CHAPTER – III

Post-war Reforms and the Merger Issue

At the end of the II World War, the chief colonial powers suffered disastrous setbacks. France’s drawn-out colonial wars in Indo-China and North Africa, undermined her international status and ultimately brought down the political regime at home. The war expenses drained public funds away from domestic reconstruction and saddled the French economy with chronic inflationary pressures. France’s status had indeed been reduced by World War II. Even after the loss of her mandates in the near East, France’s post war colonial empire was still a considerable political construction. Throughout the world some 38 percent of all colonial territory and 39 percent of all colonial subjects were ruled by France: a collection of 79 million people were scattered over 4.6 million square miles on three continents.¹

Nationalist activism grew stronger in the colonies. However, war and the consequences of war changed the composition of the nationalist movements, which managed in a relatively short time to gain a solid footing among the masses. The events of the war years strengthened natives’ nationalism in several ways. France’s defeat, occupation and virtual separation from her colony reduced both her prestige and her authority. The war offered a suitable opportunity for French colonies for demanding autonomy or even independence. It awakened expectations which were immediately identified with the expulsion of foreigners and the breaking of the old ties of loyalty. The “inferiority complexes” inherent in the “colonial situation” were cured and the determination to achieve self-government strengthened.

In British India the Indian nationalists mounted a systematic campaign of anti-western and anti-colonial propaganda and sought also with great skill to accommodate nationalist aspirations. The launching of the “Quit India” movement in August 1942 had assumed an unprecedented dimension. The Indian National Army’s trail, the Royal Indian Navy’s revolt, and organization of numerous strikes and propagandas gave a further boost to anti-imperialist consciousness.\(^2\)

During the war years the colonial administration in French India was weakened but managed to survive. Pattern of trade between colony and the mother country was disrupted, other developmental works were stopped, industrial and labour problems increased, and the trade union movement took root, the pricing of consumer goods created resentment resulting in strikes and local disturbances.\(^3\) The *Combat* in French India supported *Général* Charles de Gaulle’s call, even at the risk of losing the respect of the more radical nationalists and the masses, this because France was successful in presenting a credible picture of the war as one forced upon them in defence of freedom and justice against an autocratic Germany. French culture won over the elite who remained strongly attached to it even though hostile to the colonial system. In the course of the war, French India provided both soldiers and financial support for free France movement.\(^4\) The political elite at once made use of it to advance radical demands. The growth of Indian nationalism naturally influenced nationalist movements among the populations of French India. Nationalist


\(^4\) R. Vaithialingam, one of the senior politicians of French India witnessed that people from French India were very eager to joint in French military for France and even there was some community people mostly depressed class demonstrated for France and voluntarily joined the military, A fund was collected for free France movement and a rapid collection of Rupees 1904 was collected within few days of time and was sent to Algeria. (R. Vaithialingam, Lecture on Freedom Movement in Pondicherry in Saturday, the 9 September 1972, 7.00 P.M.)
organizations and parties began to demand, if not immediate independence, at least a relaxation of authoritarian rule and an increasing share in government and administration.

**French India in the aftermath of World War II**

The attitude of the French Indians at the war time surprised the French administration and quickened its readiness for reforms. Policy makers in Paris were designing a new structure for the post-war French Empire. Free French leaders had begun to consider the future of the empire after the setting up of Général Charles de Gaulle’s provincial French government in Algiers in 1943. D. Zivarattinam, a lawyer from Pondicherry was elected to French India delegation for the Provincial Consultative Assembly at Algiers. In 1944, his address to the Consultative Assembly in Paris embodied the assimilationist theme of the overseas French. D. Zivarattinam demanded a single list of voters and called for the abolition of the reserved seats or separate electorates for Europeans. Restoration of the French Republic in France resulted in the fulfilment of the French Indians’ plea for a truly democratic electoral system in French India by abolition of the much abhorred and controversial two lists on 23rd August 1945, in favour of a single list of voters. The same Décret also authorized reorganization of Conseil général, Conseils locaux, and Municipalities.

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Table 3.1 Re-organized Electoral System in French India in 1945

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements</th>
<th>Number of Councillors</th>
<th>Municipalités</th>
<th>Conseil général</th>
<th>Conseils locaux</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pondichéry</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondichéry</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariancoupo</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahour</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeliarpet</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nettapacom</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oulgaret</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiroubouvané</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villenour</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikal</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotchéry</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand’Aldée</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nédouncadou</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Néravy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tinnoular</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandernagor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandernagor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahé</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yanaon</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Total</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>64</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Following the reorganization of electoral system in French India, elections were held on 21st October 1945 to choose a delegate to represent French India in the *Assemblée nationale constituante* in Paris. Zivarattinam contested for the seat with the support of Communists, the *Combat* groups and labourers, against Lambert Saravane, who was supported by the former Franco- Hindu Party or David’s Party. Having lost influence among the Europeans in the electoral system, the French administration played a crucial role in the election separating Christian and Muslim voters against majority of the Hindu voters. In Karaikal among the 11,000 voters, 5,000 voted for
Lambert Saravane and similarly in Mahe the Muslim population supported Lambert Saravane. The following table shows the Election results:

**Table 3.2 Election Results of 1945 Député Election**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total voters</th>
<th>70,746</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>43,762</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required majority</td>
<td>21,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Zivarattinam</td>
<td>22,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Saravane</td>
<td>17,687</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armand Gallios</td>
<td>03,850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>00,054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Kudi Arasu, 21 December 1945, pp.2-4

![Figure 3.1: Distribution of votes in the 1945 Député Election.](image)

D. Zivarattinam secured 22,171 votes and won the election.

During the war years the character of French Indian politics underwent some radical changes. The old notables and a few educated Indians who dominated French Indian politics were now replaced by younger leaders, often students, lawyers and by representatives of the Indian middle-class, small businessmen, officials, teachers, agriculturist and labourers, who used new methods of organization and propaganda, founded trade unions, associations and began to build up modern parties.

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8 Journal officiel des établissements français dans l'Inde, 1945, p.631.
On 14th March 1946, Communists, Socialists, some old Franco-Hindu and David’s Party elements, Membrane’s political committee and many other associations, members of the Combat group and individuals united to form a progressive front called the “National Democratic Front.” In fact, the Communists seemed to have played a leading role in the organization of this front not only in Pondicherry, but also in the other French Indian settlements. They set forth a list of objectives like a completely autonomous government within the French Republic, the abolition of the Governor’s dictatorial powers, universal voting rights for both men and women, the conduct of free and fair polls, adequate representations for French India in the representative organizations in France and fundamental democratic rights from the French Indian government.

The officials and administrators in French India demanded a raise in their salary and pensions. Since the war French India struggled with economic and financial difficulties, and they had to face a cut in their salaries. Prevailing inflation of the French Indian economy and lower value of French franc justified their demands. Governor Bonvin made them indignant increased their salaries. For example the Chef de service of treasury 1st class received 12.516 rupees in 1939 got 14.134 rupees in 1944 (12.45% increase), the Engineers of public works 2nd class got 13.34% increase, the Professors of colleges 2nd class got 13.73% increase, the Procureur de la République got 8, 60% increase, the Administrator in Chef des colonies got 9.02% increase etc., Bonvin also increased pensions of the different service personals. For example, the Commis-greffier principal of 1st class received 2,160 rupees (12.22% increase), the Rédacteur du gouvernment received 11.89% increase, the Contrôleur

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des contributions got 12.67%, the Conducteur des travaux publics got 11% etc., all of them paid from the local budget.\textsuperscript{11} In his opening speech at Conseil général Bonvin, promised to solve the electricity problems in Pondicherry, to renovate irrigation works in Karaikal, to improve the trade activities and other development works in other French Indian settlements.\textsuperscript{12} French India definitely ran over economic difficulties and it expected huge financial supports from metropolitan France.

Since 1945 there was talk of a change of Governorship. Some sections of the population favoured Bonvin’s retention, especially the Europeans and Muslims because of his ability and the peace maintained during his tenure. The Communists under V. Subbiah backed D. Zivarattinam or Adicèam to the post of Governor. Marie Xavery, the President of Mahajana Sabha Party wrote a letter on 8\textsuperscript{th} January 1945 to the Minister of Colonies in Paris requesting him to nominate a professional Governor with liberal tendency. He referred to V. Subbiah as an “international agent of trouble” and accused both David and Subbiah were responsible for the troubles which broke out in the years 1937, 38 and 39.\textsuperscript{13} Jeandin who held office during Bonvin’s visit to France was made acting Governor in July 1945. François Baron succeeded as interim Governor of French India on 20\textsuperscript{th} March 1946. He was a Socialist, determined to enlist the support of the local population. His first job was to carryout the liberal policy of the Fourth Republic.

**French Colonial Policy after World War II**

Political concessions and reforms were a byproduct of World War II. Free France; impelled by a revolutionary urge for renewal, attempted to break through the stagnation of the Third Republic; at the same time an effective programme of reform

\textsuperscript{11} Procès-verbaux établissements française dans L’Inde Conseil général, 1944, pp. 685-697.
\textsuperscript{12} Procès-verbaux établissements française dans L’Inde Conseil général, 1944, pp. 7-26.
\textsuperscript{13} File No: 42 (5) W/1945, Ministry of External Affairs, N.A.I, New Delhi.
had to be found to counter American and Russian anti-colonialism. In short, the free France movement necessitated the revision of traditional colonial policy.

Under the leadership of de Gaulle and Pleven (his Commissioner for colonies) the new colonial policy was fashioned. It was prompted partly by international requirements (Atlantic Acts, United Nation Charter etc.), partly by the need to meet the desires of the colonial peoples who had supported the free France movement. The result was the beginning of a new phase of French colonial policy.

In the Imperial Conference presided over by the colonial administrators on 30th January and 8th February 1944 at Brazzaville, the following recommendations were made:

(i) The conference proposed wide colonial representation in the future Constituent Assembly and the creation of a new body, a “Colonial Parliament or preferably a Federal Assembly”;

(ii) The powers of the Governors should be widened and made more precise and the administration made simpler and more effective;

(iii) It condemned forced labour;

(iv) The conference recommended that education should reach the masses and secure the advancement of talent; and

(v) The conference drew up a big programme of social reform and in the economic field rejected the mercantile principle and recommended the gradual industrialization of the colonies.14

To sum up, the old idea of unity and assimilation continued to hold sway.

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The provisional government of free France wished to give practical effect to the recommendations made at Brazzaville. An important innovation of this government was the fact that all the colonies were asked to choose representatives and many natives shared in drawing up the constitution. Général de Gaulle decreed that the members of the Constituent Assembly should be elected in each colony by electoral colleges. In all, the Overseas Territories had sixty three representatives. In October 1946, the Constitution of the Fourth Republic, drawn up by the Assembly which included representatives of the Overseas Territories, created the “French Union.” The French Union was composed of nations and peoples who co-ordinated or pooled their resources and energies to develop their respective civilizations, increased their prosperity and ensured their security. Thus France and her overseas peoples constituted a union founded on equal rights and duties without distinction of race or religion.

The French Union differed from the pre-war Empire in some important respects. First the word “colonies” officially disappeared from the French political terminology. La France d’outre-mer was classified into five distinct categories. These were (i) Algeria, (ii) The Overseas Departments, (iii) The Overseas Territories, (iv) The Associated Territories and (v) The Associated States. Secondly, the pre-war distinction between French Citizens and Colonial Subjects officially disappeared. Article 80 of the constitution stated that “all the nationals of the overseas territories rank as citizens equally with French nationals of the mother country and overseas.” As such, they can claim the individual right guaranteed by the constitution, including the right to be represented in the parliament of the métropole and the right to vote

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(women were to be given equal rights with men), the right to work, the right to form trade unions, the right to strike, the right to national protection and the right to education were all laid down. All overseas possessions now elected one or more representatives to the French Assembly and the Council of the Republic. Thus in 1951 of the 627 deputies in the French Assembly, 83 represented Overseas Territories and of the 320 senators, 74 represented overseas constituencies.

The creation of an Assembly and a High Council of the Union constituted another major innovation of the French Union. The Assembly included up to 240 members, elected for six years, of whom half must represent the mother country and half the Overseas Territories and States. The functions of the Assembly of the Union were advisory only. It was consulted regarding the application of legislation to Overseas Territories and regarding presidential decrees applicable to them. The function of the High Council was described in the constitution as being one of assistance to the government in the conduct of the affairs of the Union and it was presumably intended to be a coordinating body.

Figure 3.2: Distribution of seats in French Assemblée and Sénat, 1951.

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17 In 1946, the overseas electorate numbered three and a half million, in 1951, there were seven and a half million overseas electors.
Another innovation of the French Union was the implementation of the French undertaking to lead the colonial people in her care towards free and democratic self-administration. As an immediate application of the undertaking to extend native political rights, local representative assemblies were set up in 1947 and 1948 in all Overseas Territories. These assemblies were elected for five years by all those whose names were on the electoral register. The members varied in number according to the population of the territory. The function of these assemblies was to assist the Governor in the administration of the territory. They also had the right to be consulted regarding proposals to change the status of the territory and they were intended also to act as a training-ground for native politicians so as to enable the native population to play an increasingly important role in the running of affairs, both local and metropolitan. The territorial assemblies were also the colleges for overseas senators as well as for overseas members of the Assembly of the Union.19

Constitutional reforms in French India

The French settlements in India had rallied to de Gaulle’s free France movement in 1940 and in 1946 became a Territoire d’outre-mer and thus came under the responsibility of the Ministry for Overseas France, formerly called the Ministry for the Colonies. In all the Overseas Territories proper; there was a representative of the French government, a Governor General. He was responsible to the government in Paris for the administration of the Territory and for its defence. He was assisted by an advisory council comprising the heads of the different services and selected native leaders, and by the elected assemblies. The French parliament legislated for the overseas territories and reserved the right to apply legislations to the territories, either by legislative enactment or by decree. In the former case, the Assembly of the Union

was to be consulted; in the latter case, the constitution required that it shall be consulted. In addition, the government might make decrees applicable directly to individual territories. In such case, the decree was signed by the President of the Republic and only after consultation with the Assembly of the Union. In short, the French Union was still partly a fiction. In reality the French government was supreme, legislation belonged solely to parliament, and in the colonies the administration had the real authority.\(^{20}\)

In keeping with the Fourth Republic’s policy towards the colonies, in French India the French Governor and the authorities followed a policy of introducing a series of administrative reforms during October 1946 and September 1947. France under the Fourth Republic had, Baron said, “proclaimed the death-knell of colonialism and all men and women whether they belong to Paris, Quimper, Tananarive or Pondicherry, are free and equal. That all men and women have the same right and can also be freely elected, without distinction of caste or race or colour, representatives who should faithfully express the idea and wishes of the electors.”\(^{21}\) This he thought would give the French authorities ample time to adjust them to the changing political scenario in Asia, particularly in the Indian sub-continent and to fulfill aspirations of the French Indian population.

Municipal elections which were suspended during the war years, was to be held on 23\(^{rd}\) June 1946, on the basis of universal suffrage and a single electoral list. In the history of French India women were first time allowed to vote and participate in electoral politics. The National Democratic Front won a sweeping victory in the


Municipal elections. It captured power in all the 22 Municipal Councils of French India, winning 101 out of the 122 Municipal seats and its candidates were elected as Mayors and Assistant-Mayors.22

In the past French settlements in India unanimously voted for selected candidates of the French administration. Now they reacted differently and registered the votes for opposition against French authorities. This situation was created by the National Democratic Front consisting of Communists and Congress men. The National Democratic Front, as expected, won in Pondicherry and Karaikal. In Chandernagore, people overwhelmingly voted for the National Democratic Front’s candidates. The NDF also registered its success in Yanam where the French Governor had not set his foot since past 10 years. In Mahe too the NDF won, though the victory was not an emphatic win, as the Mahajana Sabha had won 5 seats and the NDF won only 7 out of a total of 12.23 While observing these radical changes Baron himself admitted that the French policy was largely responsible for the separatist tendency manifested by the settlements.24 The trend of defiance continued in the subsequent years until the settlements were finally merged with the Indian Union.

The Décrets of 25th October and 10th November 1946 abolished the 30 members Conseil général and replaced it with an Assemblée Représentative, composed of 44 members distributed in the following fashion:

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Table 3.3 Composition of *Assemblée Représentative* in French India

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlements</th>
<th>Electorat Constituencies</th>
<th>No. of Councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pondichéry</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pondichéry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ariancoupom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modelharpet</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nettapacom</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oulgaret</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiroubouvané</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villenour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Karikal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karikal</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotchéry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand’Aldée</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nédouncadou</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Néravy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirnoular</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chandernagor</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chandernagor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mahé</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Yanaon</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The members to the Assembly were to be elected on the basis of universal suffrage and a single list of voters. This Assembly met twice in ordinary sessions of 30 days duration and twice in extraordinary sessions of 15 days. It was called either by the Governor or by two-thirds of the members, if necessary on the prerequisite. The President of the Assembly was selected on the basis of seniority by age. The *Assemblée Représentative* was permitted to deliberate and give its opinion on matters referred to it. The Governor or head of the French Indian administration assured the implementation of the decisions or opinions of the Assembly. The budget prepared by the Governor and his council was discussed and it was implemented by his order. In fact the Assembly and the Governor shared the initiative of incurring state expenditure. The *Assemblée Représentative* elected a Commission Permanente of 9 members with one year office. In short, the Assembly was nothing more than an

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approving body as the Head of French India was endowed with the power of overriding the decision or opinion of the Assembly. In reality, it could not take up or discuss matters which were not submitted before it, and from that point of view its scope was very restricted.

Electoral Politics in French India (1946-47)

According to the new Constitution of 27th October 1946, French India was endowed with a Député to the Assemblée Nationale in Paris, two Sénateurs to the Conseil de la République and a member to the Assemblée de l’union française. In the election held to elect a Député to the Assemblée Nationale on 10th November 1946, the National Democratic Front supported Lambert Saravane and placed its candidate against the candidates like Armand Gallios Montburn and D.Zivarattinam of Pondicherry, Savarinathan of Karaikal and Anandan Calcatta from Mahe. The National Democratic Front’s manifesto proclaimed in favour of French India remaining as an autonomous unit within the French Union. The French administration fully supported Saravane, since he was emerging as a new leader of the labour community other than the Communist leader V. Subbiah. The Governor of French India hoped that Saravane would abandon V. Subbiah once he was elected with his support. Saravane came out successfully and defeated his rival candidates by a huge margin. Results of the election:

Table 3.4 Election Results of 1946 Sénateur Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total population</th>
<th>Total no. of voter</th>
<th>Voted</th>
<th>L. Saravane</th>
<th>Oppositions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>298.510</td>
<td>103.297</td>
<td>79.907</td>
<td>79.267</td>
<td>640</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lambert Saravane served his masters loyally. When he addressed the French Constituent Assembly at Paris in 1946, he stated “In French India, French domination is a myth rather than a reality. Indians from French India have remained attached to France by bonds of true friendship. We do not know what is subjection or oppression” He added “we are all the spiritual sons of France and without France we, educated and leading men of that country, would be nothing at all”. He remarked, “Your fate and ours are bound up together. That is why the French Union must become a reality”. He further stated, “While riots and disturbances prevail everywhere in neighbouring territories (British India), French India is peaceful. Harmony between communities has been maintained we live in brotherhood because France has kept up their complete democracy.”

Supporting Saravane’s speeches, Governor C. F. Baron said, “Our territories, freely handed over two hundred years ago by local sovereigns to the Compagnie des Indes are like small properties in the immense Indian domain. Their raison-d’re être is to constitute natural links between two great peoples, two great cultures,” and he concluded that “It is in the interest of French India to remain a democratic country united with India and freely associated with France.”

The attitude of the both French administration and Communist clique in French India earned the opposition of the Indian nationalists. When British India launched it final struggle for freedom, the people of French India hoped that they would naturally be freed from French rule. R. L. Purushothama Reddiar, President of the French India National Congress expressed this hope in a letter, sent to the Indian National Congress annul session held at Meerut in December, 1946. He assured that “French India as integral part of this great country will keep in step with her march

27 Bulletin de Presse, 19 October 1946, N.A.I, Puducherry.
towards an Independent sovereigns Republic.”  

28 He added that “French India at no cost would like to remain under the foreign domination whatever may be the so called advantages.”  

While these things were happening in Indian sub-continent, the situation in Pondicherry and Karaikal became volatile. In Pondicherry clashes between the Communists and Congress men was a daily report. According to the Dinasari (Madras based daily) rowdyism and hooliganism were in full swing in Pondicherry. Congress men were attacked, their houses were raided, with the result that, two Congress workers were murdered in Mudaliarpet area, at least 12 houses were burnt and nearly 100 people had left Pondicherry and took shelter in the adjacent British Indian territory. 

29 In a letter to the Governor of French India, K. Sundaraju, leader of the labour union complained that the French government and V. Subbiah were responsible for these crimes and atrocities committed by the Communists and accused that the government, was siding openly with the Communist Party and encouraging them in their unlawful activities. 

30 Exploring the political situation in French India Franc-tireur observed that Baron was incapable of maintaining law and order and failed to restrict the activities of the band of murderers. In this background the paper asked Maurice Moutet, then French Overseas Minister to recall Baron. 

31 Sensing the growing opposition, Baron banned British Indian leaders from speaking in public meetings in French India, circulation of several British Indian dailies, and prohibited the circulation of pamphlets and notices printed in British India.

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30 Dinasari, 17 October 1946.  
31 Madras Daily and Swadesamitran, 27 October 1946.  
French India National Congress was no longer part of the National Democratic Front. In the elections held on 15th December 1946 to elect the members for the New Assemblée Représentative, despite opposition from the Congress in Pondicherry and Karaikal, Mahajana Sabha in Mahe and the Praja Party in Yanam, the National Democratic Front won 34 seats out of 44.\textsuperscript{33} As in the past, this election also registered irregularities and malpractices.

However, the National Democratic Front’s intentions considerably changed in the early 1947, due to the French oppressive policy in Indo-China, Great Britain’s declaration (20th February 1947) to quit India before 30th June 1948 and most importantly due to growing hostility between Baron and the Communists. The Indo-China problem was discussed in the Assemblée Représentative where Lambert Saravane, the present Député expressed his disappointment over French attitude about the Vietnam movement in Indo-China.\textsuperscript{34} After the assembly was adjourned, a procession of assembly members and the crowd shouted slogans such as “Down with Imperialism” and “we want complete independence for French India.”\textsuperscript{35} On 4th January 1947 the annual session of the National Democratic Front was conducted, this conference condemned the rule of the Ordonnance Organique of 1840, the rule of French India by the decrees of the French République and urged the French government to follow Civil liberties as in France. This clearly indicates the changing mood of the National Democratic Front. On 13th January 1947, Maurice Moutet, the French Overseas Minister paid a visit to Pondicherry, on his way back from Indo-China. The National Democratic Front submitted a memorandum of the French Indian problems. The Congress also registered their complaints against Communists

\textsuperscript{34} Procès Verbaux- Assemblée Réprésentative, session extraordinary, 3 January 1947.  
\textsuperscript{35} The Hindu, 8 January 1947.
atrocities.\textsuperscript{36} When he addressed the public, Moutet admitted that French India being the oldest of the French colonies deserved special consideration and assured the people that the French Indian problems will be solved soon.\textsuperscript{37}

A new wave of political excitement came to the surface during the Sénateur’s election in February 1946. The National Democratic Front announced its candidates V. Subbiah and Pakkirisamy Pillai of Karaikal for the two Sénateurs’ positions in the French Sénat in Paris. There was another reason for Moutet’s visit. He had come to Pondicherry to ask the support of the members of the Assemblée Représentative for his son Maurice Gaudart for the position of Sénateur. There were altogether six candidates. V. Subbiah’s patriotism was questioned since he had not renounced his personal status in favour of the French Civil Code (Renonciation) and his parents did not belong to the French Indian settlements. An ample opportunity presented itself to the Communists on 21st January 1947, when British India observed “Vietnam Day” to express their solidarity with the oppressed Vietnamese. In French India the National Democratic Front decided to observe “a day of union between the army and the people” (the anniversary of RIN trail in 1946). The Congress remained aloof from it. In order to show their strength, the Communists in Pondicherry organized a strike in the morning and a huge demonstration in the evening. Morning was peaceful but in the afternoon the procession that paraded through the streets of Pondicherry, mainly composed of mill workers shouting only one slogan “long live Subbiah”, turned violent. Through Dupleix street (now Nehru street), the Communist hooligans attacked Café Ansari, where a Students’ Congress meeting was going on in the 1st


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{The Hindu}, 13 January 1947.
floor.\textsuperscript{38} It was destroyed and plundered. Despite the presence of a strong contingent of armed police, the assault could not be prevented, and it resulted in the killing of a mill worker and it injured several police personnel. In a telegram the Pondicherry administration reported Overseas Ministry about the incident and held the anti-social elements affiliated to the group of V. Subbiah responsible for it.\textsuperscript{39} The Café Ansari incident had its impact on other French Indian settlements too, particularly in Mahe and Chandernagore where the Communists threatened to drive out violently all the French officials. It was in these circumstances, on 26\textsuperscript{th} January 1947, the Assemblée Représentative elected V. Subbiah and Pakkirisamy to the Sénat in Paris. Results of the Sénateurs election:

**Table 3.5 Election Results of 1947 Sénateur Election**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Candidates</th>
<th>No. of Votes secured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V. Subbiah and Pakkirisamy (N.D.F)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obbaye Chorone Boudhapadhia (Chandernagore)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeandin (Former Governor of French India)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bezorzei (Socialist)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaudet</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


![Figure 3.3: Distribution of Votes in 1947 Sénateur Election](image)

\textsuperscript{38} A piece of information given by Antoine Vallabh Mariadassou, leader of Students’ Congress.

\textsuperscript{39} R.L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I., Puducherry.
Five members from Chandernagore who had been elected to the Assemblée Représentative, under the NDF banner, registered their votes in favour of Boudhapadhia. Surprisingly two Praja Party (Yanam) members extended their support to the National Democratic Front’s candidates.

New reforms were introduced by the Décret of 12th April 1947 which replaced the Conseil privé du Gouverneur by a Conseil du Gouvernement (Government Council) consisting of 7 members of whom 5 were nominated by the Governor and 2 were chosen from the Assemblée Représentative. The following was the composition of the Conseil.

President:
Le Gouverneur du territoire.

Members:
1. Le secrétaire-général
2. Chef du service judiciaire.
5. Le Président de la commission permanente de l’assemblée représentative.
7. Le Chef des services civil et militaires.

Though it was described by the Governor as a great innovation but was only a consultative body and had no executive or legislative power. It was to advice the Governor on such matters that the Governor puts before it. Moreover the majority of this body consisted of government officials and contained only two elected members. They were made members of the Conseil in order to ensure a close co-ordination between the Conseil du Gouvernement and the Assemblée Représentative on the one hand and the affairs of public administration on the other. Baron, himself admitted that “I know that there are many of you who worry and consider the powers of this

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40 Was Instituted in French India by a Décret of 24th June, 1879.
Assembly as still insufficient.”

The Décret of 12th August 1947 abrogated the above arrangement into 6 members of whom 3 were officials and 3 were chosen from the Assemblée Représentative invested the Conseil du Gouvernement with enlarged powers. In due course of time all the members of the Conseil were selected from the Assemblée Représentative. With that the Conseil du Gouvernement became the most powerful administrative body in French India.

However these measures did not divest the power of the Governor who remained the ultimate executive power and could over-ride or cancel any measures or resolution adopted by any one of the elected bodies in French India. On 20th August 1947 the French Governor styled himself as Commissaire de la République, instead of ‘Governor,’ which was a new colonial connotation invented by the ‘French Union.’

**Politics and Society in French India (1940-1947): An overview**

However in the changing context it is hard to say that various administrative reforms introduced from time to time in French India satisfied the aspirations of the general population. The French democracy won over political elite which remained strongly attached to it even though hostile to the colonial system. In the past, the colony was subject to laws and regulations peculiar to them. The new political institutions allowed the political elite complete control and gave full power to the elected members, who began to make the regulations and started exercising considerable influence in the affairs of the settlements. Post war constitutional reform increased the number of electors and elected members to the respective assemblies of

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44 Journal officiel des établissements français dans l’Inde, p.1061.
French India. As such France possessed a democratic prestige among the native population and this was her greatest asset.

Article 80 of the French Constitution stated that “all the natives of the overseas territories rank as citizens equally with French nationals of the mother country and overseas” and it also entrusts the freedom of press, freedom of association and public meetings.\footnote{Cited in C. A. Julien, “From the French Empire to the French Union,” in International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944), Vol.26, No.4, (Oct, 1950), p. 497.} Since, it had been extended to the French settlements in India; French India saw the growth of a number of associations and political parties in the modern sense. Baron observed: “Finally, a policy of parties and programmes has taken the place of a policy of persons and clans, giving proof of a sounder and more developed political conscience in the citizens.”\footnote{Cited in C. A. Julien, “From the French Empire to the French Union,” in International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944), Vol.26, No.4, (Oct, 1950), p. 497.}

The French India Communist Party, under V. Subbiah as its undisputed leader, emerged as the best organized and most powerful party in French India. The intensive labour movement in 1930s ultimately resulted in the evolution of Communist movements in the settlements. The French administration fully covered them, but hesitated to give them an open support owing to the Communist challenge in Asia and the anti-Communist drive in India.\footnote{Bulletin de presse, 31 March 1947, N.A.I, Puducherry.} The French India National Congress was officially established in May 1946, identical to the Indian National Congress in its aims, creed, and method of action. It was formed with the sole aim of the nationalist aspiration of liberation of French India and its integration with British India.\footnote{R.L.Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.} Its leaders included some former members of the National Democratic Front, R. L. Purushothama Reddiar, Anasari Doraisamy, S. R. Subramanian, K. Sivaparakasam, Ambady Narayanan, Sethuraman Chettiar, Andre Selvanadin and others like J.

\footnote{R.L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.}
Once Saraswathi Sangam (a Communist brand welfare association) was dissolved and a band of young men like Antoine Vallabh Mariadassou, Sebastin, Durai Munisamy and Arumugham formed the French India Students’ Congress on 17th August 1946.\textsuperscript{49}

Immediately after the Second World War, in French India the leading political formation was V. Subbiah’s French India Communist Party which was founded on the base of the labourers, student associations and agriculturalists. As the leader of the Communists, V. Subbiah was instrumental in passing the legislation which ended the bitterly hated forced labour regulations in effect throughout French India under the Third Republic. By this legislation, V. Subbiah was able in one stroke to give a decisive blow for his own class at the European administrators and European investors and to enlist the support of the great mass of the natives who were subject to these terrible regulations. So V. Subbiah, the leader of the labour community, became a hero and liberator. By 1940s the French India Communist Party had mass members and was the largest party in French India. At the very time when French India was securing an initial measure of political unity behind V. Subbiah, the settlements were to be found in increasing turmoil with the French administration.

The political problem was familiar throughout the post war world in the context of nationalism and decolonization. But it was aggravated in the French settlements in India by the French reforms of 1945 and 1947. In the local assemblies a number of political issues and personal interests of the political elite served seriously to divide the Communist dominated National Democratic Front. There were two tendencies within the ruling clique, one which was anti-colonial and the other pro-\

\textsuperscript{49} Journal officiel des établissements français dans l’Inde, 1946.
French. As the French administration expected, in July 1947, the ruling National Democratic Front split into two, pro-French such as the Franco-Indian Edouard Goubert and Lambert Saravane broke away to form the “French India Socialist Party.” However, this Socialist party; which seems to have been Socialist just in name was neither associated with “Socialist Party” of India under Jaya Prakash Narayan, nor with the “Socialist Party” of France.

What brought these local issues to the intense concern of anti-colonialists and Indian nationalists however was the alliance which had grown up between the French India Socialist Party and the French administration, and the increasingly dominant role the French India Socialist Party was playing throughout the affairs of French India. In the very first the French administration had recognized the Socialist Party as their ally in the effort to secure liberal reforms in colonial rule. However, the Communist and Congress leaders warned people of the French reforms which were not so liberal and the French Union which was irrelevant to French India. V. Subbiah, the leader of Communists went on record thus: “The present policy pursued by the Government of France towards its colonies is part of its general anti-democratic policy at home and abroad. Much against the declarations made by the Resistance Organizations during the last war and against the very spirit and letter of new Constitution which ensured equal political status to the people overseas territories in the family of French Union.”

In response, therefore some members from the Socialist party brought in the government’s support in their effort to sabotage the opponents. Governor Baron used his influence inside the government to convince affiliated Indians, most notably the

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Map 3. The Unification of India

Socialists, to boycott the anti-colonialists and Indian nationalists. In the absence of a well-organized Communist Party, the French India Socialist Party with Goubert at its head emerged as the ally of the French administration and the leader of the people. It guaranteed a continued French presence in the Indian settlements. These measures did not go unanswered, as hunger strikes, demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and actual street fighting took the lives of several Indians while hundreds were injured and thousands arrested. Thus civil conflicts lurked in the heat of every political movement. So shortly after the liberation of India on 15th August 1947, serious strife broke out in the French Indian settlements lasting for eight years before India and France came to an amicable agreement regarding merger of French Indian territories with the Indian Union.

The Merger issue:

Political issues in 1947 increased in importance due to the constitutional reforms. The great urge for the end of colonies everywhere and Britain’s announcement of granting independence to India had its repercussions in French India and it provoked a change in the political thinking and situation in the French Indian settlements. An important question arose in the minds of people of French India. If India would attain its independence what would be the political future of French India? The question of the future of French India came to be viewed from two different perspectives. On the one hand, French Indians, ethnically, socially, culturally and economically were having close ties with Indians, even though politically they were separated for about two and a half centuries. On the other hand, the French rule had considerable influence in the linguistic, social and cultural life of French Indians, who enjoyed manifold privileges like democratic institutions, administration, law, justice and education under French rule.
The French reaction to the present situation was quick. The French Minister of Foreign Affairs declared in March 1947 that the British decision to withdraw from India would have no effect on the French possessions in India, which were part and parcel of the Overseas Territories of the French Union and that there was no connection between the two.\textsuperscript{51} F.C. Baron, the French India Governor too issued a similar statement “the British Declaration of February 1947 to the effect of withdrawing from India before June 1948, had nothing to do with French India and the people of French India themselves would decide their fate and future to merge with the Indian Union or remain within the French Union” and he warned that “the French Indian community of 3,00,000 souls will be lost in the fusion with the mass of four hundred millions brother people without benefit for none.”\textsuperscript{52} His sensational observation came in the circumstances of growing anti-imperial agitations in French India and the great urge for continuation of Fourth Republic’s reforms. However his statement provoked many reactions and gave a different dimension to the political problem. The French Overseas Minister was quite unhappy with Baron for making such a statement without securing prior consent and approval from the French government.\textsuperscript{53} R. L. Purushothama Reddiar, The leader of French India National Congress expressed his dissatisfaction that “the inalienable rights of self-determination of French Indian people cannot be questioned by a progressive nation like France”\textsuperscript{54} and demanded from France the complete withdrawal of their territorial control over French India leaving its three lacks of people to merge into their real and natural nationhood (Indian).

\textsuperscript{51} *The Hindu*, 3 March 1947.
\textsuperscript{52} Information Bureau de l’Inde Française, 1947-1948, N.A.I, Puducherry.
\textsuperscript{54} R. L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.
As British departure from India was fast approaching, at this juncture the development of friendly relations with India was the primary concern of France. Already in December 1946, Jawaharlal Nehru who headed the interim government of India demanded that the French should have ambassadorial relationship with India. Hesitation, doubt and lack of steadiness from the French side delayed the process. Bilateral relations between France and India started at the embassy level were officially announced on 17th February 1947 but under the outmoded designation of Ambassadeurs aux Indes.\textsuperscript{55}

However, the colonial issue dominated the relations between France and India. Jawaharlal Nehru was acting as the mouth–piece of countries fighting for independence and attacking French positions in certain overseas territories, especially in Indo-China and Vietnam. Nehru, a strong critic of French policy in Indo-China, informed French authorities, “we want to have friendly relations with the French government and people; but we cannot forget the present struggle in Indo-China is producing a powerful reaction in India…I do hope that the French Government will put an end to the fighting there as soon as possible and arrive at a peaceful settlement.”\textsuperscript{56} Undoubtedly, India’s diplomatic activism and its solidarity with other freedom movements in Asia provided enough cause for worry to France.

The French Cultural Programme

French authorities were quite aware that the future of the French settlements in India depended largely on the “total colonial policy of France”. Their main desire was to win over the Indian nationalists; because they were anxious that the Indian


\textsuperscript{56} Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vol-2, p. 527.
nationalistic flavour would affect the fate of French India. But Indian leaders reacted to this problem differently. They believed that the liquidation of British domination would be followed by the end of the other foreign dominations. Sardar Vallabhai Patel firmly asserted that the French settlements too must be liberated at the same time as India became free from the British rule. However Nehru believed that French Indian problem could be resolved diplomatically after India became free. The French authorities believed that the Indian nationalists would take a more moderate stand once the country became fully independent. A lot of hope was placed on the French “humanitarian principles that had inspired the colonial policy of the Third Republic” and that the “idea of radical discrimination and prejudice against coloured people had always been alien to the spirit of the French people.” Therefore Paris authorities instructed Henri–Paul Roux, the Chargé d’affaires de France in India to follow a policy calculated to improve future French relations with India and was also instructed to take interest in the promotion of better economic co-operation between the two countries.

Meanwhile, F. C. Baron conceived a cultural programme for French India. It emphasised the desire of the French government to develop cultural institutions in the French Indian settlements and establish a university at Pondicherry, which would be a centre for the imparting of the culture of France, and in its highest and noblest aspects in various forms- literature, arts, and sciences, theoretical and applied. Thus it should serve India by bringing French culture here and should serve France by bringing Indian history and culture to the French. Added more, he thought about a sort of dual

57 B. Krishnamurthy. Jawaharlal Nehru and Freedom movement in French India. Centre for Nehru studies, Pondicherry University, p.47.
citizenship, so that people might be citizens of both India and France.\textsuperscript{60} Thus French India would serve as a \textit{Le trait d’union} between France on the one hand and India on the other. Baron hoped that Indian people would appreciate the value of this cultural programme and would wish to retain them.\textsuperscript{61} He also believed that this cultural programme, if accepted and implemented, would go a long way to strengthen the French influence in India.

Paris authorities quite agreed with the views of Baron and they also secured considerable support from the French Indian political elite. When he met Nehru along with Roux on 27\textsuperscript{th} May 1947, Baron outlined the idea of this cultural programme. While expressing his great appreciation to Baron’s proposal, Nehru insisted that the Indians naturally wanted a united India without any foreign bases or extraterritorial rights. Regarding the idea of the dual nationality, Nehru maintained that it had to be fully examined as to how for it was practicable.\textsuperscript{62}

French cultural programme was converted into a political propaganda. A lot of hope was placed on Nehru’s acceptance of the transformation of the French settlements as centres of cultural extension. In addition Nehru’s repeated statements that India wanted to make Pondicherry “a window open to the west” became highly politicised. Baron carried out his propaganda by pointing out that the various rights and facilities being enjoyed by the French Indian people in the fields of administration, education and politics under the French rule will be lost in the fusion with the mass of four hundred millions people without benefits for none. And he maintained that “it was in the interest of French India to remain a democratic country

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru}, Vol.2, pp. 571-72.

\textsuperscript{61} File No: 109, O. P. Ramaswamy Reddiar Papers, Nehru Memorial Library and Museum, New Delhi.

closely united with India and freely associated with France”. He believed that if the whole situation could be handled with “tack, wisdom and broad outlook, it might turn in French favour.” Thus Baron’s political aim defined the preservation of French India within French Union and development of friendship between France and India. Paris authorities therefore emphasized that the enlargement of cultural facilities in the French settlement would allow them to maintain their rights there and thence it became the principle instrument of rapprochement with the Indian government.

Meanwhile, the French authorities in France sent Tézanas du Montcel, the Inspector of colonies, for an on the spot study of the situation. Maurice Moutet, the French Colonial Minister also visited the French settlements and he was preceded by Roux. Their mission was to examine the general situation in French India and they were instructed to take necessary measures to safeguard French interests in India. They met a cross section of the population to ascertain their feelings.

On 11th January 1947, The Assemblée Représentative which met at Pondicherry unanimously adopted a resolution demanding the conversion of the Assemblée Représentative into a sovereign assembly and complete autonomy for French India. Following it the Chandernagore members of the Assemblée Représentative met Tézanas at Pondicherry and submitted a memorandum on 12th April 1947, which demanded financial and administrative autonomy for Chandernagore as a prelude to complete independence. They justified their cause by referring to the distance which separated Chandernagore from Pondicherry resulting in the delay of the execution of works, geographical reasons of Chandernagore and the failure of the Assemblée Représentative of Pondicherry to protect the financial

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interests of Chandernagore. At the very outset the memorandum made it clear that mere administrative reforms would not satisfy the people of Chandernagore.66

Later in May Kamal Ghosh, the National Democratic Front leader and the Mayor of Chandernagore presented his memorandum to Tézanas, who visited Chandernagore. The memorandum summarily rejected the plan of French autonomy proposed to be given to Chandernagore and it called upon the French to declare the date when they would quite French India.67 The Mahajana Sabha Party of Mahe also presented a memorandum similarly to Tézanas demanding immediate independence for French India and the right of joining the Indian Union. The uncertainty about the political future of French India left the French Indian population and the political elite in confusion and divide.

Sensing the mood of the people Roux instructed France the need of urgent reforms even to the extent of granting local autonomy which he believed would change the political status of the French Indian settlements. He hoped that the diplomatic rapprochement on cultural programme would go on one side, on the other political and administrative reforms must be undertaken immediately. Baron also admitted to giving greater autonomy to the settlements and facilitating the effective participation of the French Indian population in the management of their own affairs. He believed that it would check the growing unrest among the people.

Following the recommendations made by the observers the French government granted the Décret of 30th June 1947 which accorded financial and administrative autonomy to Chandernagore.68 The feasibility of granting similar

autonomy to other four French Indian settlements was studied. Chandernagore was given prior consideration, where the Indian nationalist sentiments and emotions of the Bengal people were at its highest and a movement for merger with India was gaining ground.

However, the internal conditions of the French Indian settlements were far from satisfactory and peaceful. Political turmoil griped the settlements and resentment brewed. In early June 1947 Mountbatten publicly declared that Great Britain would transfer power to India on 15th August 1947. While India was marching towards its independence, the people of French India could not remain indifferent. From the days of freedom struggle in British India, French Indians were influenced by the Indian nationalist politics and anti-colonial struggles. Only the colonial situation separated them from the mainstream of India.

**Agitations for Merger**

Since June 1947 there was a vociferous demand for the merger of French Indian settlements with India. The external pressures exerted on the settlements by the Indian nationalist forces had spurred French Indians into action. Agitations, demonstrations and strikes brought the French Indian administration to a stand still.

The meeting of the Liberation Council (composed of all party members of Chandernagore), held on 13th July 1947 at Chandernagore, adopted a resolution rejecting the Décret of 30th June 1947 which granted autonomy and further demanded the dissolution of French rule in Chandernagore on the expiry of 14th August 1947. Kali Charan Ghose, the Chandernagore Communist leader, called the Pondicherrian

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people to formation of a “United National Front” at Pondicherry similar to the one at Chandernagore to fight against the French imperialism.\footnote{File No: 334-Eur, External Affaires 1947, N.A.I, New Delhi.}

In Pondicherry R. L. Purushothama Reddiar, the President of French India National Congress sent telegrams to Ramadier, the Socialist President of French Republic, Maurice Moutet and Roux and urged them to take immediate measures for real transference of power to people before 15\textsuperscript{th} August 1947.\footnote{R.L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry.} In a press note he admitted “we have high regard for French culture and for all that France represented in the history of the struggle for human freedom. Cultural relations between our people and the French are indeed of great value for both. But such a relation can only be envisaged seriously and under their true light once the last vestige of political domination has been removed.”\footnote{R.L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I, Puducherry}

On 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1947 the French India Communist Party’s Students’ Federation, \textit{Kisan Sabha}, Labour Union Federation and \textit{Madhar Sangam} held a meeting at Kottakuppam, on the northern outskirts of Pondicherry, in sympathy with the Vietnam freedom movement and they demanded the French government to grant complete autonomy for French India as a forward step for fusion with free Indian Union.\footnote{File No: 334-Eur, External Affairs, 1947, N.A.I, New Delhi.} A memorandum urging the French government to transfer power to free India signed by the Communist Mayors of Pondicherry, Tiroubouvane, Nettapacom, Modéliarpet, Oulgaret, Ariancoupam, Bahour and Villenour Communes, was distributed among the people. They sent a telegram to Jawaharlal Nehru expressing their keen desire to get united with India and solicited his firm supports.\footnote{The Indian Express, 30 July 1947}
The Bar Associations of Pondicherry and Karaikal which met on 12th July passed a resolution that “India is our mother land, our native land will became an independent country on 15th August, we are therefore no longer anything but Indian citizens and we look forward to being integrated with the Indian government.” The Bar Association of Mahe which met on 25th July 1947 also adopted a resolution similarly urging the French government to withdraw their sovereignty from Indian soil and transfer power to Indian interim government.

Sensing the pressure and French India’s perilous position, Baron approached the government in Paris to show a new gesture for French India. He was called to France for consultation. Baron had a series of meetings with Ramadier, Bidault, and the French Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Maurice Moutet in Paris. The French India problem was discussed elaborately. In the changing situation, stress was put on the necessity of chalking out a clear cut policy towards the French Indian settlements. By the initiatives of Ramadier, the French Ministry of Overseas Empire formulated new measures for giving (i) financial and administrative autonomy to the remaining four French Indian settlements (Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam), has had been done in the case of Chandernagore (ii) to reorganise the Conseil du Gouvernement and (iii) to share the payment of the French officials in India (previously it was meted out from the local budget).

A special attention was put fourth to establish a strong platform to improve Indo-French relations. It was decided that the French loges be returned to India. These loges were scattered over the Indian provinces of Madras, Orissa, Bengal and

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75 The Hindu, 17 July 1947.
76 Dinamani, 3 August 1947.
Bombay, covering an area about the ¾ sq. miles with a population of two thousand. Negotiation for their surrender had already been initiated in 1945, but did not lead to any fruitful results. In early 1947, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs unofficially asked French government that these territories be surrendered voluntarily to India as a sign of good will. On 27th May 1947 in the meeting which was held among Nehru, Baron and Roux, the question over *loges* was discussed. Nehru pointed out to them there is no use of the *loges* for both France and India unless it created some nuisance to the rest of India. Baron informed Nehru that there should be a settlement about them soon. In a letter dated 12th August 1947, Bidault announced to the Indian government that the French government’s decision to cede its historical right on the *loges* to the union of India. This became a reality on 6th October 1947.78

At a time when the pro-merger movement was going on in French India, an autonomy bill for French India was tabled in the French parliament by French India’s *Député* Lambert Saravane.79 Acting as a mouthpiece of French India Socialist Party, Saravane said in the French National Assembly: “Our immediate demand is not to seek merger with the Indian Union. We demand to be an autonomous unit within the French Union.”80 In fact, this had the effect of spurring the political activities in French India in favour of merger. To curtail the growing unrest, the French Indian administration adopted repressive measures. There was a ban on all public meetings and processions. The French Indian government had prohibited Indian nationalist leaders (they were considered as foreigners) to speak in public meetings. Moreover

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78 Selected works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vol: 2, p. 571.
79 Madras Mail, 26 July 1947.
harassment was meted out to people with pro-merger sympathy by the French Indian police and the French India Socialist Party members.\textsuperscript{81}

On 3\textsuperscript{rd} August 1947, the pro-merger activists in Pondicherry surrounded the government offices and demanded their freedom from French rule. The Mayor of Chandernagore declared on 4\textsuperscript{th} August 1947 that “Chandernagore forms an integral part of Bengal and has every right to break its links with imperialist France.”\textsuperscript{82} A general strike was called for and a \textit{hartal} was announced but withdrawn after the release of about hundred persons who had been arrested earlier. The situation in Chandernagore had assumed an alarming proportion. When, the Mayor of Chandernagore backed by National Democratic Front hurled a threat of direct action against French administration if the French government failed to come out with a declaration by 8\textsuperscript{th} August. A total blackout was observed on 10\textsuperscript{th} August. The protestors sealed the government offices, forced the police to lay down their arms and expelled the French administrator.\textsuperscript{83} A similar demand for liberation from French tutelage was made at a public meeting held in Karaikal on 9\textsuperscript{th} August 1947. A joint procession of young men, students and peasants was \textit{lathi}-charged; Pakkirisamy, the French India Sénateur and other leaders were victims of the wrath of the French police.\textsuperscript{84} In Pondicherry, the banning of a French India Students’ Congress meeting to be held on 9\textsuperscript{th} August 1947, demanding the French to “Quit India” led to a general mobilization of various organizations including Communists. A general strike was observed in Pondicherry and over 150 people were arrested. The general public

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Aloo J. Dustur, “India and Foreign Possession in India,” in M. S. Rajan, ed. \textit{India’s Foreign Relations during the Nehru era}, Asian Publishing House, 1968, p. 168.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} B. Krishnamurthy. \textit{Jawaharlal Nehru and Freedom Movement in French India}, Pondicherry University: Centre for Nehru studies, pp. 49-50.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} \textit{The Indian Express}, 9 August 1947.
\end{itemize}
became so intense that permission was finally granted to hold the ‘Quit India’ meeting on 10th August 1947. In the meeting a resolution was adopted demanding the merger of French India with India.  

As 15th August 1947, was fast approaching the demand for liberation from French rule became stronger and more widespread in the French Indian settlements. French India witnessed a growing wave of agitations. Seeing that the situation was going out of control, Roux, the Chargé d’affairs in New Delhi, approached Nehru demanding his intervention to control the situation in the settlements. It was in this meeting he assured Nehru that all these matters will be settled amicably between the French government and the Indian government and in accordance with the wishes of the people in French India and asked Nehru that due publicity should be given to the handover of French loges to Indian government. He hoped this might have a good effect in controlling the situation in India. Roux also explained to Nehru that the French administration had serious intentions of introducing constitutional reforms towards democraticising the French Indian administration. Regarding the agitations in French India, Nehru expressed his unwillingness to help French by pointing out that neither he nor the Indian National Congress had any practical control over the political parties in French India. However, he suggested to the French to commit their stand on French India on paper and present it to the Indian government. But, the French were not in a position to commit themselves in papers. In this meeting Nehru also expressed his strong disapproval of the French policy in Indo-China. He told the French delegates that Indo-China events had deeply agitated Indian public opinion.

and the bloody battles between France and the Asians were standing in the way of forging friendship with France. 86

Governor Baron flew to Calcutta to meet Mahatma Gandhi and pleaded for his interference. It seems that Baron himself convinced him that the French would resolve to settle the French Indian problem peacefully through diplomatic negotiations with Indian government and assured that the French will leave India shortly. 87 Convinced with Baron’s mystic personality Gandhi in course of his prayer speech on 12th August 1947 condemned the actions of the Indians in the French possessions and the Portuguese possessions for declaring their freedom from France and Portugal. “That would be a thoughtless act, a sign perhaps of arrogance. The British were retiring, not the French and Portuguese. The Indians of the Portuguese and French possessions were bound to merge with independent India in good time” 88. He advised the Indians of these territories not to take the law into their own hands. While reacting to the Satyagraha movement in French India, Gandhi disapproved of their action and condemned them as Duragrahis, 89 warned them that it was not time for Satyagraha and he assured the people of French India that Nehru was there to look after their affairs. Gandhi even stated that the French are highly cultured people and they will leave India after sometime following the implementation of their political reforms. 90

This was a signal that there was not going to be an immediate merger of French India with the Indian Union and led to further confusion and division among the pro-merger elements in Pondicherry and elsewhere. In fact Baron used Gandhi’s

86 Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vol: 3, p. 413.
87 The Hindu, 27 August 1947.
88 The Hindu, 27 August 1947.
89 Opposite of Satyagrahis.
statement as a political propaganda effectively in favour of France. It was translated into local languages like Tamil and Malayalam and distributed then throughout French India in order to assuage feelings of the population clamouring for immediate independence. It was in this political backdrop in French Indian settlements that India gained complete independence on 15th August 1947. It had its immediate reflections in French India. Baron hoisted the flags of India and Pakistan alongside with the French on Hôtel du gouvernement following it all Municipalities of French India hoisted the Indian National Flag on 15th August 1947. The Indian national flag was hoisted on most houses and public places in all French Indian settlements marking the occasion. In Pondicherry people gathered in large numbers and there were recitations of patriotic songs composed by Subramania Bharathi. The French India National Congress members took the oath and circulated a pamphlet that “we realize that violence is not the right way to achieve independence, unless like India we would follow the Ahimsa (non-violence) method to attain our complete independence and integration of French Indian territories into the Indian Union.91 But the militant mentality of the pro-merger activists did not stop them from taking recourse to violence.

The ‘Indian Independence Day’ celebrations were not devoid of violence. There were instances of violence in the heart of Pondicherry, the notable one being an incident which brought to the surface local peoples’ attack on the residents of the Aurobindo Ashram.92 The pro-mergerists turned violent against the Ashram, because they believed the Ashram to be the mainspring of all activities opposing French Indian

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91 R. L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I., Puducherry.
92 A neo-Hindu movement was founded by the Bengali nationalist, Aurobindo Ghosh, in Pondicherry in 1911, together with Mira Richard (who later came to be known as the “Mother”). Aurobindo’s works were translated into French language and more and more people in France were attracted to these works. The Ashram was to gradually become a focal point and an important partner in the Franco-Indian dialogue.
merger movement. Their action reached its climax on the evening of 15th August 1947, when they stabbed one of the Ashramites to death and wounded a few others. The people’s grudge was that the Ashramites participated in the procession on the 14th July to celebrate the “Fall of Bastille Day”, and did not turn up for independence day celebrations. Hostility of the Pondicherry people towards Ashram was also due to the feeling that Ashram was flourishing under the protection of French rule. The Ashram Secretary however, refuted the changes levelled against them and gave a statement which was sent on the 20th August 1947, to the editor of the Statesmen (Calcutta) that, “Every body in Pondicherry without exception supports the right of self-determination for the people of French India and Sri Aurobindo has always been a firm supporter of that right for all people every where. Nobody here is for the “continuation of French rule,” but the people were prepared to accept the French proposal of a free and completely autonomous French India within the French Union. It was only when it appeared that the reforms offered by the French Government would fall short of what was promised that the cry arose for the immediate transfer of power and the merging of French India with the Indian Union. Sri Aurobindo, not being a citizen of French India, made no public declaration of his views, but privately supported the views set forth in a manifesto of the French India Socialist Party demanding the end of the colonial rule, a complete autonomous status within the French Union accompanied by a dual citizenship and a close association with the Indian Union which should control customs, communication and a common system of industry and commerce.”

French India situation in the post 15th August days was not quiet. The uncertain political future of these territories caused clashes and conflicts between pro-merger and anti-merger followers. In Pondicherry street-fights between the Communists and the members of the French India Socialist Party increased. The latter were wielding some power and enjoying some benefits under French dispensation, which they did not want to lose all of a sudden. Violence and intimidation increased. Paramel, a student leader of the Colonial College, was assaulted by the toughs of the Socialist party. The French Indian police took no action. Nearly 200 students reached Madras on foot from Pondicherry to lodge a complaint with O. P. Ramaswamy Reddiar, the Premier of the Madras Presidency; against this. A students’ strike in Pondicherry was started from 24th September demanding among other things a non-official enquiry into alleged assault on Paramel. Durai Munusamy, member of the Youth Congress of Pondicherry undertook a “fast unto death” for the rejection of the case of assault on Paramel. Students of Karaikal and Mahe also joined the strike.95 V. Subbiah, the leader of French India Communist Party, who was spearheading the anti-French propaganda, was expelled from Pondicherry along with some of his associates.96 Vaithiligam, Mayor of Modéliarpet commune, Vasoodevan, President of the Worker’s Union of Rodier Mill, Sitaramane, and President of salle de lecture, Clémenceau and D. K. Ramanujam, the French India Communist Party activists, were arrested by the police on murder and some criminal charges.97 Anti-Subbiah labour union was formed in Rodier, Savanna and Modéliarpet Mills. Leaflets were brought out enumerating the various misdeeds of V. Subbiah on different occasions.98

96 The Indian Express, 23 August 1947.
Indo-French relations: the Agreement of June 1948

These incidents irked the French administration, the French authorities believed that it is necessary to constitute new reforms for French India most preferably status of villes libres (free cities) in Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam. They believed that this would help organize and consolidate the Francophile elements by grants of certain privileges. They believed that the majority of the people would favour villes libres federated to Indian Union and associated with French Union with the approval of the government of India.

There was an urgent need for diplomatic negotiations between the two governments. On 18th August 1947, Maurice Moutet announced that French India with its population of some 3,24,000 would become an establishment of five free cities (villes libres) within the French Union. Meantime Roux started talks with the government of India and a joint declaration was announced on 28th August 1947 expressing their resolve to settle the problems of French settlements in India “taking into account at the same time aspirations and interests of the people, historical and cultural links which unite them to France as well as the evolution of India” (See Appendix-I).

The resumption of talks between India and France and the joint declaration of 28th August 1947 were unanimously welcomed by all the political parties in French India. The French India Students’ Congress stated that “we welcome the negotiations in Delhi between our Prime Minister (Nehru) and the representatives of French Government” but “the only acceptable solution is the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of French sovereignty from these parts of India” It called people to

prepare themselves at any moment “in the event of failure of negotiations now proceeding, a final struggle should be launched in consulting with the national leaders to get rid of the foreign yoke.”

Regarding the proposed *ville libre* reforms for French Indian settlements, the French India National Congress criticized it as a “buttered device … subterfuge to divert or to pacify the people. No amount of these reforms will quench the thirst of the people for independence.”

The French reforms were continued, by a *Décret* of 12th August 1947 which reconstituted the *Conseil du gouvernement*. Of the six members, three were elected by the *Assemblée Représentative* and the remaining three were nominated by the Governor. Now they were given independent charges of the administrative departments: (1) André was given charge of hygiene and public works, (2) Counamma, finance and education, (3) Deivasigamony, revenue, (4) Goubert, general administration, (5) Latechmanasamy, agriculture and (6) Sivasubramaniyam, road and civil supplies. All of them were important personalities of the French India Socialist Party who were of the opinion that they should get their independence from the French rule first and then should decide whether to join the Indian Union or to stay in the French Union.

In his opening speech at the *Assemblée Représentative* which was opened on 15th September 1947 at Pondicherry, Baron announced that France was thinking of giving to French India a large financial and administrative autonomy and transforming them into *villes libres* federated to Pondicherry. It was in this session, he announced that he was the last Governor of French India and the first *Commissaire de_
This change in designation or colonial connotations of the Governor was made by the Décret of 20th August 1947. While explaining this designation Baron said that “I am no longer the head of a colony, but a representative of the French Republic and the French Union, a Counsellor, a guide and an arbiter.” Later on 7th November 1947 a new Décret was passed. The Décret was an extension of the previous Décret of 30th June 1947. This gave Chandernagore the status of a ville libre. The modified Decree gave Chandernagore the status of an autonomous town with its own independent assembly of twenty five members elected on adult franchise. Besides, the status of villes libres was given to Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam by four new Décrets of 20th November 1947. In December 1947, another Décret, envisaging the constitution of a federation comprising the five “free cities” under the guidance of a Commissioner nominated by the government of France, was issued.

However the reforms earned different reactions from the French Indian population and political elite. First, it won over a section of the population, the Francophile community. The French administration believed that by promoting the Francophile community it would be able to promote and safeguard the larger interests of the group of people in the five settlements. This was well evidenced from the increase in the number of French Indian inhabitants accepting French citizenship by renouncing their Indian status. In 1947 their number increased to 312 compared to 73

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105 Procès-verbaux Assemblée Représentative de l’Inde Française, 2 ème Séance ordinaire, 1947.
106 Procès-verbaux Assemblée Représentative de l’Inde Française, 3ème Séance ordinaire 1947.
in 1946, 23 in 1945 and 22 in 1944.\textsuperscript{109} Moreover the French India Socialist Party strongly advocated the concept of double nationality and opposed French India joining the Indian Union.\textsuperscript{110} Towards that end the French followed calculated and conscious policies of reducing the number French officials in French India and competent French Indians were appointed instead. Many were also appointed in subordinate positions. Secondly French reforms considerably confused and divided the supporters of merger. They were visibly dismayed by the uncertainty of the future of French India. Pakkirisamy of Karaikal, even though earlier advocated merging with the Indian Union, now turned out openly in support of French reforms and strongly criticised those who opposed them. He said “we in French India are in a position that compares favourably with the present world conditions today. We have no food scarcity, we have no cloths scarcity… there is no Hindu Muslim quarrel among us. So it is absurd to say that French India join Indian Union. We have greater advantage to be in French Union.”\textsuperscript{111} Lambert Saravane joined him declaring that “it would be dangerous to join Indian Union, the very existence of which is yet unsettled.”\textsuperscript{112} There was also a change in the stand of French India Communist Party. It started criticizing both the governments of France and India for not arriving at an early solution to the French Indian issue.\textsuperscript{113} It openly declared that “it had lost its faith in the Government of India” and tried to avoid the merger of the French Indian settlements with the Indian Union. The anti-Communist measures taken by the Indian government during this time were additional factor that caused this change. They proposed the idea of

\textsuperscript{110} Manifesto of French India Socialist Party in O. P. Ramaswamy Reddiar Paper, Nehru Memorial, New Delhi.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Liberator}, 4-5 October 1947.
\textsuperscript{112} R.L. Purushothama Reddiar Papers, N.A.I., Puducherry.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Sudandiram}, 23 January 1948.
conducting a referendum which could alone ascertain whether the people wanted to remain in French India or join Indian Union.\textsuperscript{114}

While these things were happening in French India, Maurice Schumann was sent by Ramadier, the then Premier of France, as the head of the French cultural mission to Pondicherry to promote better understanding and good relations between France and India. While in Pondicherry, Schumann proposed the foundation of an institution for research and study of European culture at Pondicherry.\textsuperscript{115} Baron was also assiduously canvassing for forging cultural relations between the two countries with Pondicherry as the centre. In the changing environment and equations, the French knew that maintaining the old form of sovereignty would be impossible. Even maintaining a shadow of sovereignty-be it cultural appeared to be acceptable to them.

In the month of December 1947, Daniel Levi arrived in New Delhi as the Ambassador of France. On the Indian side Rashid Ali Beig, was appointed as the first Consul General of the Indian government at Pondicherry. Both of them travelled and met French officials and eminent French Indian personalities with the object of studying the political situation in French Indian settlements and reported to their respective governments. While observing the political situation in French India, Rashid Ali complained that France was following dilatory tactics in the matter of opening negotiations with India. He accused that France had actually brought out the reforms for reconstructing the French Indian administration within the frame work of French

\textsuperscript{114} Dinamani, 25 March 1948.

Union with a view to placating public opinion and gaining time for prolonging their stay in India.  

After the establishment of Indian Consul General at Pondicherry, the pro-merger movement gained its momentum. He directly approached people and encouraged them to indulge in anti-French activities. Support and sympathy for French India pro-merger movement also began to pour from outside the French Indian settlements. Kamaraj Nadar, the leader of the Tamil Nadu Provincial Congress hurled a threat of “Direct Action”, if the French remained indifferent to the demand of the people. A committee was constituted for giving all necessary assistance to the pro-merger activities of the French Indian people. On 24th and 25th January 1948, the French India National Congress organized the people’s convention in Nehru vanam at Pondicherry. In the conference, presided over by R.L. Purushothama Reddiar, the participants demanded unconditional withdrawal of the French and immediate merger with Indian Union. They condemned the idea of holding a referendum to ascertain the public opinion as an insult to the Indian and called upon the people to be ready to fight for achieving their goal, if need be.

The Karaikal National Congress rejected the proposed ville libre status and organized “Propaganda Fortnight” beginning from 1st August 1948 to intensify the merger movement. Even Venkatachalapathy, the President of Karaikal Congress asked “all Municipal Counsellors, members of Assemblée Représentative, Député and Sénateurs to resign immediately and join the liberation struggle. The total picture of Pondicherry and Karaikal was not encouraging for the French. Mahe did not lag

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117 Dinamani, 26 January 1948.
120 The Indian Express, 11 January 1948.
behind other French Indian settlements. Chandernagore had always been in a militant mood and for a long time it was harbouring a strong anti-French attitude. In March 1948, an attempt was made by the largely pro-merger population led by the Communists in Chandernagore to get the settlement merged with the Indian Union through extra-constitutional method. The French Consul General in Calcutta asked the government of India to take action against the rebels in accord with the Treaty of Peace agreed after the Napoleonic war in 1814 as well as past practices. But Nehru refused to curtail the attempt, and said “the movement might be considered a liberation movement and it would be improper for us to aid in suppressing it.”121 This sent a clear message to the French government that India did not intend to use force to merge the French Indian territories with India and that it would prefer dialogue instead. Leon St. Jean, an advocate of Karaikal and the member of Assemblée Représentative moved a resolution in April 1948 to the effect that “the demands the immediate merger of the five French settlements in India with Indian Union.”122 The French India Assemblée Représentative rejected the merger resolution of Leon St. Jean by 27 votes to 10 and adopted instead a resolution in regard to the future of French India demanding complete independence and autonomous status123 by 34 to 3 votes.124 This resolution was moved by the French India Socialist Party, backed by the French India Communist Party.

It was in this background that a series of discussions to decide the future status of French India was held between India and France. France tried to convince the Indian government to accept their formula of conducting a referendum,125 as it was a

122 The Indian Express, 29 April 1948.
123 The Madras Mail, 2 May 1948.
125 One for Chandernagore and another, separately for remaining four south Indian settlements.
French Constitutional requirement, since any alienation of French Overseas Territory or any change in its status could be effected only with the consent of the respective people concerned as per Article 27 paragraph 2 of French Constitution of 1946. However, the French proposed the conduct of referendum in no less than three years and no more than five years for their obvious reasons. On the other, India made it clear that the postponement of referendum even for a period of three years might cause considerable embarrassment to both the governments and give rise to serious popular feelings throughout India.\textsuperscript{126} The negotiation which had started four months ago (February 1948) reached its fruition in June 1948. After several exchanges of notes and diplomatic talks, on 8\textsuperscript{th} June 1947, in the second session of the French Assemblée Nationale, Coste – Floret, the French Minister for Overseas Territories made the long expected declaration (See Appendix- II). He stated that France intends to leave to the population of the French establishments in India themselves, the right to pronounce their future fate and future status.\textsuperscript{127} Thus, the Indian government agreed to the French government’s contention that the future status of the French Indian settlements should be left to the decision of the people concerned and that their wishes would be ascertained by means of a referendum, the modalities of which were left to be finalised by the Municipal Councils of all the settlements.\textsuperscript{128} The Indo-French agreement referred to above was concretized by an exchange of letters between Nehru and Levi on 29\textsuperscript{th} June 1948 (See Appendix- III & IV).
