

French [Français] Language in India: Historical and Modern Presence

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ABSTRACT

France and India share a history since the seventh century, where France has a remarkable foot on Indian soil, though for a shorter time and smaller territory. The historical events led to the emergence of the present scenario when French is not just a language but a sense of cultural belonging to the nation. The paper tries to focus on drawing a timeframe review of the evolvement, adoption and enhancement of French Français in India. Its role can be spotted in past after the advent of the French East India Company and in present as the use of French in various schools and Universities. Starting from the first introduction of the Bachelor of Arts course in the University of Bombay in 1886 and now 12 Central Universities offer various courses as Degree, Diploma and Certificate courses. According to Label France, there are "almost 300,000 French learners in India, for 3,000 teachers. This figure comprises 60,000 university-level students and about 500 teachers. The figures are increasing gradually in lieu of NEP 2020 i.e., the Third language policy and the popularity of the French language worldwide.

Keywords: French Français, Francophone, Chandernagore, Pondicherry, NEP 2020

INTRODUCTION

France is frequently referred to be a nation with a Roman language and culture. It is significant because Latin and Roman culture and its civilisation are the roots of modern-day French language, civilization and culture.

People around the world have done so through colonialism or conquest, respectively. Latin was simplified and made more ordinary, and it was due to necessity that French evolved from Latin words. The oldest instance of what may be called French was recorded in 842 "Serments de Strasbourg" known as the Strasbourg Oaths after the initial process of pidginization and simplification which lasted almost seven centuries (Cazamian 1959).

Langue française means the French Language is arguably the most acknowledged Romance language in the world. At the beginning of the 19th century, French was the official language of near about 25 countries. After Mandarin, English, Spanish, and Arabic, French has 300 million native speakers, making it the fifth most widely spoken language in the world. Apart from English, it is the sole language that is spoken across all five continents. In addition to being extensively spoken in France, it is also a main or official language in portions of Belgium, Switzerland, Monaco, Canada, most notably but not exclusively in Quebec, and parts of south-east Asia, especially in former French colonies. French is the second most extensively used foreign language in international communications, following English, and is an official or primary second language in 55 nations throughout the

world. As, the International Postal Union, the International Olympic Committee, the International Red Cross, and other organisations all have French as one of their two official languages alongside English, and it is also one of the six official languages of the United Nations.

The presence of the French language can be traced back to the 17th century in the south Asian region when the evidence of the French East India Company and French Travellers' arrival in India is found. The language finds its origin in India as a remnant of the French existence which lasted from the inception of the French East India Company in 1673 to the formal restoration of the French territory to India in 1962. French is one of the first foreign languages to be taught in India. However, a motion to add French language and literature as a degree to the Bachelor of Arts was first approved by the Senate of the University of Bombay in 1886 by Sir Pherozeshah Mehta and Justice Triambak Telang.

Now, as per the new National Education Policy 2020, various foreign languages have been included to be offered at the secondary level of the Indian education system namely Korean, Japanese, Thai, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese and Russian.

Though we see concrete evidence of the French Language supremacy in India there are very a smaller number of research articles be found which focuses on the timeline of the French language and its adoption in India. The present study tries to map the historical and modern-day significant presence of the French language in India. The paper is divided into six different sections where the next

section i.e., Section 2 highlights the historical background of the French language, Section 3 mentions important hubs of the French language and culture in India, Section 4 marks the trend of increasing craze and demand for the French language in India, Section 5 describes the importance of French language in India and Section 6 with the concluding remark and way forward of the French language in India.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The phases of linguistic adaptation in India, which was already a country of multiple languages itself were because of a series of historical events which has a major influence on the society. In the section, the author moves forward with the objective of drawing a line of historical events in Indian history that led to the French language's ethnic presence in the country.

French Language Evolution in India:

The time of the French was in line with the presence of the British in India between 1667 and 1954, which marked the dominance of the British post-1763 in the whole of Indian territory. The 1814 pact cemented France's status as a minor coloniser and left it with five remote, non-combatant trading outposts. Spivak (1990) mentions that the British owned almost every part of Indian land except small corners. These 'small corners' were administered by the French as their trading posts were Pondicherry, Yanam, Karaikal, Mahe and Chandernagore. These trading posts called as *comptoirs* at the time are the history of French français in India. French-language depictions of India provide a crucial third perspective on colonial crises (such as the one in 1857), decolonization, and the post-colonial economy of India. These *Comptoirs* provide us with a series of micro-histories since they were isolated from one another and had a total land area of 508 square kilometres in India's northeast (Chandernagore), southeast (Karaikal and Pondicherry), and west (Mahe) and east (Yanam) coasts (Dodu 1908).

The dual aspect, which is the defining element of both the history of the French presence in India and of French-language representations of India, is dictated by the relatively limited overall area and isolation when taken together. As a result, French depictions of India started to express themselves increasingly through idealisation, fantasy, and other "discourses of the non-real" (Spivak 1990). In addition to the extensiveness of the French ideology of India, for metropolitan audiences, French-language depictions of India include significance beyond the boundaries of their intended viewers. This realm of the more extensive history of French colonialism reflects this component, especially in Southeast Asia and North Africa (Mayer 1951). Debates over reasserting France's right to acquire colonies as soon as it was able to after being defeated by Prussia in 1871 involve French language depictions of India and an analysis of what went wrong in the defeat in the Anglo-French wars of the middle of the eighteenth century. Lucien-Anatole Prévost-Paradol (1829) further argued for the emphasis on India in the French language is the history of these representations and their influence on worldwide French colonial ideology.

MAJOR HUBS OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE IN INDIA:

French Colony in Chandannagar: Chandannagar was a French colony until 1950 because of the French settling here in the second half of the 17th century. To construct a trading post on the right bank of the river Hooghly, Ibrahim Khan, the then Nawab of Bengal, granted permission for Chandannagar to become a French colony in 1673. In 1688, France established a long-term presence there. Joseph Francois Dupleix was chosen to serve as the city's administrator in 1730. War broke out between France and Great Britain in 1756, and on 23 March 1757, the British Navy seized Chandannagar. In 1763, Chandernagore was returned to the French, but the British took it again in 1794. In 1816, the city and a 3 sq mi (7.8 km²) pocket of surrounding land was returned to France.

Beginning with the three communities of Khalisani, Boro Kishanganj, and Gondalpara, Chandernagore began to urbanise. Despite India's independence from Britain in 1947, it was administrated as a region of French India under the political supervision of the governor-general in Pondicherry until 1950. Among all the Little Europe locations along the Ganges, Chandannagar is the one that attracts the most tourists. The stained-glass artwork in the Holy Sacred Heart Church is renowned for preserving the history of European Painting art. The Institution De Chandennagor presently operates out of the former home of French Governor Dupleix and houses a museum with a variety of colonial and other artefacts.

The Institute of Chandernagore offers French language classes besides some French structures that are in various degrees of existence. There is a church nearby called the Sacred Heart Church (1884). Jean-Claude marvels at Father Orson Wells' initiative to provide students of all ages free Saturday morning French language sessions at the church. Paradoxically, The French built a lot of top-notch schools however, few Chandannagar schools offer French as a language option. One of Chandannagar's eight French-speaking schools is the Kanailal Vidyamandir (formerly College Dupleix, founded in 1862). It is known as the "fountainhead of Chandannagar's Francophony" with a student strength of 2000 and is aided by Alliance Francaise du Bengale of Kolkata. The C.E.P.E diploma was established by the city municipality in 1949 to foster French as the second foreign language after English.

The French Jesuit missionary Father Magloire Barthet founded the École de Sainte Marie in 1862, which is where Chandernagore College got its start. Since the very beginning of this institution's existence, which was run by Jesuit missionaries, French has been taught. Collège Dupleix was re-established on July 4th, 1931. It was placed under French government authority on June 2nd, 1938, by order of the Governor of French India. The College has advanced quickly since then. In July 1947, a French B.A. programme was launched. Collège Dupleix eventually adopted the name Chandernagore College. When Chandernagore and West Bengal merged in 1954, it has been under the administration of the West Bengal government.

In 2008, the Post- Graduate Course in French was introduced. As part of the two countries' ongoing cultural

exchange programme, the French Ambassador to India, the French Consul General in Kolkata, the Linguistic Attachés of the French Institute in India, and other dignitaries routinely visit this Department.

French Colony in Pondicherry: The cornerstone of Pondicherry was laid in the year 1673, after successfully obtaining a firman from the Qiladar of Valikondapuram under the Sultan of Bijapur, "La Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales,". The former French colonies of Puducherry, Karaikal, Mahe, and Yanam acquired during 1720-1738 make up the Union Territory of Puducherry. Tamilnadu surrounds the areas of Puducherry and Karaikal, whereas Kerala and Andhra Pradesh border the states of Mahe and Yanam, respectively. A French Company official named Bellanger moved into the Danish Lodge at Pondicherry on February 4th, 1673. The French Company appointed François Martin as the territory's first governor in 1674. He who launched the ambitious plan to turn Pondicherry from a sleepy fishing village into a thriving port city which eventually became the chief French settlement in India.

In the period of Anglo-French wars from 1742 to 1763 and 1793 the British "East India Company" took control of the region and returned to the French "East India Company" by Treaty of Paris 1763 and 1814 respectively. Later when, the French "East India Company" was allowed to keep its settlements in Pondicherry, Mahe, Yanam, Karaikal, and Chandronagor when the British "East India Company" took over control of all of India in the late 1850s. Following India's independence in 1947, France's Indian possessions were united with former British India, and a 1948 agreement between the French and Indian governments mandated that the people of France's Indian possessions would determine their own political future. The jure union of French India with the Indian Union took place in 1963, but the bureaucracy had already been merged with India's on a de facto basis on 1 November 1954. As Chandernagore chose to become a part of West Bengal during the process, and Pondicherry, together with Karaikal, Mahe, and Yanam, was established as a Union Territory in the Indian Union. Pattabiraman (2008) Soon after Indian Independence, in 1949,

Pondicherry and its enclaves were de facto handed over to India on November 1, 1954, and it was made a Union Territory. However, on August 16, 1962, after the Treaty of Cession was approved by the French parliament, Pondicherry officially became part of India. Causing De Jure Da (Independence Day) to be commemorated in Pondicherry on August 16th a day after Indian Independence Day. The French and Indian governments agreed in the Treaty of Cession to keep specific traditions to preserve the distinctive features French culture of Pondicherry. This included keeping French as the official language and continuing to teach it in schools. Until 1956, Franco-Pondicherrians who were born and resided there may keep their French citizenship.

Pondicherry is the capital of Francophone culture in India. As the French continued ownership of several institutions, including the Institut français de Pondichéry (French Institute of Pondicherry), Lycée français international de Pondichéry (French International School of Pondicherry)

and others. The French Institute of Pondicherry was officially opened on March 21, 1955, under the name "Institut Français d'Indologie," in accordance with the Treaty of Cession of French Lands in India. The French National Center for Scientific Research and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs jointly oversee the French Institute of Pondicherry (Institut français de Pondichéry), a French research facility in Puducherry, India (CNRS). Of the 26 research centres covered by these two umbrellas, it is one of the biggest. Together with the Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH) in New Delhi, it is a component of the CNRS research unit 3330 "Savoirs et Mondes Indiens". The Lycée français international de Pondichéry (French International School of Pondicherry) is an international French school in Pondicherry, Puducherry, India. The college is a member of the 500-school AEFÉ network of French high schools abroad. After the Bourbon Restoration, on October 26, 1826, Eugène Desbassayns de Richemont, the Governor-General of Pondichéry in French India, founded it as the Collège Royal. A memorandum of the agreement allowing for student exchanges was signed by the school and the Future Foundation School in Kolkata in 2014.

French ideals, its rich culture and history, and the country's national motto—Liberté, égalité, fraternité—were all taught in schools of Pondicherry. French in the education of Pondicherry has been divided into four schools i.e, ethnic, bi- ethnic, transition and maintenance. The first is ethnic, the schools for students who speak a minority language, the second is bi- ethnic, the school for teaching a variety of languages to students of different ethnolinguistic backgrounds, the third, transition schools that uses native languages to teach subjects until skills of the target language are ready to learn, and fourth, maintenance where majority language is used to learn some subject and rest in the target language. The French language as preserved in this Indian territory has created a unique dialect of French known as Pondicherry French.

Modern Presence:

The Government of India in 2020 unveiled its New Education Policy, which encourages the study of foreign languages, half of which are European languages including French, German, Spanish, and Portuguese as additional languages. In a true sense, languages are a crucial component that connects Europe and India. India and Europe both have a diverse linguistic population. The goal of India's NEP 2020 is to align the new learning outcomes with the way the world is evolving. Its core principles include multilingualism and the provision of multidisciplinary courses.

FRENCH LANGUAGE IN INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM:

Linguistic Context of India

India is a very multilingual country. In the country there are more than 120 main languages and more than 1500 linguistic varieties. At the national level, the two official languages are Hindi and English. In this context, foreign languages occupy an important place in the educational system. (lefilplurilingue.org)

The school system often follows the formula of three languages:

1. the regional or mother tongue
2. Hindi or English
3. a foreign language (like French). (rea.ucad.sn)
2. Place of French in India

French is the first foreign language taught in India after English, and it counts hundreds of thousands of learners. (lefilplurilingue.org)

However, even if many students learn French, few Indians use it in daily life, because it does not have official status in the country. (lepetitjournal.com)

3. Institutions That Teach French

The teaching of FLE is done in several types of institutions:

- Secondary schools (with third language)
- The universities with the departments of French
- Les Alliances Françaises, present in several large Indian cities
- International and private schools offering bilingual or multilingual programs

The Alliances Françaises play a major role in the diffusion of the French language and culture in India. (FDLM: The French in the world)

4. Teaching Methods

The teaching of FLE in India is generally used:

- the communicative and actionable approach
- The levels of the European Common Reference for Languages (CECRL)
- international exams like DELF, DALF, TCF or TEF. (fle.fr)

5. Motivation Of Learners

Indian students learn French for several reasons:

- the professional opportunities (tourism, commerce, diplomacy)
- les études supérieures in France or in the francophone countries
- Interest in French culture (mode, literature, cinema). (ASJP)

French occupies an important place in the teaching of foreign languages in India. Although it is not widely spoken in everyday life, it is taught in many schools, universities and cultural institutions. It's learning continues to develop.

In the current scenario, German, French, Spanish, Chinese, and Japanese are the most popular foreign languages taught in schools and universities across the nation, along with Hindi and English as required curricular courses. French is the most popular language to learn when it comes to doing so. Spanish would rank second in terms of popularity, followed by Chinese and Mandarin (Menaka 2009). According to Label France,

there are "almost 300,000 French learners in India, for 3,000 teachers. This figure comprises 60,000 university-level students and about 500 teachers (Diplomatie France, 2008). The Consolidated list of Central Universities has 56 universities, a total of which 10 are under the preview of various Ministries. From the remaining 46, twelve Universities provide French

Courses in Language and Literature ranging from Certificate, Diploma, Advance Diploma, Online, Undergraduate, Postgraduate and PhD.

Table 1: List of Central Universities offering French Courses:

Sl.	No.	States	University	French Courses
	1.	Delhi	IGNOU	MA /PhD /Certificate
	2.	Delhi	Jamia Millia Islamia	BA(H)/ Advance Diploma/ Diploma /Certificate
	3.	Delhi	JNU	BA/ MA/ PhD
	4.	Delhi	DU	BA/MA/PhD
	5.	Telangana	English & Foreign Languages University and Diploma	BA(H)/ MA/ PhD/ Certificate
	6.	Pondicherry	Pondicherry University	MA/PhD
	7.	Uttar Pradesh	Aligarh Muslim University	BA/ MA/ PhD
	8.	Uttar Pradesh	Banaras Hindu University	BA/ MA/ PhD
	9.	Assam	Tezpur University	Full-time Certificate and Open Elective Choice Based Credit Type Courses in French
	10.	Chhattisgarh	GGV Bilaspur	Diploma
	11.	Maharashtra	Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya	BA
	12.	West Bengal	Viswa Bharti University	Diploma

In State's public Universities also foreign language French course is taught at different levels.

Madurai Kamraj University, Lucknow University, Ambedkar University Agra, University of Rajasthan Jaipur, Punjab University, University of Kashmir, Calcutta University, Madras University etc. (Compiled from information available on the Consolidated UGC list of Central Universities and Respective Universities Websites)

Why Studying the French Language in India:

All the discussion above of the French language in India is of relevance only when we include the importance of it in today's scenario, both at the national and international levels. In this section, the figures and facts that represent

the significance of French as a foreign language in India have been highlighted.

- Better options of Higher Education: French can be learned at home or in school, needed for the job or administrative procedures, and used in international talks, the media, and cultural events, depending on the country or area.

The Delhi Board of School Education (DBSE) has inked an MoU with the Institut Français en Inde (IFI) to teach French in its affiliated schools. According to French Embassy in 2019, 10,000 Indian students chose to pursue higher studies in France. And by 2026, France aims to have 25,000 Indian students studying in the nation, creating potential for new businesses, start-ups, and innovation between the two countries.

- Alternative to English: Having studied French has helped those who belong to smaller towns in India with limited English competence to a relatively simpler path for enhancing their professional life, without depending on conventional ways of technical expertise or English language proficiency. Multilingual and plurilingual learners have enhanced employability and can enter the economy in professional, management, or administrative positions, even though they may not all be fluent in English, as foreign language expertise, on the other hand, is increasingly recognised as creating potential (Sridhar 2022).

- Job Opportunity: Knowing French allows one to enter French businesses not only in France and other francophone nations but also in India and other non-francophone nations. As known, France provides 2 years of post-study work permit. India has some specific agreements with France that allow Indian students to stay for one year and it can be extended to another 12 months that results in 24 months. Since many French businesses are opening regional offices in India and other countries, having French on your resume will undoubtedly boost your career prospects significantly. For example, Axa, BNP Paribas, Orange, Airbus, Alstom, Alcatel, Louis Vuitton, L'Oréal, Renault, Christian Dior, Chanel, Carrefour, Peugeot, Michelin, and many other French companies have global presences.

- Global representation: Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, and the Middle East all speak French. As per the statistics of Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie *LANGUE FRANÇAISE ET DIVERSITÉ LINGUISTIQUE*,

French represents a wide range of imaginations and engages multiple identities in conversation. It is the world's fifth-most widespread language in the number of speakers, fourth-most widespread language on the Internet and second-most learned among foreign languages. With 300 million francophones across 160 nations, 235 million are daily users and 132 are learners in 2018. Showing a huge increase in the francophone in the world has been recorded at 321 million in 2022.

- Cultural Diversity Exchange: The Partnership Agreement on Migration and Mobility, which went into effect on October 1, 2021, has the full support of the two countries. India and France also called for ways to jointly

increase the mobility of students, professionals and skilled workers while strengthening their efforts to combat irregular migration between the two countries. With this, the share of culture and values of both nations gets assured and accelerated.

Conclusion: Understanding India's historical tradition of welcoming different cultures and languages, as well as the hybridity embedded in its cultural psyche, is ultimately necessary to comprehend its affinity for foreign languages like French. French language has been present in the Indian subcontinent for more than 200 years, and it continues to be one of the most preferred foreign languages to be taught in schools and universities. Yet, English has long remained dominant in the job market, opening doors for better employment prospects and social progress, even though foreign languages like French, German, Spanish, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese are making great strides in the modern era. In India, recently the introduction of third language policy as per NEP 2020 has increased the importance of French history in India to make the most favourable choice among schools. And the increase in Certificate, Diploma and Degree courses in French is due to the urge of Indian youth to be globally competitive.

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