Chapter VI

Conclusion

The outbreak of World War II (1939-1944) and the capitulation of France in 1938 to Hitler’s expansionism through German annexation of the Sudetenland and the installation of the Vichy government virtually put end to the Third Republic and the colonial expansion and experiments of the republicans. During the war period (1939-44) French India passed through a time of political turmoil and economic difficulties. France came out of World War II not as a powerful nation. The French colonies remained fragile. The first principle of French colonial policy at the end of the 1940s was to safeguard the empire. This meant preserving colonies from natives’ anti-colonialism, nationalism, insurrection and independence, and defending the empire from foreign attack and conquest. The French spent the next two decades (post-war period) consolidating their hold, trying to develop colonial economies and win support from franchised native elite. The French state had provided the legislation, appropriated the money, designed the development plans and adopted the ideology which made conquest and maintenance of empire possible. Universal suffrage without distinction of race or gender was introduced after the Second World War and a new political structure with a democratic format was put into place.

From the onset, French rule in the settlements during the nineteenth century was to be constrained by many adverse factors. The struggle for supremacy between Britain and France in the eighteenth century in India ended with five settlements and eight loges under French control. These were scraps of territories which the British agreed to leave to France and which they regretted later. Yet the French keenly wanted to hold on to them in order to continue their trading activities in India which proved ultimately to be a disappointment.
These dispersed territories, united politically under the name of French Establishments in India, were returned to France by the Treaty of Paris of 1816. According to article 12 of the Treaty of Paris France was not allowed to keep an army but only a police force to maintain law and order, denied of water supply to the paddy fields and forced to accept the British customs. The humiliating terms imposed upon France by the British defined the limits within which the French colonial set up had to operate. Strictly speaking, this meant that French India was technically not a colony. This was part of the British design to severely constrict the powers of the French. Any discussion of French colonialism in the nineteenth century or beyond must take this fundamental fact into account. In the nineteenth century, there was a certain arrogance manifested by Pondicherry towards the other settlements. The role of Karaikal was to cater to the needs of Pondicherry. As for the other settlements, they were viewed as mere currencies of exchange for the enlargement of Pondicherry. One can also see that there was a scale of preferences in the following order of hierarchy: Europeans, Topas, Créoles and Indians as in the decree of 1826, maintained in the distribution of funds among the population. The competition between these sections of population always persisted under the French colonial rule.

The French presence that began with the acquisition of these territories did leave some imprints. The French colonial policy was largely based on the concept of “mission civilisatrice” executed in French India under different regimes in different notions. The missionaries gained considerable success in the propagation of Christianity. The French Revolution propagated the cordial principles of ‘liberté’, ‘égalité’ and ‘fraternité’. The Second Empire rallied around ‘progress of the colonies’ both moral and material. Under the Third Republic ‘assimilation’ triumphed. Thus in the nineteenth century, the value of French India to France was essentially political: France took pride in establishing a secular political
culture, in introducing its political values, creating a representative system and associating the
diverse population in a common republican, democratic and nationalist design. In this
respect, the nineteenth century is significant because it was then that France tried to setup an
electoral apparatus which would make the former French territories of India more
democratised at the time of independence than British India. The beginning of democracy can
be seen in the implementation of the edict of 23rd July 1840 calling for the creation of an
assembly where Indians would have half the seats. With the installation of the Third
Republic, a hybrid constitution embracing Western and Indian cultures was formed. It was
liberal and democratic, decentralising, conservative and paternalistic. French India was
endowed with a deputy, a senator, a Conseil général, Conseils locaux and municipalities,
elected through universal suffrage. Further, France imposed its Civil code on caste based
Hindus, Christians and Muslims and invited Indians to renounce their personal status to
become French citizens. French conservatives thought that it was putting the cart before the
horse to impose administrative and political assimilation before cultural assimilation. Instead,
it would perhaps have been more effective to expose them more thoroughly to science and
French culture before making the transition to political institutions as the British had done.
This would have been feasible as the French, more than any other colonial power, had
endeared themselves in the eyes of the natives who held them in respect and deference. It is
perhaps for this reason that the French are still viewed with a high decree of respect in the
former French settlements.

Indian society, before the establishment of French settlements, functioned on the basis
of certain interdependence. The French colonial regime introduced representative institutions
and innovations of administration, law, education and politics. All this resulted in the creation
of an institutional framework within which society functioned. The earlier system of
interdependence was replaced by a system of dependence on the State. The French political institutions and legislative bodies constituted an important component of the State, and therefore attracted landlords, privileged sections of society, joined in due course of time, by the educated and professionals, mainly on account of their economic clout and prominence. The domination of the privileged sections virtually created the political elite, a new rank in the colonial society. The political elite of French India, though they constituted a small portion of the total population of the French Indian settlements, dominated the political scene and the French-Indian administration and enjoyed the manifold benevolence of French rule. They participated in the institutional framework put in place by the French as subordinates and as instruments serving French colonial interests. They competed against one another for power and position within this institutional framework. However, the political elite were never committed to any ideals and principles; had no value in their politics; and what really counted was power and profits for their self-advancement. The French colonial system did not oppose this, but actually intended things to be like that, as these political elite were a great asset for sustaining French colonial rule in India.

An analysis of electoral politics in French India reveals that the Indians lacked political representation. Only after 1870 was the population in the colony given the right to vote in local and national elections. French India was divided into communes (like in the metropole) had representation in the local bodies and in the French national assemblies as well. Of the colonial population of 68 millions, French Indian settlements, with a population of almost 3, 00,000 had an electorate of 57,000, elected a deputy to the pre-World War II French Chambre des Députés (618) and a senator to the French Sénat (320). French India was represented continuously in the French parliament since 1871. About 2, 00,000 Indians of these settlements were recognised as French citizens in 1848, and after the interlude of the
Second Empire their privileges were restored in 1870. Consequently, Hindus, Christians and Muslims, were expected to vote peacefully together and to weigh carefully the differences between a Legitimist and an Orleanist or a Radical and a Moderate Republican. This idealism was not translated into reality. It must be remembered that to Hindus imbued with the caste system and to Muslims reared in the family tradition, the European principle of equality was incomprehensible. Moreover, since religious traditions dominated their lives in matters of justice and government, the idea of the secular state remained an alien and remote concept. Under these conditions, it was not surprising that elections in the French settlements turned out to be one among the many mysteries of India.

Usually fifty to sixty thousand electors were registered in French India, and except in the deputy elections of 1876, 1877, and 1889, more that thirty thousand of these were reported to have voted. This remarkable result was not due to an inordinate love among the Indians for the democratic process, but was brought about by one of the best organised system of corruption and violence which existed in the settlements. The political boss of India from 1870 until his death in 1908 was ‘Nadou’ Shanmugam Vellayuda Modeliar, better known as Shanmugam. In 1871, this leader’s favour fell upon the son of a former governor of French India, Desbassayns de Richemont, who happened to be a monarchist. After the latter’s promotion to the Senate in 1876, however, moderate republicans became the consistent choice of Shanmugam. Godin was the representative from 1876 to 1881, when the number of his supporters suddenly dropped from 15,314 to 463. A similar fate awaited Pierre Alype, who represented India from 1881 to 1898. In the latter year, he lost the favour of Shanmugam, with the result that only nine of the 26,175 electors who had supported him in 1893 remained loyal five years later. Henrique-Duluc was easily victorious in 1898 and 1902,

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but in 1906 Shanmugam’s machine ran into its first real trouble in thirty-five years. Lemaire, the governor of French India from 27th May 1904, to 10th March 1905, was recalled at the latter date, but not removed outright. His administrative influence was apparently still strong enough to win over some of the electoral bosses, thus making the electoral results somewhat closer to victory than ever before. The electoral officials of India, having to choose between the administration and Shanmugam, extricated themselves from the dilemma by proclaiming neither candidate as deputy, thereby leaving it to the Chamber of deputies to decide whether the result of 17,757 votes for Henrique-Duluc and 16,654 for Lemaire was acceptable. The Chamber, however, was able to subtract 3,500 from the total of Shanmugam’s candidate, and then proclaimed Lemaire the lawfully elected deputy. The former governor was unable to repeat this victory, although he tried in 1910, 1914 and 1919. Sadassiva, the successor of Shanmugam at the latter’s death in 1908, imported armed gangs from British India, and by killing and wounding about 150 electors was able to assure the victory of Paul Blysen, the deputy from 1910 to 1924. Angoulevant, a former governor, became the Indian representative in 1924, but was quickly dropped in 1928, when he received only 3,829 votes as compared with 35,070 in 1924. The political bosses of French India succeeded time and again in fending off any serious opposition.

Since none of the deputies who represented India in the French parliament had known any of the dialects spoken by the people of French India, electoral campaigns were a useless refinement in the district, where in 1898 only 500 of the 60,000 registered voters were Europeans. Most of the candidates did not even bother to go to India for the electoral period. All the arrangements were generally left to the local bosses, who prepared the electoral lists,
drafted the “right” people to supervise the elections, stuffed the ballot boxes at the proper moments, and hired gangs if necessary to scare the opposition. A decree of 8th April 1898, which tried to reform Indian politics by assigning two government interpreters with police powers to each voting bureau, failed to bring about any improvement, serving merely to make it more difficult to prove the existence of frauds. Thus French India continued its native electoral practices undisturbed, with violence, death and fraud as much a common occurrence as before 1898 and the Indian deputies continued to support any French government which was willing to satisfy the local political bosses.

Nevertheless, the phenomena presented by the working of democratic institutions in French India are not altogether discouraging. The maintenance of a government democratic in form produced many salutary results. The formal declarations of the equality of man, of the ‘liberté’, ‘égalité’, and ‘fraternité’ of the French Republic, notwithstanding the great practical limitations to which the doctrine had been subjected in French India, led to a free social interaction between Europeans and Indians, and to the absence of a spirit of exclusiveness in the superior race which a purely paternal government tends to foster. The beneficial effects of the democratic system in French India are, therefore, to be found in this free social interaction and civilising influence which France had induced in the general education and culture she had diffused.

The colonial representation to the French parliament was largely a meaningless façade, since the candidates were selected in France and a handful of natives could not have any significant influence on decisions of the French parliament. The political party in power in the locality elected a deputy and a senator who safeguarded their interests in France and

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6 According to the deputy d’Estournelles, the “great elector” did not even bother in 1898 to put the ballots in the boxes, but simply reported fictitious results. (Journal officiel, Chambre des députés, débats, 11, July 1898, Vol. III, pp. 464-466.)

protected them against all possibilities of the local officials attempting to check their abuses.

As long as the French Indian political elites provided enough money to spend for their candidates in elections, accepting this bonus those candidates remained aloof from and indifferent to local politics. Representative institutions, so abruptly introduced in India, provoked social imbalance, caste war, communal conflict and French India witnessed an electoral terrorism under the leadership of French Indian political elites.\(^8\) No healthy democratic tradition flourished, French India saw a kind of personality based politics dominated by men like Ponnuthambi Pillai, Shanmugam Vellayuda Modeliar, Henry Gaebelé and Joseph David.

Since the establishment of political institutions in French India the political bosses in this colony had either agreed or fought among themselves for candidates selected for purely personal and local reasons. At the same time, they had paid or forced the natives to vote for these favourites. French India witnessed electoral battles on personal and local issues. In these personal battles, all means were fair; and since the majority of the voters were politically ignorant natives, force and violence, illegal pressure and stuffed ballot-boxes, were features which appeared in practically every parliamentary and local election. The French settlements in India, with a population of almost 3,00,000 in the 1870s had an electorate of 57,000 and more. This electorate consisted of five hundred white people, mostly government officials and the descendants of Europeans and native Indians. In French India White settlers, officials and clericals among the Europeans controlled the voting. Among the natives, prominent personalities and representatives of religious and caste groups in the colony controlled the whole ballot boxes and led their followers en masse to the voting places, where open voting had occurred at times to assure their employers that they were obtaining their

\(^8\) Since electoral politics first introduced in 1848 until the last election held in 1951.
money’s worth. Personality, not principle counted. Members of the political elite were, in fact, election managers and if they succeeded in getting their candidates elected, their social position was enhanced along with their power of interference in the local administration.

During the Third Republic, the population made its presence more and more felt in the decision-making process. At that time, there were three centres of power: the governor who was officially the repository of the power of the French Republic, the representatives of the people in the French parliament who through the intermediary of the Minister of the colonies could influence the governor, and the elected councils of the settlements whose powers increased progressively. The picture became more complicated owing to the fact that the population was not homogeneous. The Europeans wanted to monopolise all the power for themselves, the French government did not want to alienate them as it was dependent on them for the maintenance of the French presence. It thus devised a system of lists giving the Europeans who made up a tiny majority more seats than the Indians in the elected councils of the settlements. But it did not want to tarnish in this discriminatory manner the parliamentary representation. The Member of Parliament was elected under universal suffrage where the vote of one Indian counted as much as that of one Frenchman. In this regard, the Indians, who had an advantage due to their greater number, had a Member of Parliament of their choice. This could have led to a clash between Indians and Europeans. But due to the inherent competitive nature of politics, Indians as well as Frenchmen both became divided; as a result, there were two camps, each one having some Frenchmen and some Indians. Hence, the confrontation between Europeans and Indians was avoided to give way to a struggle between parties and their programs. The European population still had more advantages. But the situation subsequently evolved in favour of Indians due to two factors: the increase in the number of educated Indians and the decreasing European population whose number remained
fluctuating throughout. Moreover, in French Indian territory, the Catholic community, because of their religious affinity obtained high administrative or judicial positions and were ready to assimilate French culture. The Pariahs were the most Francophile along with the Christians. Because of the favouritism showed by the French administration they became progressively resistant to the power of the traditional dominant high-castes. The French party had its hand in setting up the Pariahs against ‘the people of caste’ and the Muslims against the Hindus with the aim of eliminating opposition by creating divisions. Since Europeans and natives constituted separate electoral colleges, European settlers held control of the ballot box and made decisions about native affairs. Europeans in the colony, even though they were few in number, monopolised power in local assemblies, municipalities and national assemblies. The natives did not have any significant institutionalised role in the colony. French authorities easily rejected or ignored resolutions and decrees of officially established local assemblies.

In the nineteenth century, there was certainly a contradiction between the imposition of universal suffrage and the hierarchy of castes. Universal suffrage implied equality whereas the caste system was by definition unequal. According to Ristelhueber, the Indian caste system actually placed the French in the category of outcastes or Pariahs. For example they offended Hindu sensibilities by eating beef. Thus, in a sense, the French became the outcastes even though they were the ruling elite. The “ridiculous matter of footwear” raised to a public level the question of assimilation. Shanmugam proved to be the antithesis of Ponnuthambi in opposing moves to impose universal suffrage. In the end, the introduction of universal suffrage favoured the Brahmanical coalition which had imposed its supremacy on Indian society. These factors prevented Hindu society from being assimilated. Moreover the French settlements were located far apart and indifferent parts of the country and as such there was
no real common factor among them. Thus, as was pointed out in 1879 by Councillor General Bayol, it made more sense to decentralise the establishments rather than to assimilate them collectively to France.

Nothing is more precious to the Indian than his religious and cultural heritage; nothing is more valuable to him than the honour of his caste. In 1904, at the acme of Shanmugam’s power, the writer Paul Mimande foresaw that both the French coloniser, with his “mania for assimilation” and the English coloniser were doomed to failure and condemned to disappear from Indian soil. While he stood in admiration before the temple of Shiva at Pondicherry, the divinities of Gopuram (dome) suddenly seemed “to taunt him defiantly and to say: All your glories have been dissipated, all your attempts have been fruitless; only I remain standing, I alone reign in this country, I, the Mamool”.

Historians like Jacques Weber consider that Shanmugamism, the boss politics which resulted from the policy of assimilation through institutions, could disappear only with the abandonment of this policy. They argue that the failure of France in India cannot be attributed to the principle of assimilation itself, but to the particular assimilationist strategy which was adopted at the beginning of the Third Republic. Paradoxically, from the end of the nineteenth century, French colonisation seemed condemned in a land which the mother country hoped to assimilate by extending her own institutions rather than through transmitting its culture. For Captain Goumain, only profound cultural exchanges could have created durable links between two great civilisations. The ‘comptoirs’ could have been “open windows on Indian thought for us”; but this thought remained “the exclusive possession of a tiny number of

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10 Captain Goumain was the Inspector of colonies who visited Pondicherry in 1947 to make report on the general situation in the colony.
academics.”\footnote{The 19th and 20th Century Documents, N.A.I., Pondicherry Branch.}11 Besides, the French government had not taken the necessary steps to respond to “the unmistakable sympathy which the Indian feels for our culture. We opened for him the doors of the parliament when we should have given him access to the university.”\footnote{The 19th and 20th Century Documents, N.A.I., Pondicherry Branch.}12

The western influence on India had not been negligible, because the Indian Union, unlike most of the states born of decolonisation, has adopted universal suffrage and parliamentary democracy. One might see this as a parallel to the policy of assimilation of the Third Republic which was neither premature nor inconsequential. It is not very probable that the experiment tried in the ‘comptoirs’ had it been introduced in British India, would have contributed to make the Indian Union ‘the largest democracy in the world’. The choice of the current Indian institutions was in fact made by elite who had received Western education and who, while remaining profoundly Indian; owing to their Western education had been won over by the British system of government. After all, the British had always refused to extend their system of government to their colonies.

The promotion of French education was indeed one of the goals of the Third Republic. The setting up of free schools for Indians in 1827 was part of France’s general policy of assimilation. French education was modelled on the spirit of the local elite. But popular education did not go very far. The French got into conflict with the dominant castes who tried hard to prevent the dissemination of education. The upper castes, as commonly perceived, were afraid that education would uplift the lower castes, give them appetites and turn the servile worker into a formidable rival. Though, these obstacles were present, they were very limited. The inadequate knowledge of French was responsible to a great extent for increasing the gap between metropolitan France and her settlements in India.
The spirit of the renunciation movement of the 1880s was cultural assimilation with republican France. It is obvious that the attempted assimilation of local population by France ultimately created a formidable problem for her. In the nineteenth century, there was a lively debate on the theme of citizenship, when conservative Hindus, or members of the upper caste, considered it unacceptable if it meant the total renunciation of the personal status. By renouncing the personal status, those people had to give up their centuries old customs and their share of the property in the Hindu joint family household. For those who belonged principally to the lower castes in the hierarchical Hindu society, French citizenship meant an escape from their downtrodden condition. The Pariahs or outcastes, thus uplifted, were expected to be loyal followers of the French way of life, but the earlier enthusiasm had gradually waned because the caste system was an inherent part of the Indian society, an essential constituent of its fabric, and they could not completely avoid it. The tensions between the outcastes and the people of caste far outweighed the positive outcome of a successful conversion by the French of the Pariah. The plight of the assimilated Indians was to get slowly absorbed back into their own society.

After the de jure transfer in 1962, every one was looking for the best path towards the future. There was, first of all, an important choice to make. According to the Treaty of Cession, concluded between France and India, the territory became legally Indian and the inhabitants became Indian nationals. The treaty gave the right to opt for French nationality to those who wished to remain French, including the assimilated; in this regard, they had to make a declaration at the French consulate in Pondicherry within a period of six months. Little by little as the fateful date of 16th February 1963 approached after which the French Indians would become irrevocably Indians their nervousness increased. This right to opt became problematic for the French Indians to whom the two countries were equally valuable.
They were Indians by race, language and manner of living. Would they take necessary steps to go and register at the French consulate but with the result of having to repatriate themselves in a distant country, which was known to be cold and towards an uncertain future? On the other hand, their studies had been in French, their qualifications were French and they had been imbued with French culture. Would they remain in their ancestral land but with the thought of having to adapt themselves to their racial counterparts’ from whom they had distanced themselves through three centuries of history and with a future which was as uncertain? They faced a real dilemma. Their anguish increased. When the last day arrived, the most indecisive among them had to make up their minds. At the time of the closing of the consulate, the line before the door was very long; the closing time of offices was extended to midnight. When midnight came those still waited were asked to enter and the door closed behind them.\textsuperscript{13}

Those who obtained French citizenship are referred to as optants, after having opted to take up French nationality six months after the \textit{de jure} transfer in 1962 of the territories of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam to India. As many as 95\% of the optants of 1963 were descendants of renonçants or those inhabitants of these territories who gave up their personal status in Hindu society in favour of French citizenship in 1881.\textsuperscript{14} Among those who opted, there were descendants of Europeans, the local civil servants who knew the possibility of integrating themselves in the metropolitan services which many of them had not even dreamed of, the families of French soldiers and metropolitan civil servants who were serving elsewhere and finally, the domestic servants of Europeans. In 1963, there were 4,944 optants both men and women, the children being included in the option exercised by their parents.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} David Anoussamy, \textit{L’intermède français en Inde}, Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, pp. 160-161.
\textsuperscript{15} David Anoussamy, \textit{L’intermède français en Inde}, Pondichéry: Institut Français de Pondichéry, p. 161.
There are currently approximately 8,000 Indians of French nationality in the Union Territory of Pondicherry. Of these, only approximately 2,000 are actually French speaking or have a link with France through pensions, which they receive from the French government, or through family members living in metropolitan France. The rest of the Indians who opted for French citizenship then does not speak French and are totally ignorant of French culture.

Their Indian origin combined with their imitation of the French culture make them unique in that they are like the natives of other French colonies with the sole difference that their “Frenchness” is permeated by their unique “Indianness.” Considering these factors the cultural assimilation of the Third Republic succeeded only in partial adoption of the coloniser’s cultural elements and values in the colony.

The French Indian settlements could not remain unaffected by the movement for independence which gripped British India at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the beginning of the century, the local population of Chandernagore was not against the French government as can be witnessed by the protest of the revolutionary newspaper *Matri Boumi* against a threatened plan in 1910 of a possible cession of Chandernagore to the British. The newspaper projected the French as being on the whole a better coloniser than the British. Bengal being the centre of nationalist movements in British India in the beginning of the twentieth century, it was inevitable that the inhabitants of Chandernagore felt the pulse of the independence movement before those of the other south Indian French settlements could do. Being a land of asylum, Chandernagore became a haven for revolutionaries fleeing British authorities even as Pondicherry turned into a land of asylum. Chandernagore and Pondicherry

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16 The second article of the 1956 Treaty of Cession would constitute Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam as a single administrative entity based on their historical links with France until the populations of the territories decided otherwise.

17 According to Michalon the great majority 60 to 70% is not Francophone and many are unaware even of the name of the French President and of the colour of the French Flag (Paul Michalon, *Des Indes françaises aux français Indiens ou comment peut-on être Franco-Pondichérien?*, Pondichéry, pp. 57-58).
also served as centres for receiving seditious literature by post. Finally, since the purchase of firearms was free, it was not unusual for revolutionary activities to be planned from these settlements. It is perhaps not surprising that the French government was more than eager to let go of Chandernagore, which in its eyes, was increasingly coming under the British sphere of influence.  

A new kind of nationalism and anti-colonialism emerged under the impact of the First World War and its aftermath. Anti-colonialism had seethed in the minds of Indians since the early years of the twentieth century under the symbolic leadership of Indian nationalists. Limited western education, disunity and distance from European currents hindered the creation of a nationalist movement. Protesters, often drawn from the ranks of students; lawyers and educated elite, adopted the nomenclature of Indian nationalist movement. But in the interwar years the French administration could effectively contain their actions through harassment, arrests and the outlawing of political parties. However resistance directed against the enfranchisement of native Indians belonging to the lower rungs of the social hierarchy and a general resentment at foreign yoke often lay just below the surface of acquiescence and obedience.

The mid-1930s brought economic depression to France and the colonies. French India suffered from the high price of essential commodities and other primary products. The colonial budget went bankrupt. Indebted merchants lost their properties and savings. Many

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18 In 1947 a strong movement for liberation had manifested itself in Chandernagore which had never been able to tolerate the tutelage of Pondicherry. The settlement was declared a free town in the administrative framework of French India by a decree of 7th November 1947. On 20th January 1948, the town claimed its right to secede for deciding its future subsequently. On 4th December, it asked to be merged with India as soon as possible, a transition period of five years and, subsequently, a maximum of administrative and financial autonomy. The assembly of the free town of Chandernagore was united on 10th March 1949 to determine the date and modalities of the referendum which was fixed for 19th June 1949. There were 7,500 voted for merger with Indian Union and 114 against it. The cession of the territory was to take place in two months pending the signing of the treaty. As the law and order situation had deteriorated, France requested India to take de facto charge of the territory on 2nd May 1950.
colonial development projects were indefinitely fielded away before being implemented. In 1936, the Popular Front, a coalition of Socialists and Radicals with support from Communists, won the election in France under the leadership of Leon Blum. Blum’s government intended great reforms for the empire and colonies. This government had more success in promoting economic development, especially in expanding agricultural production and managed to pass the first labour legislation designed to protect native rights.

Inspired by the Indian National Movement, Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the French Communist party (Parti communiste français, PCF), the Communists in French India took the lead in the anti-colonialist struggle. Their agitation took the form of labour movements in the 1920s and 1930s. The party organised a series of strikes in Pondicherry; demonstrations against French suppression of labour issues and drew more number of people to participate against the French administration over the next few years. Communists frequently and loudly denounced European colonialism. Public meetings of the ‘Communist Party’ became focal points for anti-colonialism. Not all opposition to colonialism came from the Communists. Dissidents within the Indian society, which for a long time suffered from French colonial reforms, were easily a breeding ground for anti-colonialism.

At the time of Independence of India, democracy was more advanced in French Indian settlements than in the rest of the country and France was engaged in improving the system without regard to what was happening in the neighbouring British India. When the British left India, it was clear to everyone that France would have to do the same. The Indian government promptly proclaimed it. For the political class in metropolitan France which had just founded the Fourth Republic, French India could not be ceded without a last manifestation of its French ideal. Therefore France insisted that article 27 of the Constitution be respected, that no cession of territories could be made without the consent of the affected
people, an argument which very naturally led to a decision about a referendum. France had made the referendum a *sine qua non* condition for the determination of the future of French India.

For the French Indians, the turn of events was problematic. They had become used to their dual identity; it had become natural for them. They had economic and human ties with France as well as with India. The thought of breaking these ties with France was weighing upon them. They accepted the idea of a merger with India but desired a period of transition so that integration would take place gradually without any group of citizens having to suffer. France tried to profit by this situation to prolong its presence. Further, when the process of decolonisation of the French *comptoirs* in India was started in August 1947\(^\text{19}\), there was a great urge for the withdrawal of French colonial rule from India. At the same time, there were supporters for the continuance of French possessions in India under the rule of France. The local elite were well knit to France sentimentally and intellectually that some of the inhabitants of French India hesitated to support the move to merge with India. Political ideologies and factions were built around these views and local political movements for ‘pro-merger’ and ‘anti-merger’ gained momentum during 1947-1954. The roots of the ideological, political and personal motivations of the faction politics can be traced back to nineteenth century. A series of political experimental measures introduced in French India as a part of the French colonial policy which attempted to link the colony with metropolitan France were largely responsible for the growth of these political factions. The French attempt to rally for the progress of a minority population under political and cultural assimilation created discontent and the majority population, which mounted up an agitation for ending French

\(^{19}\) In August 1947 the governments of India and France issued a joint declaration in favour of a friendly settlement of problems related to the French settlements in India. On 19\(^\text{th}\) June 1948, the governments of France and India agreed, by an exchange of letters, to let the population of these settlements decide about their future by a free referendum.
colonialism and fusion of the French territories with Indian Union. The Indian National Congress which formed the first government of independent India made it more and more difficult for France to continue in India.

The movement for ‘merger’ with Indian Union gained its strength in 1954 and the withdrawal of French from Indian was inevitable. The political incoherence was further exacerbated by the chronic governmental instability which plagued the Fourth Republic.\(^\text{20}\)

However the scale of priorities given to the French territories of India by the metropolitan government in France can be judged by the fact that the formal transfer of these territories to the Government of India did not take place until 1954, that is, after the withdrawal of France from Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam. The cession of these territories was not legally ratified by the French parliament until after the resolution of the Algerian crisis in 1962. Nearly three centuries of French presence in the former French territories of India makes them unique and different from other parts of India. The common history with political and economic ties had given rise to individual links of friendship between the inhabitants of the establishments and the French.