CHAPTER VII

CULTURE

J.F. Tyler defines culture thus: "Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and many other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

Culture in the abstract is common to all mankind who are said to constitute society in general. Culture in reality is only manifested in specific, unique cultures, such as German, French and Hindu. A culture is the distinctive way of life of a group of human beings in a specific place at a specific time.

Western civilisation of the 18th and 19th centuries led to the rise of rationalist philosophy, liberal ideology, the industrial revolution, and the influence of the new 'human sciences' of sociology and psychology. In the movement to free the human mind from the tyranny of traditional authority which characterized the eighteenth
century, the French thinkers played a prominent part, and by the end of the 19th century they were the intellectual leaders of Europe, having upheld the ideals of democratic government, humanitarian ethics and religious toleration. French thought in the 19th century was marked by the influence of positivists from Henri de Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte to Renan and Taine in the later years of the century and by the socialist reformers such as the Saint-Simonians, Fourier and Proudhon. This, was also the time when scientific humanism came to the fore as a fully argued philosophy.

The Hindu civilization of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was traditional, pluralist and states-oriented and endowed with an ancient arrangement which had stood the test of time. It was also recognized that the basic ideals of that society were incompatible with the western ideals viz., dignity and freedom of the individual, social and legal equality of all the subjects, and humanism

1. E.F. Tyler - Primitive Culture (Boston, 1871).
But, in the nineteenth century (particularly the latter half) with the arrival of the Europeans, Hindu tradition came to be assailed as never before.

Tamil culture of the period was highly influenced by the religious revival movements whose chief characteristics were the ethical emphasis, the intellectual certitude, and consideration of social services as divine service. Tamil culture was also noted for its cosmopolitan outlook and emphasis on the one world idea, though in later times a certain intolerance began to assert, at times as a reaction against the foreign influence.

In this study the area of culture treated is that of Pondicherry and Karikal, the Tamil speaking areas where common cultural traits are to be found.

Concrete evidence of French interest in India during the 18th century is found in the letters from the Jesuits written in
answer to various questions ranging in interest from Indian philosophy, social life, medicine, flora and fauna. French scientific and cultural curiosity was aroused by the accounts of the various travellers. Most of the writers regretted the contemporary cultural aridity of India when contrasted with the flourishing conditions of the arts and sciences during the earlier period. Fr. Pons admired the beauty of the Sanskrit language, and he sent an analysis of its form and poetry to France. Fr. Martin was so immersed in the language of the country that he hoped to retain only enough French to write to his superiors of the progress of his mission. These two viewpoints represent the aesthetic and religious interest in the culture of the country.

A clear indication of French interest in Hindu culture can be seen in the request for Indian books by the librarian of the Bibliothèque du Roi. Colbert had given a great impetus to collecting books on the Near East, but it was not until 1727 that Abbé Bignon had

searched for valuable material in India. He asked travellers to purchase or make copies of every important book, grammars and dictionaries in regions where Hindu culture prevailed. The missionary also obtained copies of the Veda in 1731, and the Italian Jesuit Beschi sent Tamil books, a Tamil grammar and a Tamil dictionary. Fr. Vons stationed in Chandernagore, succeeded in collecting important classical Sanskrit literature. His collections included a Sanskrit grammar which he had written in Latin. Primarily due to the efforts of these scholars, the first printed catalogue of Sanskrit literature was published in Paris in 1739. Fr. de la Lame is credited with having written the "Grammaire pour apprendre la langue Tamoule" in 1729, and also for compiling a Telugu dictionary in 1739. Fr. De Bourges compiled a "Dictionnaire-Tamoul-Francais".

In the second half of the 18th century Joseph Faguignes (head of the Dept. of Syriac language, 1757-1773) was engaged in Asian

studies and his accomplishment was to fix the major synchronism by which Indian chronology was linked with the universal one. In this he was helped by Naridas Pillai who furnished him a translation of the 'Bagavatas'. It was in this manuscript that Desruignes found the dynastic lists of the Suryavamsa and the Somavamsa kings who had reigned since Parikshit, including Chandragupta which he immediately determined as the Sandrakottas of the Greeks. This synchronism was published in the 'Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres'; this same synchronism was rediscovered by Sir William Jones, who is generally credited for identifying it. Naridas Pillai of Pondicherry knew Latin and French, and all French scholars who visited Pondicherry during that period were indebted to him. The astronomer Le Gentil, wrote that he himself had been a grateful pupil of Naridas and of other Tamil scholars of Pondicherry. Le Gentil's work dealt with the religion and customs of the people on the Coromandel Coast.


At about this time, Augustin Du Perron visited India and later prepared the first European translation in Latin of the Upanishads from the literal Persian version made for the Mughal prince, Dara Shikoh in 1636. This was first translated by him into French in 1776. Du Perron arrived at Pondicherry in 1754, but his stay was shortened because of the English siege of Pondicherry in 1761. Whilst at Surat, he discovered the 'Avesta' and published his 'Zend-Avesta' in three volumes in 1771. He also published an account of his travels in 1789.

De La Flotte is well known for his diary in which he gave an account of the various centres visited and an account of the traditions of the Tamil and their language. He is also noted to have translated some of the Kurals into French.

The traveller Sonnerat drew the attention of West to the fact that information on Hindu culture was easier to obtain from South India

7. De La Flotte - *Essais historiques sur l'Inde, précédés d'un journal de voyages et d'une description géographique de la côte de Coromandel* (Paris, 1769)
than from any other part of India before the founding of the Asiatic
Society at Calcutta.

Before the full European impact, eighteenth century India
had a culture which was different in its conceptions, values and aims
from European culture. The Indian fulfilled his cultural aspirations
within well defined patterns, and cultural change was therefore slow.
Indian society, of course, was not immune from outside influences.
Indian society utilised these influences to continue its traditional
cultural pursuits.

Many individuals made important contributions, notably,
Naridas Pillai and Ananda Ranga Pillai in Pondicherry settlement.
Their achievements in the field of literature were enduring. Kasturi,
a Telugu poet, dedicated his old 'Rangara Chandum' to Ananda Ranga.

S. J. Pilliott, op. cit. p. 4.
Pillai, who had singers and dancers to perform the ode in a lavish evening. Ranga Pillai's diary covering the period 1736-1761 is remarkable for the details and the vividness. At times the diary is Pillai's apology for his own activity; yet more often than not it is a graphic account of the events of the day. It cannot be denied that he was considerably influenced by the European ways.

The social milieu of Pondicherry during the close of the 19th century underwent certain changes. There were instances of inter-racial marriages, which gave rise to the new group known as 'Zopas'. There were certain superficial or surface cultural borrowings, in the field of art, architecture and dress. Some of the Tamils started dressing like the French. The carpenters and blacksmiths who accompanied the early French settlers introduced at Pondicherry, the tradition of French craft. Buildings were constructed according to the Roman style.

The Diary of Ananda Ranga Pillai gives a vivid picture of the cultural life in Pondicherry settlement. Musical performances on festive occasions had become a regular feature. Songs were composed to extoll the glory of the French. A number of Tamil poets of the time seem to have sought the patronage of Pillai. Sadasiva Desikar, son of Vaidyanatha Desikar of Tiruvarur who wrote the 'Ilakkana Vilakkan', composed the 'Anandaranga-k-koval' in honour of Pillai. The famous Arunchala Kavirayar of Seerkashti, the author of "Rama Natakam" was another poet who frequented Pondicherry. Among other poets who sought the patronage of Ananda Ranga Pillai were, Madura Kavi, and Namaschivaya-pulavar.

The nineteenth century is noted for the increased interests by the French Indologists. A chair for Sanskrit was created at the Collège de France in 1814 headed by Léonard de Chézy, and this was followed by the works of Eugène Burnouf in the field of Sanskrit.

11. V. Raghavan – Anandaranga Campa, p. 10 & 111.
Fali and Buddhism. With the founding of the Société Asiatique in 1822 at Paris the first of its kind in Europe, many other French scholars evinced deep interest in Indian thought. Barthélémy de Saint-Hilaire published valuable studies on Indian philosophy. Burnouf encouraged his pupil Ariel to study Tamil and its literature. Ariel collected many Tamil manuscripts and translated part of the 'Tirukkural' and the poems of Auvaliar. With the creation of the 'École des Hautes Études' in 1863, many other Sanskritists took interest in Indology. Mention may be made of Paul Régnaud, Auguste Barth Faucaux and Emile Senart. Barth devoted himself to the study of Indian religions in their historical perspective.

The most important lexicographical works in Tamil were produced by the Missionaries Musset and Dupuis. The 'Dictionarium Latino-Gallico-tamulicum' was published in Pondicherry in 1846 and the 'Vocabulaire français-Tamoul' in 1858. The 'Dictionnaire Tamoul-Français' also attributed to the missionaries Mgr. Musset and Dupuis

12. E. Burnouf wrote his famous 'Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien' in 1844. Earlier he published the work on 'L'Inde française: ou collections de fassins lithographiés etc. 1827 - 1835 (2 Vols).
is a monumental work and was published in Pondicherry in 1855, mainly to meet the needs of the evangelists. Fr. Dupuis also re-edited the 'Kodum Tamil' grammar of Beschi and later in 1843 published a summary of 'Sen Tamil'. In 1863, H. Dupuis published the 'Grammaire française-Tamoule' considered to be the most important work of the kind published in an European language.

Fr. Martinet completed his three volume 'Dictionnaire de prononciation tamoule figurée en Français' in 1877. This work attempted to distinguish pure Tamil expressions from the colloquial. The Tamil pronunciation was given in French phonetics. Besides those who worked on grammars and dictionaries quite a few were drawn to the Tamil language and its literature. Fr. Perreau published in 1863, the 'Méthode indienne pour apprendre à lire en peu du temps le Tamoul et le français', a book meant to teach French and Tamil with rapidity.

13. It dealt with the rules of both Colloquial and literary Tamil together with presody. It gives both the morphological technical terms from Telugu and Tamil and Latin denominations used then, to classify the grammatical forms. Thus, it was possible to learn at the same time the Tamil way of rendering Latin expressions into
French interest in Indology is also reflected in their literature, especially during the Romantic period. François René de Chateaubriand (1768 - 1848) who deeply influenced the Romantic movement in France, was an enthusiastic admirer of 'Sakuntala'. Victor Hugo (1802 - 1885) imitated an Upanishad in his poem 'Suprématie' (1870).

In 1825 Philaré le Charles wrote the "La Fiancée de Benares, nuits indiennes". Paul Verlaine (1844 - 1896) wrote the poem 'Savitri', though a short piece, but is indicative that the French writers had an accurate knowledge of Indian literature. Several other French writers wrote on India.

Nevertheless, it should be observed, that India had no great effect upon French writers beyond supplying an occasional exotic image, despite the fact that French oriental scholarship was of a high order, and there was constant intercourse between scholars and poets. This was mainly because the French intellectual climate was very different

Tamil and the much more perfect Tamil grammatical analysis. An abridged version of this grammar was published in 1892 by Fr. Laf -- entitled 'Abrégé de la grammaire française - tamoule'.
from that of Germany. French romanticism was not so much a quest for eternal truth as a search for new literary forms and language.

There were writers who confined their themes to the French settlements in India. Christian Négrét published in 1839, 'Les Chimères de Chandernagor', Julien Vinson wrote 'Pondichéry sauvé', and Louis Jacollet (1837 - 1890) who worked in French India, translated numerous Vedic hymns and the Kural. E. Lasairesse published in 1867, 'Poésies populaires du Sud de l'Inde' (collection from Tiruvaluvar) and Julien Vinson translated the 'Civakacim-tamani'.

Julien Vinson, born to French parents in Karikal showed great interest in Tamil literature and was in contact with the leading Tamil scholars, vis., U.V. Swaminatha Iyer, Nagaï Vedasalampillai (Maraimalai Adigal), Savarayalaounayagar, Karaikal Ayakanmu and Ayasamy Pulsavar. He translated into French some parts of Chintamani, Cilappatikaram and Namisalai. He also wrote some short stories in
Tamil and evinced interest in rendering the 'Kamba Ramayana' into French. His translation of 'Tadagai Vachai Padalam' and 'Agaligai Pava Vimocharana Padalam' was published in Pondicherry in 1861.

In the course of the 19th century several printing presses were set up with facilities for printing in Tamil, French, English and Telugu. The interest evinced by the French in Tamil language and culture stirred many of the Tamils of Pondicherry to probe into their own language. The eleventh part of the 'Seodamani Nigandu' was published in 1836 with commentaries by Puduvai Nainappa Mudaliar. It carried as a prologue a poem by Puduvai Ponnusami Mudaliar eulogizing the erudition and knowledge of Nainappa Mudaliar. The 'Urichol Nigandu' was published by the Government press in 1840, with a commentary by Chittambalan. This was prescribed for the schools in Pondicherry.

14. J. Vinceau taught Hindustani and Tamil at the 'L'École Nationale des Langues Orientales' from 1879-1921. 'Le Verbe dans les langues dravidianes' (1878), 'Légendes Bouddhistes et Djainas' (1900), 'Manuel de la langue Tamoule' (1903) are some of his notable works.

15. Sundara Shanmugham - Tamil Aswarathikalai, p. 257
It is said that Racine’s *Britannicus* rendered into Tamil by Swaminatha Pillai was enacted at Karikal as early as in 1829 and at Pondicherry in 1837. Many educated Tamils came to appreciate the treasures of French literature through English translations, and the rôle of the Indians in popularizing the masterpieces of French literature cannot be lost sight of. Significant contributions were from those who came under the direct influence of French language and culture. Writers like Nainiappa Nadialar and Nuthusamy Pillai of Pondicherry considered to be the products of what may be termed as the French age in Tamil culture rose to prominence during this period. Nuthusamy Pillai was an erudite scholar and a linguist who showed great interest in historical studies. His biography of Fr. Beschi is well known.

The cultural history of nineteenth century Pondicherry will not be complete without mentioning the rôle of Z. Sayarayalumayagar, 16.

the poet laureat of Pondicherry. An ardent Christian he wrote the
"Perinba Sadagas", "Perinba Andhadhi" and "Tirunavatchadaga" all
in praise of the Blessed Virgin Mary. His discourses on "Thambavani"
won him the appellation of "Thambavani Ubadesigar."

One of the most interesting features of the French impact
was the penetration of French words and idioms into the Tamil language
(in French India) which thereby became enriched.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century marked the emer-
gence of the western educated elite at Pondicherry. They were dis-
tinguished by many aspects of their behaviour--their deportment,
speech, dress, occupations and their associations.

The new cultural attitude did not exist in a social
vacuum. They originated in a class of intellectuals arising largely

17. J. Savarayaloumyagar - Recueil de Chants tamouls (Pondichery 1904).
Born on 9 Dec, 1829, he came to learn Tamil under Numa-
tchiamurra Pillai of Trichinopoly. His master sang
as a result of close European contacts. This élite group was largely urban and not rural; it was literate and sophisticated and its status was based on occupation and caste. It was receptive to new attitudes and some within this group transcended caste and religious barriers and began to view things in broader social terms.

This western educated élite was composed mostly of Tamil renongant Christians (from the upper castes), a few Hindu renongants and some of the upper caste Hindus. Most of them were in government service, some were lawyers, and journalists. Evidence seems to suggest that this élite group responded well to foreign ideas and customs when introduced by sympathetic Frenchmen. French education had greatly influenced them, particularly the principle of equality.

The leader of this élite group was Ponnuthambay La Forte, a Tamil Vellala Christian followed by Louis Rassendrin of the same

the praise of his student in 'Savarayalounayagar Malai'. He was decorate- rated with the 'Chevalier de l'ordre Royal', a recipient of several awards and titles, his fame spread even to France. He was a member of the International Congress of Orientalists. He died on 30 June 1911.
caste. In both Pondicherry and Karikal settlements, the Vellala Christians dominated this group. We have seen earlier in this study, how this group clamoured for equality with the French, which resulted in the introduction of 'renunciation'. Since then, they became more vocal in their demands for equality with the French. Though they had readily absorbed European concepts and values and had become adept at using materials from their Europeanised educational experience, for the most part they were conservatives in their social outlook. Even the renounciants, kept within their traditional moorings.

Despite these shortcomings, this elite group played a notable role in the cultural development of the settlements. The creation of a Public library at Pondicherry in 1827 was one of the several important gestures of cultural policy of the French. During
the latter half of the nineteenth century several newspapers, periodicals, both in French and in Tamil, were published by this élite group in articulating their policies, and in propagating the essentials of French culture and thought. Besides the press media, quite a few associations were involved in cultural activities.

The Tamils representing the above group were plagued by anxieties about their cultural identity. They rejected those aspects of westernisation which they held unnecessary for progress and sought to retain their version of the traditions, values and manners of their own society.

The traditional élite group led by Changamouga'relayoudamodélier (though western educated) firmly believed that since Hindu tradition had continually changed to meet one challenge after another,

18. Nearly twenty newspapers and periodicals were published between 1880 - 1900, see Schelberg, B. & Divien, E — Bibliographie des Français dans L'Inde, pp. 151 - 169.
it was hardly necessary to have this traditional Hindu civilization substituted by an alien culture. This group though with a large following of caste Hindus, Pariahs and some Tamil Christians, was not as vocal as the western educated élite. This can be explained away by the support given to the latter by the establishment. The mass following it had was rather inarticulate. They had very few newspapers and associations to put across their ideas. The traditional élite questioned the right of a foreigner to interfere with a people's religion and social structure. The raison d'être of this traditional élite group served thus as a bastion for the preservation of the ancient Hindu civilization.

CONCLUSION
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It is clear from this study that the impact of French rule on the Tamil society in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led to many changes in government, law, and economic conditions, in the territories under French influence. These changes, begun under French rule, did lead to certain social changes, though it did not in any way destroy the traditional Tamil society. The impact of western ideas in the realms of education and culture had their own benefits and also led to certain reactions.

The eighteenth century was a period of unsettled conditions in the history of the French settlements in India. It was only after the restitution of the territories by the English in 1816 that stability was established in the settlements.

The Ordinance of 1840 constituted a landmark in the administra-
tion of French India. The Governor was vested with wide powers
and functioned as the Chief instrument of centralisation in the settle-
ments. The system introduced was in keeping with the institutions
established in France for the administration of départements. The
Governor could be compared to the Préfet of the département, but had
more plenary powers than the latter, since, he represented the French
government in a distant country. The judicial and financial adminis-
trations of the colony and the system of local government were all
identical with those of France. This type of administrative system
was, introduced in French India in consonance with the policy of
assimilation. This over-centralisation led to considerable weakening
of the local self-government which is, another notable feature of
the French system, both in France and in India.

The impact of this system on the administration of the
colony had its own salutary effects. The highly centralised govern-
ment led to efficient administration. The policy of assimilation by
which the colony was regarded as a mere administrative division of
the 'République française', tended to introduce a high sense of responsibility among its officials, and secured a very economical administration.

It was in politics that the French impact was noteworthy. Since the advent of the Third Republic in 1870, the political institutions of the Colony were remodelled in an attempt to assimilate them to those of France. This is characteristic of the French and contrasts with the cautious, tentative way in which the British introduced and developed new institutions in their colonies. The difference is further illustrated by the different attitudes of the two countries in respect of the colonies. England considered them as distinct offshoots from her, as separate, though subordinate, political entities provided with distinct governments. France on the contrary regarded her colonies in an entirely different aspect. Politically her colonies were considered to form part and parcel of France. They were regarded more as departments of France under the
administration of the French executive, than as distinct self-governing communities. As part of this policy, the colonies were represented in the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. This tendency to link the colonies with the mother country, was in keeping with the tradition of the French ever since they began their colonial enterprise.

The elective institutions of the colony (introduced much earlier than in British India) had powers which were far in disproportion to their elaborate structure. The ‘Conseils’ had no legislative powers, the Chambers alone had the right of legislating for the colonies. Such matters which did not come strictly within their legislative power were regulated by Presidential décrets. Despite these shortcomings, the elective institutions did exert their influence on the executive. The importance and limitations of government policies in promoting the processes of social change cannot be denied. Such mechanisms and policies did provide arenas and opportunities for political mobilisation.
In the political life of the settlements, we notice the role played by the three different groups representing the three ‘listes’. The second ‘liste’ comprising the renegants was dominated by the western educated élite. The Christian renegants of the upper castes, still valued their high caste status and were very anxious to preserve the social order, with all the traditional privileges of their caste. It was this group which consistently clamoured for inclusion in the first list so that they could be treated on a part with the French.

The traditional élites representing the third ‘liste’ opposed this division into three ‘listes’ on racial and religious basis. Though the ‘reconciliation’ policy did not insist on any change of religion, it has been observed that the renegants comprised mainly of Tamil Christians. It is but understandable that the first ‘liste’ and second ‘liste’ electors allied themselves and left the third ‘liste’ to its own resources in the game of politics. The formation of the
three 'listes' with equal proportions of councillors for each 'liste'
introduced a factional spirit in the elections.

The elite groups were essentially urban groups, particularly the group which represented the remouants. Their values, and even their way of life were to some extent modified by the influence of their environment. The impact that French education and the missionaries had on this elite group was considerable. French language education helped the dissemination of liberal ideas and gave a sense of identity with those who used it. Doubtless, there were pre-existing rivalries between these groups, stemming from religious and social factors, which made collaboration between them difficult. The upper caste Tamil Christians and caste Hindus had generally taken advantage of the opportunities provided by French rule and had improved their position.

The basic tenet of French colonialism has been the spirit of 'mission civilisatrice'. Closely linked with this, was the policy
of assimilation, a triumph of the democratic and republican ideas of nineteenth century France. The two extra-parliamentary Commissions of 1878 and 1882 headed by Admiral Pothuau and by M. Declere respectively were invited to study the modifications that were to be introduced into the Colonial régime. Their findings approved of this 1 policy of assimilation. The chief objective of this policy was an attempt at uniting the colony to Metropolitan France. Colonies were considered merely as an extension of 'la mère-patrie' (mother country).

The 'Renaudiation' policy introduced in 1881 in French India was one of the vehicles to be used in making a success of the 'assimilation' policy. As mentioned earlier, this resulted partly from the demands of the western educated élites and partly by the spirit of humanism of the French colonial policy makers. This élite group played a rôle in the introduction of 'renaudiation'. There was marked bitterness about the inequalities existing between the European and the

1. A. Girault - Principes de Colonisation et de législation (Paris 1927) P. 75.
Indians in the electoral system and they had an assumption that the educated elements should provide leadership to this movement. This finally culminated in the 'renonciation au status personnel' of 1881.

The 'renonciation' policy did not prove a success in the ultimate analysis. This was primarily due to the prevailing social structure. Even the renonciants were not totally assimilated. Besides they knew that further institutional development would bring increasingly insistent demands from the lower orders for accommodation. Thus, as S.N. Eisenstadt has observed "the institutionalization of change, or the development and crystalization of new institutional settings requires the internal transformation of the societies or groups within which it occurs". The traditional elites used the symbols of language, of religious identity and of their value systems in the struggles with their opponents.

Nevertheless, 'renunciation' did bring about certain changes, particularly amongst the Pariahs. The Pariah 'renouncants' improved their lot and could compete with the caste Christian renouncants and the upper caste Hindu renouncants. Since the 1860's the Pariahs had shown signs of political awakening when their leaders began to formulate ideas for the advancement of the group. Some, called for the ending of the caste system which was largely responsible for their downtrodden condition. Despite, the opportunities given to them, the Pariahs did not renounce by the thousands. The reason being they could not easily emerge from the bondage to which they were tied down from time immemorial.

Though the 'renouncants' formed only a small minority in French India they did influence the political and cultural development of the area. It should be pointed out, that the renouncants benefited much from the early twentieth century when they went to other French colonies, particularly Indo-China. The second and third
generation 'renoncants' became so much westernized that they consider it as infringing to speak the mother-tongue.

In this encounter between two cultures, there was the process of 'assimilation' as noted earlier in this study. This process may broadly be defined as 'culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous culture systems'. Particularly in the realm of ideas, there were borrowings on either side. This is borne out by the interest evinced by French scholars and Tamil scholars in the cultural studies and literary works of one another. The formal declarations of the equality of man, of the liberty, equality and fraternity of the French republic has, notwithstanding the great practical limitations to which this doctrine has been subjected to in French India, nevertheless, led to a free social intercourse between Europeans and Indians.

The policy of assimilation may be criticized on several grounds. It was just an attempt towards uniformity, a natural result
of the classical mind of the Romans. This policy curbed any tendency
towards the growth of demands for self-government. Besides, the policy
of absolute assimilation is an illusory concept. The youth in French
India were allowed to compete in all Colonial service examinations
even as early as the last quarter of 19th century. Thus, avenues were
open for them to rise in the administrative ladder or even serve in
other colonies. This is one of the main causes which retarded the
growth of a nationalist movement in French India.

If assimilation failed in French India, it was because it
could not assert itself over the traditional social structure and
culture of the Tamils. Even amongst the Christian converts the exis-
tence of caste feelings has been noticed. One is therefore led to
see the caste system as an Indian institution having its full coherence
and vitality in the Hindu environment, but continuing its existence,
in more or less attenuated forms, in groups belonging to other reli-
gions. A non-Hindu group cannot be regarded as independent of the
environment in which it is set, as really constituting a society by itself, however strongly its own values push it in other directions.

The perspective in view of this dissertation has been to show the changes in the social, political and cultural conditions of the Tamils of the French settlements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This analytical probe has tried to bring out the shifts in this direction and the undercurrents responsible for these changes. It will be clearly seen, that the French Colonial régime, with its principles of democracy of the eighteenth century, and humanism of the nineteenth century, and the humanitarian social service of the French missionaries, did infuse into the Tamil society real social changes.

It is but proper to conclude that these social changes brought about by contact with the French and the French literature helped the Tamil society of the French settlements of Pondicherry and Karikal, to evolve its own distinct pattern, a pattern born of its own ancient Hindu culture with the acculturation of the new French humanism of the nineteenth century.