French-language representations of India
Globalised research across national boundaries.

Perhaps the most significant side effect of the ongoing reconfiguration of the discipline of French studies in countries outside France has been the thoroughgoing internationalisation of that field of study. As a consequence, scholars of French in European countries with 18th and 20th century empires which competed with those of the French are reclassifying colonialism and its afterlives in a comparative way. This approach is particularly promising in the study of the cultural contact between India and Europe.

French-language research is international in its nature. This is not only due to the colonial past — but also to the mass cultural diffusion of the French language through colonialism and its afterlives. As a consequence, there is a mutual influence between the national literature of France and the national literature of India. This is particularly evident in the study of the colonisation of India and other countries in Asia and Africa. The French language and its literary traditions have been instrumental in shaping the cultural identity of these regions.

The French colonial period (1839-1954) was characterized by the expansion of French territory in India and other parts of Asia. The French colonial empire was one of the largest in the world, and its influence extended to various aspects of life, including language, culture, and politics. The French language became the lingua franca of the empire, and the colonial administration used it to control and govern the population.

The legacy of French colonialism is still evident today, with French being spoken as a second language in many parts of the world. This has led to the development of a rich cultural heritage, including literature, music, and cinema. The French colonial legacy has also contributed to the development of a globalised research landscape, with scholars from various countries collaborating on projects that explore the cultural contact between India and Europe.

Despite the decline of the French colonial empire, the legacy of French colonialism remains a significant aspect of the cultural landscape of India. The French colonial period left a lasting impact on the linguistic, cultural, and political landscape of India, and its afterlives continue to shape the cultural identity of the subcontinent today.

The study of the French colonial legacies in India is a complex and multidisciplinary field, involving scholars from various countries. The cultural contact between India and Europe is a rich area of study, with much still to be discovered. The research landscape is characterized by a growing trend towards globalised research, with scholars from various countries collaborating on projects that explore the cultural contact between India and Europe.
the monolithic nature of ‘French’, ‘British’ and ‘Indian’ in the process: Frans Balthazar Solyvra (1750-1824), a Paris-trained Flemish painter who lived and worked in Kolkata with his English wife, Edouard de Warren (1811-38), a Pondicherry-born soldier of mixed race who wrote an account of the events of the Indian Mutiny and Suzanne Bérié who married into the Tata family at the turn of the 20th century. The focus on such individuals who were French in a multi-cultural way, adds a global dimension to the understanding of colonialisms in India. This dimension provides an alternative to the parochialism built on nationality, be it French or British.

Taken together, all the project outputs aim for a practice of research which is acutely aware of the continuing role of nationalisms in theories of knowledge, while demonstrating that French and British nationalisms in colonialism were not as hermetic as they once might have seemed.

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Notes and suggestions for further reading

Notes
1. Since 2006 ‘Puducherry’ is the official Indian name of Pondicherry (Pondichéry in French): Joseph François Duplessis (1697-1765).