

# **The Urban Planning Vision of the French in Pondicherry: Objectives and Achievements**

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## **I. Introduction**

Pondicherry saw extensive urbanisation while under French administration. Pondicherry was turned into a well-planned colonial town by the French, complete with boulevards, town squares, and monuments that reflected the principles and aesthetic of European urban planning. They also built administrative buildings, hospitals, and other institutions, which helped the town develop. The city was further modernised by the French, who also built roads, bridges, and sewage facilities in the European style. Overall, Pondicherry's urbanisation during French administration was characterised by the introduction of European culture and ideas, resulting in the creation of a distinctive synthesis of Indian and French elements.

Pondicherry's topography and morphology played a role in the French settlement's establishment and subsequent growth. Pondicherry offered a number of benefits. The sea to the east, the Ariyankuppam River to the south, and the sand dunes to the north provided the attackers with natural barriers, making Pondicherry relatively simple to defend. This location offered significant commercial advantages. West of Pondicherry were the crimson hills. It served as a helpful point of reference for the ships that reached the mouth of Ariyankuppam and provided shelter when viewed from a distance. The coolies were extremely skilled in loading and unloading the cargo. The copious fishing was taken back to shore. On the banks of the river were their thatched cottages. There were skilled weavers. The cotton industry favoured their industry. In the area, the indigo business, which was used for dyeing, grew incredibly well. The white washing of the textile fabric required both the heat of the land and a plenty of water. The plentiful ponds provided the necessary water. Pondicherry was a popular location for settlement due to these benefits.

Pondicherry underwent a complete change from a shantytown to an established township, implanting the characteristics of an urban core. The upshot of the French invasion was the transformation of a forgotten seaside village into a major maritime hub. The entrance of the French was a blessing in disguise for Pondicherry's increasing urbanisation. The development of the textile industry and French business activity sped up the urbanisation process. According to F. Laurent Angouleme, he is credited with founding and creating Pondicherry in Francois Martin's death certificate. The true designer of Pondicherry and Dumas was Lenoir. Some of the key characteristics of urbanisation may be seen in the town planning, streets, homes, art, and architecture that have been interwoven into the fabric of the French model in Pondicherry.

## **II. French Colonial Township**

The French have clearly had an impact on Pondicherry's town planning, providing a prime example in the form of a colonial settlement. A canal served as the dividing line between the two neighbourhoods that made up the city: White Town (La Velle Blanche) and Black Town (La Velle Noire). The earliest plan, one of many created in the 18th century, was created by Nicolas de Fer in 1705. The plan mentioned the Grand Bazaar, Burea des droits, and Petit Bazaar as key landmarks. Pondicherry is home to the Capucins Garden, the Brahmins Garden, the French Company Garden, the Church of the Malabars, the Bleachers Quarters, the Weavers Streets, and the Mughal Ameen Garden. According to the design, the Muslim quarters were put close to the Cuddalore gate near the Modern Law College, while Thanappa Mudaliar, the leader of the indigenous in Pondicherry, built the church of St. Lazar for the new Christian converts. Dumas Street is where it is now. The third plan is dated 1750, followed by the second plan, "Plan De La Ville De Pondicherry," which is dated 1748. There were eight such plans in total from 1752 to 1793. After 1860 A.D., Pondicherry's current layout began to take shape. According to the old classification, the area of the town east of the Grand Canal may be referred to as the Eastern Zone, and the area west of the canal as the Western Zone.

1. **Eastern Zone:** The High Court, Secretariat Departments, General Hospital, Maternity Hospitals, Police Headquarters, French Embassy, Chamber of Commerce, Cosmopolitan Club, Central Library, the famous Cathedral of Notre Dam des Anges, Medical College, French College, French Indology Institute, the Aurobindo Ashram, Girls High School, the Government Distillery, Aristocratic Dwellings, etc. are all located in the Eastern Zone in addition to the great structures and monuments.
2. **Western Zone:** The canal borders the town's Western Zone on the east, while the boulevards encircle it on all other sides. This area is busier and has markets, bazaars, as well as buildings used for commerce and housing. In this area of the town, there were no tall buildings to be seen outside the clock towers, minarets, church and temple towers, and a few new buildings. In this neighbourhood, tiled and terraced homes are built next to one another without any interspace or line-up, giving the streets a largely consistent appearance. The majority of these homes don't fit the bungalow category. Avenue trees are noticeably absent, save for one or two blocks. Two significant churches may be found in this neighbourhood, one on Mission Estrangers Street and the other, the Sacred Heart Church, on Mahatma Gandhi Road's southern end. There are also a few mosques and Hindu temples.

The city was divided into four sections on a map from 1755, labelled Quartier de Saint Louis, Quartier de Saint Joseph, Quartier de Hopital, and finally Quartier de Saint Laurent. The names of all the streets were included, along with the distinct quarters to which they were assigned. The caste groups were given streets according to their rank in the community, importance to the town, and proximity to the French authorities. For instance, the Brahmans were given control of the Rue de Brammes, a street that borders the western side of the fort and was regarded as a prime position by the time it was built. The same street, known as Rue de Brahman Mudali (Modely), crossed the Madras Street heading west. The prominent roadway close to the fort in the hospital district, now known as the Nouveau Rue de Brammes, was also assigned to the Brahmans. Streets outside of Pondicherry's wall at the far end of the Quartier de Saint-Joseph (the quarter of Saint-Joseph) were given to the Pancha Kammalar (five artisans or craft groups), which included goldsmiths (Orfevres), mendicants (Mendians), tile makers (Thuiliers), metalworkers (Chaudronniers), and tile-makers. There were quieter streets near the White Town that were designated for Komutis, Chettis, company merchants, and Malabars.

A few notable merchants and courtiers of the firm were honoured by having some streets named after them, including Naniappa Pillai, Brachem Modely, and Chinnappapaya. Muslims were forced to settle in the Quartier de Hospital, primarily on three streets: the street of the Moors, the street of the Chuliyas (Muslim traders who spoke Tamil and lived west of the River Uppar), and the street of Mallappa. The only street with a female name was Madame, which split into the Saint Joseph and the hospital districts. In addition, some of the streets in Black Town, like Xavery, the Jesuits, and the engineers, bear the names of French missionary organisations and authorities. Some of them names were derived from the name of the largest structure or building nearby, such as Vazhudavur Gate, Villiyannallur Gate, Hospital Street, etc. According to the map from 1755, the Black Town had about 46 streets. Similar to this, streets in the White Town were given honorific names based on their proximity to specific structures, bastions, missionary groups, and French saints. Although one street with a temple, known as Pagoda Street, was hotly debated and will be covered later, none of the streets in the White Town were named after any of the indigenous communities or classes.

The streets were seen by the indigenous populations as an extension of their private or collective area. The native populace was specifically told not to block the streets with seats, advanced timber businesses, etc., and not to utilise the streets as private places when the town was being rebuilt around 1770. They were also instructed to surround the trees with thorns, water them every day, and not cut, break, or prune the trees. Additionally, pigs and asses would not be permitted to graze on or cross over the roads in order to preserve their cleanliness and order. They were informed that any pigs discovered on the roads would be put to death. Additionally, a position known as "dog catcher" was formed, which is another manifestation of urbanity.

### **III. Architecture of the Popular Churches in Pondicherry**

The French were profoundly involved in artistic and social endeavours in addition to economic and commercial endeavours. Religious organisations in Pondicherry, especially the missionaries, gained significant physical and ideological areas. They built churches, hospitals, and convent schools. They used these institutions as tools of social and cultural control to impose their beliefs on society. One can assess the missionaries' crucial role in the entire colonial (non)mercantile enterprise in terms of the Mission de Civiltrice by examining the sizes and locations of the areas they occupied. Their elevated status served as a metaphor for the overt display of

dominance and control over the native people. In Pondicherry, there are at least thirty churches, a basilica, and shrines that showcase the distinctive Gothic and Romanesque architectural styles.

1. **Notre Dame de Anges - Capus Koil:** The French culture had a tremendous impact on the architectural design in Pondicherry. The buildings in the white town were built with balconies in the Roman architectural style. The Capuchin Missionaries constructed a church in honour of Our Lady of the Angels in 1687; the locals referred to it as Capus Koil. This church is comparable to Paris, France's Church of Notre Dame de Anges. This church portrays the Virgin Mary's Assumption Day as though it were happening in heaven.
2. **Sacred Heart of Jesus – Basilica:** is renowned for its distinctive fusion of Gothic and Indo-French design. Similar to Mont Marte in France, the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus was built at the end of the 19th century. Telesphore Welter oversaw the construction of it in 1902. It was constructed to control Gothic and Latin Cross structures. 24 enormous pillars support the majestic church, which is 50 metres long, 48 metres wide, and 18 metres high. Around 29 pieces of stained glass make up the upper windows. The altar continues to astound visitors with its stunning design despite the fact that these glasses were particularly manufactured with images of the saints inside.
3. **Our Lady of Immaculate Conception - Samba Koil:** The 1855-built cathedral blends Roman and Gothic design elements. The name of the statue is Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, but the locals refer to it as Samba Koil. When the San Paul fathers erected the first church, the Tamil people affectionately referred to it as San Paul Kovil. Later, it went by the names San Paukoil or Samba Kovil, and it has a three-hundred-year history. The Archbishop's House, which is over 200 years old, is located to the south of the Cathedral. The cemetery, which is located north of the cathedral, is where bishops' remains have been interred for the past 300 years. It comprises the Indian and French Fathers who worked in the mission and cathedral, respectively. The graveyard is a powerful reminder of the cathedral's deep-rooted history in its simplicity and silence.
4. **Our Lady of Assumption - Nellithope:** This church is located in Nellithope, a neighbourhood adjacent to Pondicherry's main city. During the French Colonial era, it is supposed to have developed as the first Christian village. It serves as a testament to the people's faith in and love for Mariah. The first church was built around 1750, and between 1841 and 1851, the current, magnificent church was built.
5. **Our Lady of Health – Ariankuppam:** Bishop Adda Simon constructed the church in 1690. The participation of Madame Dupleix in the church celebrations is mentioned in Anandarangapillai's diary. There were problems with the British occupation of Pondicherry in 1793. The number of Protestants living there rose. But after the Roman Catholics arrived, the situation changed. The Church was rebuilt with modern technological facilities in 1837 and 1997. Santhikuppam and Korukkumedu are where the Parish's satellite stations are located. One strange aspect of the Church is that pilgrims who travel to Our Lady of Health Velankanni make it a point to stop by this Church and remain for a long, as though Our Lady replenishes their motivation to travel to Velankanni.
6. **St Andrew's Church, Reddiarpalayam:** Kanakaraya Mudali, the longest-serving dubash of the French East India Company, constructed the first Gothic-style building in 1745. The location was then known as Olugaret. Here, a Christianized Reddiar community from Andhra settled. As a result, it is known as Reddiarpalayam. The altar has a vestry for the worshippers and traditional Catholic pictures in it. The first of its sort in South India, the Tamil inscriptions in the temple contain information about the church.
7. **Our Lady of Lourdes Shrine, Villianur:** This well-known Marian shrine is situated in the town of Villianur. The Chapel was constructed in Puducherry in 1867 by MEP (Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris) missionaries. A natural pond existed in front of the chapel. Water from the large Ousteri Lake, which is 10 km away, was originally used as the reservoir for irrigation of the region nearby. The locals think that the water in the pond is supernatural and has the power to heal the ill and bring good fortune. There is a sacred pond in front of this Catholic cathedral alone in Asia.

#### **IV. Trade and Commerce during Colonial Rule**

European East Indian commercial corporations started to establish their trading enclaves in the 17th century. The political economy of the coastal regions started to change as a result of these corporations' entry. These areas eventually developed into the very first locations where the seeds of colonisation were sown. These businesses, together with other elements, played a significant role in the development of urban areas, particularly in coastal areas. Madras, Tranquebar, Nagapattinam (Nagapattinam), Pulicat, and Pondicherry are examples of such centres where trade with Asian and European countries began developing under the supervision of businesses. The indigenous population of these regions, which included merchant magnates, weavers, dyers, stands, and in some cases even the coolies, played a crucial and dynamic role in meeting the global demand for textiles and a variety of other commodities. While the Compagnie's business ventures with Asian and European nations benefited greatly from Pondicherry's external and internal trade, Pondicherry also became a thriving urban centre of trade as a result of the Compagnie's endeavours. Pondicherry's seaborne trade was conducted on two levels: first, through ships that sailed between Pondicherry and French coastal cities like Lorient, St. Malo, Nantes, etc.; second, through ships that sailed within Asia for the company, for the private trade of its officials, and for a number of the city's top indigenous merchants. In French papers, these ships were referred to as *commerce d'Inde en Inde*. Subcontinental trade was also covered in this, which meant that products brought in by small boats from other regions of India, mainly Bengal and Surat, were kept in the city in preparation for subsequent journeys to either Europe, Africa, or Asia.

'Trade of India in India' is the direct translation of the phrase "*commerce d'Inde en Inde*." However, the Red Sea and the Sea of China at the Cape of Good Hope were included in its operational region, as determined by the French government, and were traversed by company-owned vessels or by privately owned traders who had the proper authorization to sail. Since these ships were designed to travel within Asia and took far less time than those destined for European endeavours, the Superior Council used this as a means of raising capital. In addition, the country trade turned out to be far more advantageous for the company, city, and French officials in terms of preserving the trade balance and regulating the flow of bullion into India. The French government provided the French officials and citizens in India with the possibility to make a fortune without the company's involvement through *Commerce d'Inde en Inde*.

French ships from Pondicherry frequently sailed to Basra and Bander Abbas, two extremely developed ports in Persia. The ships used to leave from Chandernagore and stop at Pondicherry before continuing on to Mahe and perhaps Surat. The business appointed the French consul in Basra, who served on the Council of Pondicherry's orders, to supervise India's trade in the Persian Gulf. This meant that the Superior Council of Pondicherry would now have control over trade with Persia. The French king had previously decided to establish a consul in 1726. It started operating in 1739, and Jagues de Martinville, who was then serving in Pondicherry, was appointed as the first Basra consul. When the corporation moved to Surat, according to Alfred Martineau, trading with this region started.<sup>34</sup> However, after 1723, when a ship, the *Le Saint François Xavier*, departed from Chandernagore for Basra and paused at Pondicherry for loading, specific information on the connection between Persia and Pondicherry started to show up in the records. The council then named *Sieur Gaudron* the ship's captain, with *Rivetièrre* serving as second-in-command because he was not fluent in the local tongue. Under-merchant *Ingerand*, who was in charge of selling the cargo items, boarded the ship under the name *Soubrecargue*.

#### **V. Currency system in Pondicherry**

India's money system exhibited plurality in the early modern era. The Mughals, regional kingdoms, and European corporations were among the governmental entities who used their mints to create their own currency. On the one hand, the multiplicity of the monetary system and the existence of numerous mints reflect the high demand for money to further trade and commerce, but on the other, it begs the question of whether this plurality also posed difficulties for traders and trading firms, particularly those of the French. Additionally, there was the matter of standards and sovereignty. In both North and South India, the variations persisted to the same extent. Such systemic traits complicated both intra- and inter-regional business interactions for everyone involved. The French Company consequently had the same problem in Pondicherry and Bengal, the two main comptoirs where they were most active. For the most part, the Company used the Murshidabad and Arcot coins for their business activities. The Murshidabad currency had maintained the original Mughal norm. It was often known as the *sikka* rupee in Bengal. The Nabob of Arcot's mint produced the Arcot coin, which was regarded as having less worth.

The French Company had to acquire the coins through particular means in order to facilitate trade by paying weavers and merchants in advance with cash, administering their enclaves properly, and building the city's

infrastructure. One way to acquire Arcot or Murshidabad coins was to merchandise commodities that the Company bought for use in regional marketplaces. However, the corporation had fewer things to offer than what India exported. They were able to produce some money through them, but it was still insufficient for them to cover their needs. They included corals, fine wines, and some luxury goods. It is also important to note that the goods that were imported or produced in the city did not succeed in selling as soon as they were made available on the market. In terms of generating funds, the late arrival of ships and the delay in product sales operated as a barrier because they could only genuinely have the money they needed for cargo preparation and ship loading after the sale. Second, the business received cash payments from the property it leased to businesspeople for farming. However, because the lands were awarded annually, the collecting proceeded as planned. Commodity trading taxes and revenue were another source of income, but they were insufficient to support the entire city. Third, the French Company once sent gold ingots to be made into coins at the mints of local tyrants. These ingots were shipped in from France and other major trading hubs like Manila. The French were subject to a 7%–8% levy throughout this process of turning ingots into coins. It was a costly event that also involved the danger of metal being transported to the mint and then the peril of the manufactured coins being sent in large quantities to the owner via land routes. They were later permitted to make their own coins in Pondicherry, though. Additionally, they could use sarrafs to trade their foreign money, such as Rix Dollars, Persian Abbasis (Silver), or Japanese Koubang (Gold). Since the first part of the 18th century, Pondicherry has also produced gold coins known as pagodas. The city's earliest pagodas were most likely created around 1705, perhaps under the direction of François Martin, the governor at the time. The pagoda coin was used for larger business transactions because it had a higher denomination than the other currencies. The freshly minted pagodas resembled those found in use in the Coromandel in terms of design. In order for the country's merchants to accept it without reservation and for the city's commerce to thrive, a representation of Goddess Lakshmi was engraved into it. Following consultation with the city's merchants, the decision was made to inscribe the Hindu deity on the currency.

## **VI. Summary**

As a result, Pondicherry rose to prominence as a result of both its advantageous position and the colonisers' concerted efforts to monopolise trade and wield authority. The locals' art and architecture have undoubtedly been inspired by the interactions between the French and the Indians in Pondicherry. The places where the art and architectural components could be seen were the government buildings, the French, Indian, and domestic structures, as well as the churches. Large rooms, high ceilings, expansive verandas, and porticos with columns were features of both the government buildings and the French family homes. They were selected in keeping with the imposing nature of the classical type. The use of flat terraced roofs, which are unusual in France, marked a significant departure from the architecture of French homes. In a few instances, the local authorities carried out their plans, which were developed in France. Pondicherry has a large number of churches that were constructed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Sacred Heart Church in Pondicherry, Our Lady of the Assumption Church in Nellitope, Our Lady of the Conception Church in The Cathedral, and St. Andrea's Church in Reddiarpalayam were all constructed in a style that blended French and colonial traditions. The Pondicherrian Indian Houses exhibit some degree of the traditional Tamil ground layout being influenced by Europe. Most likely a hybrid of French and Indian designs, the compound wall's construction and concave curves between the pillars were. The residence of Ananda Ranga Pillai is unquestionably the outstanding illustration of cross-cultural architecture. Its floor layout is based on the typical Tamil house, and it is arranged around indoor courtyards with beautiful wood carving. However, French colonial proportions have greatly expanded it. More European influences can be seen in the decorative components of the upper story. Generally speaking, religion and mythology were significant influences on local art and served as inspiration for the artists' depictions of certain topics.

The French urban planning vision for Pondicherry was ambitious and multifaceted, aimed at creating a strategically important, culturally rich, and economically vibrant colonial city. Their objectives included enhancing military and economic positions, establishing a European-style urban environment, and promoting French culture. The achievements of these efforts are evident in the city's infrastructure, architectural legacy, and enduring cultural impact. The study of French urban planning in Pondicherry provides valuable insights into colonial urban development practices and their long-term effects on cities.

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