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A Brief History of French Colonialism in India : A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: This paper will provide the reader with a consolidated view over the French culture and the influence of French in India, based on the historical reviews.

The paper is thoroughly analytical and consists of historical occurrences paired with the inferences of the authors to provide a qualitative understanding. The paper is, hence, open-ended and subject to the views of the reader as well.

Findings: The influences of French and French culture in India in chronological order, starting with their initial entry into the Indian subcontinent dating mid-17th century leading up to the current Indo-French relations, nearly 350 years later was summarized. On observing various important occurrences of the French entry into the subcontinent, it is observed that the incentive for a European power like France to travel across the world in those times attributed to India's booming trade opportunities at the cusp of Middle age. As we move forward into French expansion and decline in the dynamic, constantly power-shifting colonial India, we see how small groups of French ethnic minorities clustered together in the various spots that we currently known as French hotspots today. This paper also delves into various avenues in which the countries of France and India as we know them today interact and work bilaterally and this gives us an interesting glimpse of how far Indo-French relations have changed, from India being a colonial stooge in France's battle for dominating the markets of the old world to a healthy mutual trade between two countries benefitting both nations favorably.

Application/Improvements: India collaborated trade and investment, culture, science & technology and education with France. India is yet to realize the full economic potential of their relation.

Keywords: Indo-French relations, French establishments, FDI, Education, Puducherry, influence and importance.

1. INTRODUCTION

French India known as French colony “Établissements français dans l’Inde” in French stood physically as a separate portion of the Indian subcontinent. It was during the second half of the 17th century French East India Company possessions were included into the union of India in 1950 and 1954. France colonized Pondicherry, Karaikal, Yanam on the Coromandel Coast and Mahe on the Malabar Coast and Chandernagor in Bengal. These colonies had several lodges in various towns. It was after 1816, these lodges came under the British administration.

2. HISTORY OF FRENCH IN INDIA

France was the last country to enter the East India trade during 17th century. After the foundation of the English and Dutch East India companies, their focus was in multiplying their factories on the India shores. But still the French was left out without any permanent establishment in the East.

Historians figured out that French had a late entry in the East India trade which was due to its geopolitical circumstances, countless internal custom barriers resulted in less appetite for the large-scale investment. During the first half of 16th century, under the reign of King Francis I. the first French Expedition in India took place. It was Cardinal Richelieu who formed French East India company and sent an expedition to Madagascar. The First French Factory in India was established through the second expedition sent by French East India company.

Qildalur of Valikondapuram in Pondicherry which was under the Sultan of Bijapur were acquired by France and thus the base of Pondicherry was laid. The French lost their French companies at Masulipatam, Bantam and Surat to the British by 1720.

French officer Bellanger shaped the French administration of Pondicherry staying in the Pondicherry lodge. It was the first French Governor rooted various projects to transit Pondicherry from a small fishing village into a big port-town. French continued conflicting with the Dutch and the English which made way for the Dutch to capture Pondicherry and increased its fortifications. The French took back the town only through the Treaty of Ryswick.

The goals of the French and the British, were commercial⁴ right from their entry. It was during this period French East India Company acquired Yanam in 1723, Mahe in 1725 and Karaikal in 1739. In the beginning of 18th century Pondicherry town was laid out and grew considerably. French-India governors contributed greatly for the expansion of Pondicherry area and converted it remarkably to a large and rich town.

The arrival of Joseph Francois Dupleix who was the most famous governor of French-India was crucial. It is he who cherished the desire of a French territorial empire in India despite the disagreement of his away superiors and of the French government

His ambitions clashed with British goals in India which paved way for military skirmishes and political intrigues at times even when French and British were at peace officially. His army ran the area successfully between Hyderabad and Cape Comorin over the order of Marquis de Bussy-Castelnau. Arrival of a British officer Robert Clive to India in 1744, turned against Dupleix’s hope of creating a French empire India.

In 1754, Dupleix was dismissed and called back to France after a loss and failed peace treaty. Colonial intrigues between British and French continued in spite of a treaty which agrees not to interfere in regional Indian affairs. The French increased their influence at the court of the Nawab of Bengal and increased their trading activity in Bengal. Nawab (Siraj ud-Daulah) was encouraged by the French in 1756 to attack and take over the British Fort William in Calcutta. Thus, the Battle of Plassey took place in 1757 in which British decisively defeated the Nawab and his French friends. British expanded its power over the entire province of Bengal. Subsequently, in 1758, Lally-Tollendal was sent to India by France to recapture the lost French possessions and chase away the British out of India. His arrival in Pondichéry was fruitful and destroyed Fort St. David in Cuddalore District. But then still in 1760, his strategic mistakes led to the loss of the Hyderabad region, the Battle of Wandiwash, and the siege of Pondicherry. In 1761, the British took revenge over the French and razed Pondichéry to the ground and lay in ruins for four years. It is now the French had lost their hold in South India also.

2.1. List of French Establishments in India

French establishments could be sighted on the Indian peninsula. Pondicherry and its territory are found on the Coromandel coast. Yanam and its territory which consist of dependent villages, Masulipatam lodge are found on the coast of Orissa. Mahe and its territory are found on the Malabar Coast⁷. Chandernagor and its territory, the five lodges Cassimbaza, Jugdia, Dacca, Balasore and Patna are found in Bengal, Surat factory is found in Gujarat. The name 'lodge' was coined by the French East India company constructed for the factories which consisted a home with an adjacent ground.

2.2. Pondicherry - French culture in India

2.2.1. History of Puducherry

Pondichéry became a French colony in 1674 with Chandannagar (1674) Mahé (1722), Yanam (1731), Karikal (1739) and Masulipatam (1761). French colony French India was formed by a single French governor in Pondicherry. British occupations repeatedly interrupted French rule. On 2nd November 1954, Pondicherry was transferred to the young republic of (ex-British) India de facto but it was legally declared on 16th August 1962. Since then French India ceased existing and became one of the present Indian constituent state of Puducherry including all the four coastal enclaves.

Few districts of Pondichéry are still known as *pockets* in India, as they are amalgamations of non-contiguous enclaves. The Puducherry district has 12 such small pockets surrounded by Tamil Nadu. Mahé district has 4 pockets. This unusual geography is a legacy of the colonial period with Pondicherry is still retaining the borders of former French India. The five territories of French India territorial administration are exempted to make laws on their own with respect to specific matters. Such legislation may need ratification from the federal government or the assent of the President of India in many cases.

2.2.2. Influence of French over Pondicherry

'Le Français' may not be so famous in India but it has its influence over India in many ways such as language, fashion, architecture, trade and food. The presence of French in India has had a great impact on the culture of regions where they settled and also in the other areas of the country. French cartographers mapped India very precisely which worths even today. French changed the course of military warfare in

India by introducing European techniques. French has a well-known influence in the past royal palaces of Kapurthala and personalities such as Claude Martin. The French decorative elements found expression in vernacular housing and Indian architectural features become an intrinsic part of French colonial architecture.

2.2.3. French People in India

Presence of French people was minor compared with the presence of British people in India. French Indians are wealthiest in Pondicherry because their income is from their pensions or of French government. A fascination for the French language and the French culture is very common over there and now it can be seen all over India. Many French tourists visit Puducherry out of curiosity and because they feel familiar to their home country to a certain extent like they are at their hometown in France.

3. ARCHITECTURE

French architecture has a significant effect on India, not as a whole but in select places. Pondicherry has more French architectural influence which is liked by Indians. The road along the sea is part of the Pondicherry heritage which stands as a testimony of French construction. Many streets in Pondicherry exist with French names, French style villas are a common sight. Buildings with French influence are typically colonial style with long compounds and stately walls and are copied by Indians too.

3.1. Cuisine

Most of the expensive and famous foods originated from France and are the familiar and favourite dishes of Indians today. The techniques used to make them are questionable. French food reminds us of French bread, dessert Truffles, Champagnes, cheeses, soups like Bouillabaise, French Toast. Many dishes are prepared with the main ingredient as bread. Bread and cheese have become like a staple item to eat among Indian children.

3.2. Indo-French Relations

Indo-French bilateral trade grows steadily. France is the ninth largest investor in India over the sectors like Chemicals, Cement and Gypsum Products, financial, Fuels, Electrical Equipments and auto sector. More than 400 French companies exist in India employing Indians. Namely, Electric, BNP Paribas, Sanofi, Alcatel Lucent, Steria, Renault Nissan, Alstom, Atos, Lafarge, Saint Gobain, Accor, Essilor, Technic, Michelin, Safran, L'Oreal, Dassault, Veolia, Air Liquide. India is the 13th largest foreign investor in France. Indian companies have invested in France in various sectors like pharmaceuticals, Software, Wine, Steel, Plastics, Railway wagons, Aerospace, Autoparts etc., More than 100 Indian companies like Ranbaxy, TCS, Infosys, Wipro, Sintex, Kingfisher, Jyoti, Axis and 27 exist in France and are employing French people. Knowledge of French language opens a new avenue for young Indians to get employed in French companies and posted in France.

3.3. Cultural Exchanges

Indian culture is well received by French population. Cultural events are organized in all over France depicting the Indian culture through Indian art, Indian music, dance, cinema and literature. The visits of the Indian artists are sponsored by Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Indo-French Cultural Exchange Programme (CEP) is responsible for organizing variety of cultural programmes in France

4. CONCLUSION

The study is a detailed account of both the historical and modern relations that France and India have shared and continue. Initially France's late entry into India is observed and the reasons analyzed. Like British and Dutch, French also started colonizing through their commercial activities. The foundation years of the French establishments in India are recounted and France's continued conflicts with British and Dutch forces in India are also noted. Moving forward to more modern times, the international bilateral relations between India and France as we currently know them are listed and explained with details on energy projects, cultural exchange programs etc.,. India was semi-colonized by European powers and led by leaders. Pondichery which served as a capital of French territories in India has still an imprint of French influence. The over-arching conclusion that one takes away from this study is how French culture and way of life have been a major cornerstone in India's growth as a country and something that has positively influenced our relations with western powers. The French language and people have become an integral part of Indian society and will remain so for years to come.

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