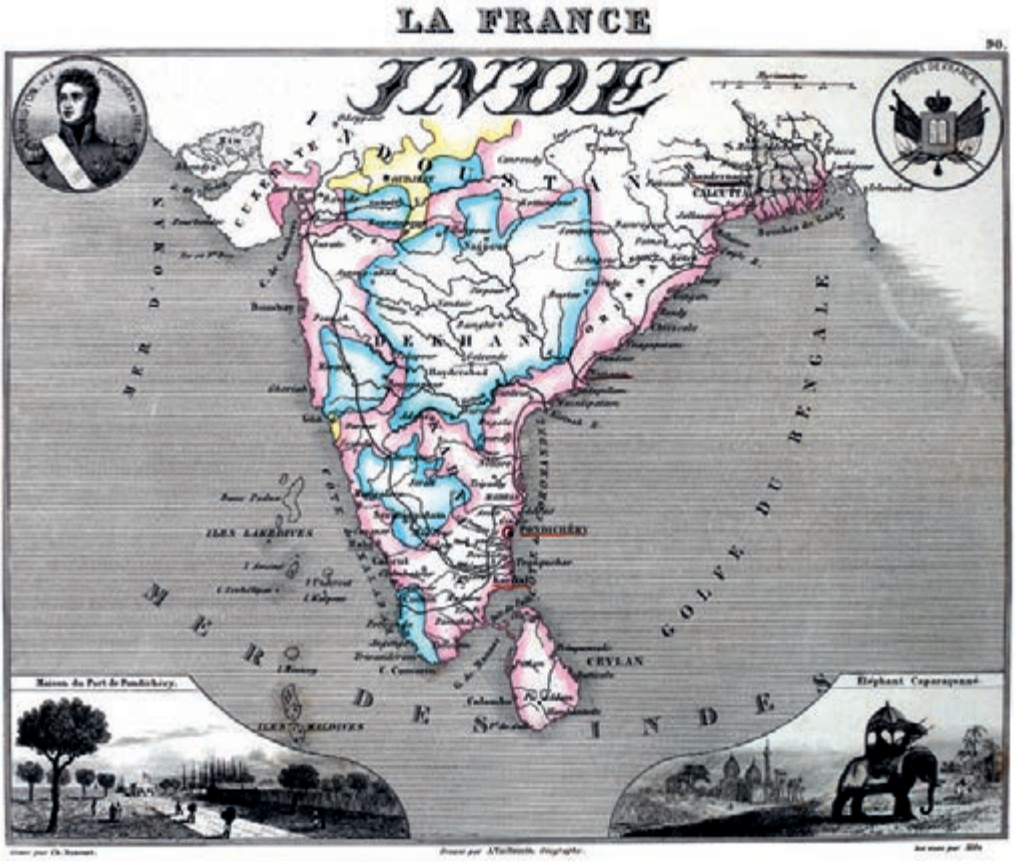

Anne Raffin

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1. Pondicherry in the French Empire during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Between Colonial Subjects and French Citizens

Abstract
Chapter 1 introduces the topic of this book – the consequences of implementing colonial citizenship in the French enclave of Pondicherry during the early Third Republic (1870–1914). Embracing a historical and a sociological comparative approach, the chapter situates the book at the crossroads of two bodies of previous research: (1) the relationship between citizenship and the French empire as well as its policies of assimilation and (2) the Indian responses to this project.

Keywords: colonial citizenship, French empire, assimilation, Pondicherry, Third Republic

I. Overview and General Concepts

Pondicherry 1889, Alacoupan district, French India: a few bare-headed and bare-chested male villagers pass by a simple thatch shelter next to a grove of trees. Under the shelter, a small group of turbaned men sit around a table with a box at its centre. There seems to be no interaction between the villagers and the sitting men, who appear to be of higher status. At first glance, the scene evokes a picture of everyday rural life in nineteenth-century south India, with its traditional and long-standing caste divisions. On closer inspection, however, it tells a significant modern story: the box is a ballot box, and the period is that of the Third French Republic, when, for the second time, all males in the French colony of Pondicherry received the right to cast their votes in local elections.[1]

1 Polling station Alacoupan, Pondicherry 1891.

Raffin, Anne, *Republican Citizenship in French Colonial Pondicherry, 1870–1914*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2022
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Image 1.1 Polling station Alacoupan, Pondicherry 1891

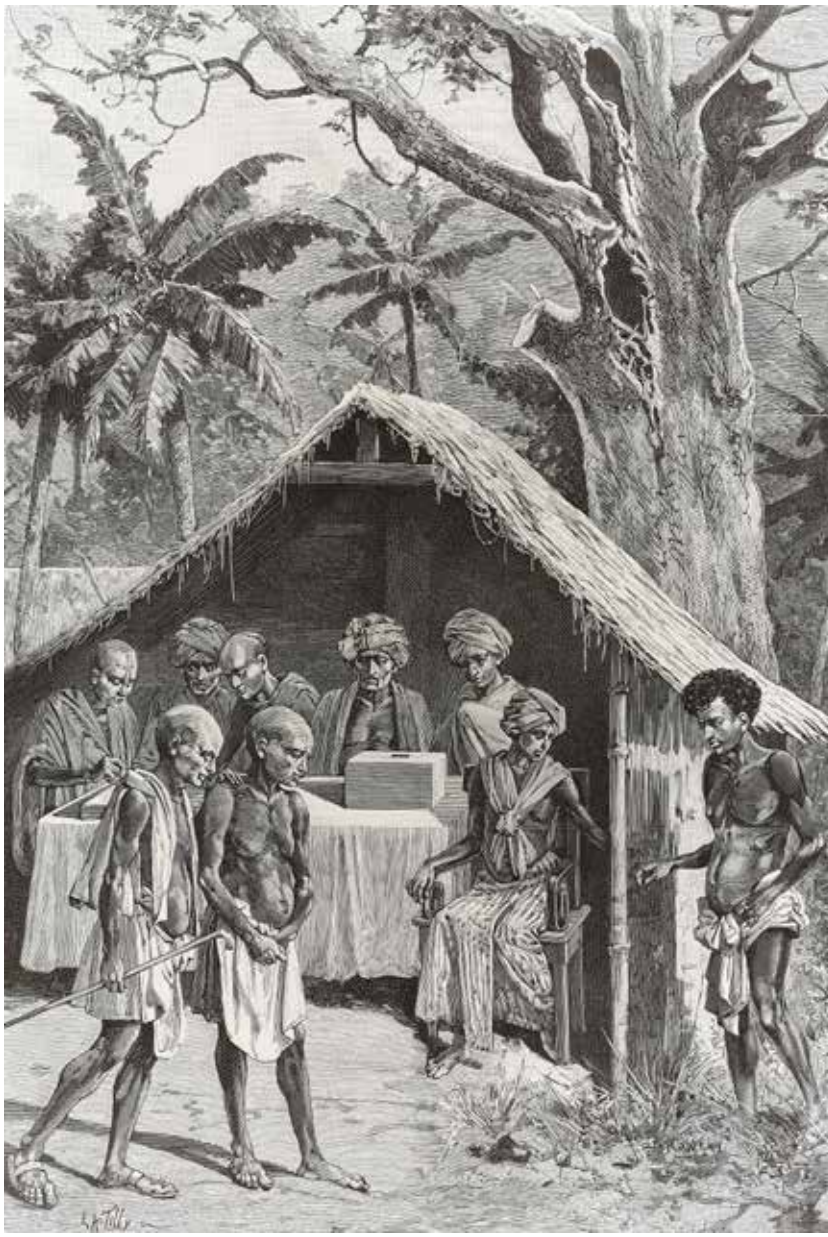
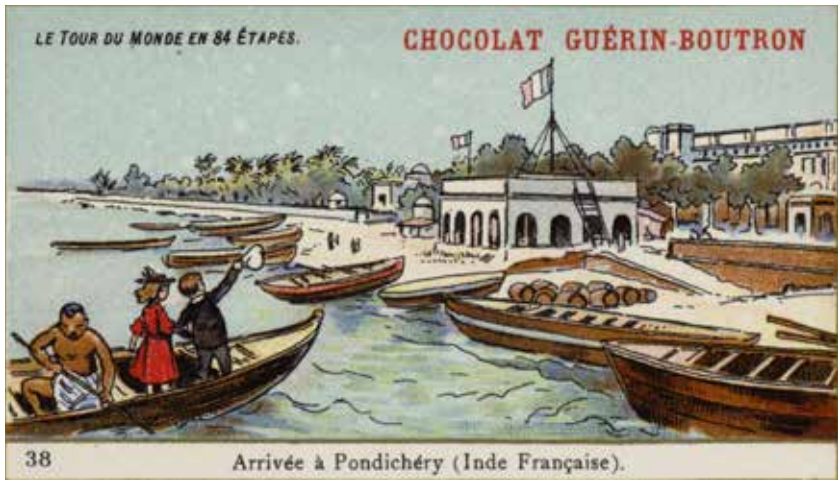


Image 1.2 Arrival at Pondicherry in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century



In 1848, the Second Republic had granted male Indians the right to elect a French representative to the Chamber of Deputies in the metropole. This situation did not last, partly due to the French administration in India opposing such a law and disorders that arose in one of the suburbs (*aldées*) of Pondicherry. The upper caste protested against the Pariahs who were emboldened to wear footwear, an emblem of the upper castes, by the establishment of a republic in France.[2]

From the 1870s to World War I, scenes of local polling places were no longer be so uneventful. There were fiercely contested battles among French and Indian candidates roughly representing republican values and the colonizers' interests versus communal and caste-based motives. Eventually, many locals in Pondicherry were organized into voting blocks, voting fraud became endemic, and voting booths became sites of violence.

Despite the doubts and opposition to transforming the people of Pondicherry from colonial subjects to French citizens, the commitment to doing so is reflected in a late nineteenth-century French educational postcard captioned 'Arrival in Pondicherry', which portrays an imaginary pair of well-dressed French schoolchildren in a small canoe rowed by an Indian oarsman. As the canoe reaches the beach, the boy removes his hat and gestures towards two French tricolour flags flying atop of a nearby building.[3] The tricolour represents the right to vote and other political

2 Malangin, *Pondicherry*, p. 112.

3 Arrival at Pondicherry.

innovations of republican rule first realized in France and then extended to its Indian territories. In addition to granting electoral suffrage, colonial authorities expanded political participation of Indian males in new political institutions. Such measures often fell far short of ideal goals and sometimes made old inequalities worse or created new forms of inequality. This book traces how such republican measures during France's Third Republic were initiated, negotiated, and translated, successfully or unsuccessfully, into a southern Indian context. It assesses the extent to which ideals of republican citizenship were realized at that time and, if any, the lasting effects of republican citizenship today.

To better understand the questions about sovereignty and citizenship, as well as the tensions between particular social structures and specific forms of political organizations regarding the French empire in India, the book looks particularly at the emergence of a partial, ambiguous, and often contested phenomenon of colonial citizenship in Pondicherry between 1870 and 1914, a period that covers the early Third Republic era up to the beginning of the First World War. The meaning of the term citizenship in the early Third Republic revolved around citizens' legal rights such as electoral franchise and civil equality guaranteed by law, which were notions of citizenship inherited from the French Revolution.[4]

Citizenship during the Third French Republic was defined, according to the French contemporary politician Léon Gambetta, by the 'little paper' that embodied the Republic itself, because political activity was first and foremost exercised through universal male suffrage.[5] The republican motto 'Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity' born during the Revolution carried the ideals of the 1790s. However, the literature has shown how such universal language aimed to include everyone was used in support of exclusionary policies.[6]

The well-known justification for France having colonies was France's right and duty to civilize the Indigenous people in the French colonial empire based on the assumption of French cultural superiority over the cultures of the Indigenous people. An important tenet of France's civilizing mission during the Third Republic was to turn colonial subjects into republican citizens. Natives were subjects, not citizens, which meant that they had duties, but few rights. In some French overseas territories, the French granted their colonized peoples citizenship rights, among which the right to vote for

4 Pairaudeau, *Mobile citizens*, p. 36.

5 Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, p. 1.

6 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*; Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*; Church, *Paradise Destroyed*; Semley, *To Be Free and French*.

their own representatives in local and metropolitan political assemblies. Historical studies on citizenship within the French empire by Frederick Cooper, Todd Shepard, and William F. S. Miles discuss issues surrounding citizenship and whether there was an alternative other than the creation of an independent nation state or becoming part of the French territory in the era of decolonization. Cooper's comparison of citizenship rights and duties given to various parts of the French empire raises the question of what degree the extension of citizenship and voting rights to Pondicherry mirrored what was happening in the rest of the colonial empire under the Third Republic.[7]

Pathways from subjecthood in the French colonial empire to citizenship of the Third Republic required assimilation into French culture and mores. However, the process of assimilation seems to have differed throughout the empire. While the Algerian Muslim population did not get full citizenship rights before 1958, Algeria still had a unique position within the French colonial empire, because it was juridically part of France. It not only elected deputies to the French National Assembly but also was managed by the Ministry of Home Affairs like the rest of France. Due to such a situation, Todd Shepard discusses whether the negotiation of Algeria's independence in 1962 was a betrayal of the republican tradition of assimilation.[8] In contrast, French citizenship in French India only required male individuals to renounce their legal status as Hindus or Muslims to submit themselves to the French Civil Code – no knowledge of the French language and mores was required.

The political scientist William Miles argues that if the *originaires* (names given to most of its inhabitants) of the four oldest colonial towns of Senegal (Dakar, Rufisque, Saint Louis, and the island of Gorée) had retained their French citizenship after the independence of Senegal, their situation would have been quite similar to the renouncers who chose to subject to the French law in French India.[9]

Blocks in the pathway to citizenship emerged for two reasons. First, following the French Revolution of 1789, the country experienced a change of regimes from being a republic to becoming an empire, followed by a return to monarchy before the coming of the Third Republic in 1870. Some of these political regimes were not opened to conferring citizenship rights to its own people, let alone to its colonial subjects. Second, during the Third

7 Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation*.
8 Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*.
9 Miles, 'Comparative Decolonization'.

Republic, some politicians in the metropole and the colonies were opposed to implementing republican assimilationist ideals and policies.

Moreover, most of the colonial administrators who were trained under the *Ancien Régime* and followed the Regime's policies of exception were not aligned with the Third Republic's vision of a universal republican rule implemented all over the French empire. Elizabeth Foster's work on colonial Senegal points out that, to study the modern French colonial empire, it is more insightful to look at the *Ancien Régime*'s framework of privilege rather than use a republican framework of analysis. This framework of privilege, in other words, 'private law', was a widespread range of distinctive laws and regulations that was applied to different territories and people.[10] Her work invites scholars to measure the governance of these modern colonies against the standard of the *Ancien Régime* rather than the principles of French republicanism. Alice Conklin's work on the civilizing mission in French West Africa from 1895 to 1930 has a different focus from Foster's work and concentrates not only on the Republican ideology and the rhetoric of senior colonial administrators, mostly governors-general, but also on the role these administrators played in the formation and policy implementation of the Third Republic's civilizing mission. Conklin argues that the Third Republic's civilizing mission was not a hypocritical cover-up of colonizers' interests but defined what actions were off limits within the colonial context.[11] The data in this book shows that some French colonial officials and some local elites made references to the civilizing mission regarding the expansion of male suffrage in French India. This work raises a similar series of questions. Were these references only lip service to please the political powers back in France? Or were they a means of defending one's political interests? Or did they reflect a genuine belief in the superiority of the French culture and its ability to improve the lives of inhabitants of Pondicherry?

There is another body of literature that suggests some Indigenous people in French India were opposed to being French citizens, because their position of privilege was jeopardized by making all the members of the local society equal. Hence, a closer examination is still needed of the role of colonial subjects' acceptance and opposition to receiving French citizenship in term of caste and class to help explain some of the difficulties of extending French citizenship

10 Foster, *Faith in Empire*, p. 5; Wilder's concept of the 'imperial nation-state', which considered the metropole and the French empire as one entity, is not being used in this study. Foster's model of *Ancien Régime* seems more appropriate to grasp groups' privileges. Wilder, *French Imperial Nation-State*.

11 Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize*.

and political rights. While historical and law-oriented studies have shown the local elites embracing or resisting such a political project, lower-caste people's and outcastes' reactions to such offerings and obligations inherent to citizenship have not been investigated as much.[12] Such previous studies have also not looked at the impact of the Third Republic's political project on colonized women, because citizenship rights were only granted to men. Yet there were some unintended positive consequences of citizenship for women; for instance, Chapter 4 discusses such consequences for Tamil female teachers.

Finally, Pondicherry was a French colony within a British colonial world that dwarfed it – what some have called a 'colonized colonizer' or 'subaltern colonizer'.[13] British colonialism appeared as a point of reference not only for Pondicherry's local press but also for French colonial and local administrators who compared everyday ruling strategies with those of their colonial neighbour, especially regarding developments in the city of Madras. For example, such comparisons seem to have led a few French colonial administrators to disagree with the implementation of the Third Republic's political project, arguing that the French should follow the path of British India, which did not extend political power to male Indians. In addition, French and British India were not only tied by a circulation of ideas between colonial officials on how to run a colony, but they were also tied by the intercourse between Indian communities that were separated but not cut off by colonial boundary lines. While French academic research tends to study the French possessions in isolation, this study posits that integrating studies of British colonialization in India, and especially in Madras Presidency, can provide new perspectives regarding a colonial enclave granting citizenship rights to the inhabitants of Pondicherry under the Third Republic.[14]

II. Analytical Framework

When it comes to the definition of citizenship, this work presents the history of laws about citizenship in colonial Pondicherry. Broadly defined, citizenship

12 Annoussamy, *L'Intermède français en Inde;* Annoussamy, *Pondicherry*; Deschamps, 'Une citoyeneté différée'; Deschamps, 'En attendant le vote des indigènes'; Michalon, 'Des Indes françaises aux Indiens français'; Weber, *Les Etablissements français*; Weber, *Pondichéry et les comptoirs*.

13 Magedera, 'French-language Representations of India', p. 1.

14 I use the word 'colony' to refer to French India or British India even though neither was technically a colony. However, I use this term, because, in both cases, India was under the control of these foreign powers.

refers to the relationship between an individual or a group of people with a political entity, in our case an empire. Such a relationship is articulated through a language of rights and duties. This research is influenced by T. D. Marshall's 1950 framework of citizenship, which underlines the development of civil (individual rights such as freedom of speech), political (right to vote), and social rights (access to education, for instance) in Great Britain.[15] In this book, I pay attention to the ways in which different institutions, such as schools, were inclusive or not towards the members of society (social rights). Within this historical context, I examine French citizenship in a colonial setting and the institutions enabling or hindering legal citizenship for Indians.

In her insightful analysis, the scholar Emmanuelle Saada has already shown how a historical sociology approach to the field of colonial studies can be a fruitful method for studying nationality, citizenship, and the category of *métis* in the French empire.[16] Likewise, applying sociological concepts to the study of a specific historical period, I look at how the colonial bureaucracy, and the laws and the means by which it categorized Pondicherry people, shaped facets of an inclusive and exclusive citizenship granted to Indian locals. My work moves beyond categorizations and rights to assess how far the implementation of citizenship could go within the French empire, based on the political manoeuvrings of Indian and colonial elites and protests carried on the ground. Through such an approach, I defend what has historically already been said about citizenship rights in Pondicherry while using a sociological perspective on the matter.

This book poses questions around two dimensions of the extension of this notion of citizenship to France's colonial territories. The first dimension focuses on the top-down, broad, and often abstract relations between the French empire and its subjects. This includes an overview of France's colonial eras and its rivalries with other colonial powers. It also involves an analysis of French authorities' differential treatment of its subjects in various overseas territories, the rights they were granted or not, and how far colonized subjects could go to attain legal rights and status equal to the colonizers.

The second dimension chronicles the experiences of Indians who engaged in – or were excluded from – Pondicherry's ostensibly new political culture based on the language of rights and participatory political institutions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such an approach delves into the historical meaning of republican citizenship in Pondicherry. Here, I explore

15 Marshall, *Citizenship and Class*.

16 Saada, *Empire's Children*.

further the continuum between colonial citizenship and French citizenship. Indeed, the proportion of the population of Pondicherry that could be considered citizens, and the extent to which this population in turn could be considered full French citizens, varied dynamically in accordance with the political measures colonial authorities attempted to implement and how individuals and groups used their own agency to accept, reject, or co-opt such measures.

This introduction is followed by five more chapters. Chapter Two contextualizes French colonial Pondicherry within British India, then discusses the expansion of voting rights to Pondicherry's Indian males within the French colonial empire.

Chapter Three examines the impact of republican citizenship on the balance of power among different subpopulations in Pondicherry and the social identities that each subpopulation used to distinguish itself from other populations.

Linked to the citizenship was the right to education and the duty of conscription. Chapter Four asks three questions: (1) how were compulsory education and military service implemented in Pondicherry, (2) how did local people perceive such institutions, and (3) which groups managed to gain access to benefits offered by French schooling and the army?

Chapter Five explores how universal male suffrage in Pondicherry was instituted and why the right to vote was accompanied by electoral manipulation and sometimes violence. At the societal level, archival material underlines undemocratic practices, such as fraud, clientelism, and the impact of private interests within institutions. Most of the analysis in this chapter is drawn from petitions sent mostly by members of the upper castes to the Board of Administrative Litigation (*Conseil du contentieux*).

Finally, Chapter Six focuses on the larger purpose of the study: that is, to use Pondicherry as a case study to reflect on the nature of republican citizenship during the early Third Republic, more specifically the extent to which the republican ideals of the Third Republic applied in Pondicherry.

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