an agreement was concluded on 21st October 1954, transferring the powers of the Government of the French Republic to the Government of the Indian Union. A treaty of cession was signed by the French Republic and the Republic of India transferring the French establishments of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam by Mr. Stanislas Ostrorog, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of France in India, and Jawaharlal Nehru the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs of Government of India after exchanging their credentials which was found in legal form of about 31 Articles. On May 28, 1956, the Treaty of cession of the French establishments of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam was signed between France and India. On August 16, 1962 the de jure transfer came into effect after passing of the bill in the French Parliament. The great struggle for independence was over and the French settlements of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam and Mahe became an integral part of Indian Union.