“All interpretations of India are ultimately autobiographical,” writes Ashis Nandy (1983). If this observation holds true for the Indian specialist, how much more trenchant is it for the non-Indologist daring to write about India?

By plunging directly into former French India, a compelling but obscure portion of the subcontinental giant of India, I have undertaken an arguably risky “lateral entry” into Indian studies. Though I have naturally tried to immerse myself in the literature of greater Indian history and society, some may judge my qualifications to attempt a scholarly work on India to be dubious; and my selection of background reading to be eclectic. No matter. As the Tamil aphorist of the *Tirukkural* teaches,

> Whatever thing, of whatsoever kind it be,  
> 'Tis wisdom’s part in each the very thing to see.

Few people are aware that in the eighteenth century India almost became a French, rather than British, territory. Fewer know that France managed to retain a foothold in the subcontinent throughout the British raj. They are surprised to discover that French India survived for a full fifteen years after the Union Jack was lowered in Delhi. And they are amazed to discover that, as a legacy of France’s colonial rule in India, there remain today, scattered throughout the Union Territory of Pondicherry, thousands of ethnic Indians who retain French citizenship.

Surprise and amazement accompanied me throughout this research into one of the most fascinating political subcultures in India today. That the ensuing paradigm of “countercolonialism” will undoubtedly stir consternation among some readers is a regrettable, but unavoidable, result.

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Before going to Pondichéry, I had already written about the legacies of French decolonization in the West Indies (Martinique) and in Africa (Niger). This—to refer back to Nandy’s observation—is the autobiographical perspec-
tive contained within the following interpretations of former French India. And I should add that I have subsequently carried my French Indian sensibilities over to the South Pacific, where I investigated the developmental implications of joint Anglo-French rule in Vanuatu, the former New Hebrides.

That I, a non-Indologist, have been able to do this study on former French India is largely due to the generosity of the American Institute of Indian Studies, whose Professional Development Fellowship specifically encourages non-Indian specialists to pursue research in India. Other institutional support for this project was provided by the Northeastern University Research and Scholarship Development Fund (which also sponsored Tamil language-training—thank you, Mrs. Siva) and Annamalai University in Annamalainagar (which extended me a visiting research affiliation). Shortly prior to arriving in Pondicherry, in November of 1987, I consulted, with efficient and friendly help from the staff, a goldmine of documents at the Archives d'Outre-Mer in Aix-en-Provence. Before departing India in August of 1988, I was assisted by the Historical Society of Pondicherry, the Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture, the National Archives of India (Pondicherry), Pondicherry University, Les Amis de la Langue et de la Civilisation Françaises, the International Centre of Education at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Romain Rolland Library, All India Radio (Pondicherry), the Indo-French Cultural Centre and Museum/Institut de Chandernagor, the Xavier Centre of Historical Research (Goa), and the administration of the Union Territory of Pondicherry (particularly the directorates of education, of planning and research, and of information, publicity, and tourism). On the French side, I acknowledge with great appreciation the assistance of the Institut Français, the Ecole Française de l'Extrême Orient, the French consulate in Pondicherry, the French embassy in New Delhi, the French consulate in Calcutta, the Lycée Français de Pondichéry, the Centre Franco-Indien de Formation Professionnelle de Pondichéry, and Alliance Française staff in Pondichéry, New Delhi, Madras, Goa, and Calcutta.

It was during a chance conversation with Jean-Yves Chandavoine at his home in Martinique that I first learned about Pondichéry. The trail led me to Professor Singaravelou, who had just returned to the University of Bordeaux from Guadeloupe, and who has published extensively on Indian communities in the West Indies. Professor Singaravelou's enthusiastic support for my idea of studying French influence in his native Pondichéry was a key element in my decision to pursue this project.

Scholars in India who assisted me in my work include Chief Justice David Annoussamy, of the Madras High Court; the eminent gazetteer of Pondicherry, Cyril Antony; Professor Gomatinayagam, of the Department of Sociology at Annamalai University; Professor Kichenamourthy, of the Department of French at Pondicherry University; and Professor D. Sundaram of the Department of Sociology at the University of Madras. Jean Deloche of the Ecole
Française shared with me the benefit of his decades of accumulated wisdom in India. Writer and Lycée Français teacher Damien Gouyou-Beauchamps proffered much food for thought. Dr. Hilde Link shared insights that only anthropologists of her sensitivity acquire. I am particularly grateful to Professor François Pesneau, then at the Institut Français, both for his deep knowledge and the gracious hospitality that he and his wife, Marie-Elyse, extended to my entire family. Those whom I met in France who have also greatly assisted me in this project include Mme. Jacqueline Bouchet, of the Centre d’Information de Documentation de l’Inde Française, Monsieur Joseph Marius le Prince, and Professor Jacques Weber, of the University of Nantes. Bernard and Hélène Larose, of the French Foreign Service, kindly opened their home in New Delhi to my family shortly before we left India.

The contacts I made during my nearly ten months in India went far beyond the professional. Limitations on space alone prevent me from naming all of those whose hospitality and generosity have made a lifelong impression on my daughter (though she was only five weeks old when we arrived), my wife, and myself. The list of people interviewed that appears at the end of this book cannot convey the extent to which so many of them gave so much more than their time. There are, nevertheless, certain persons whose unrequited hospitality was so great that I must mention them: in Pondicherry itself, the brothers de Condappa (and Elisabeth), Abe Aboody, Professor Arago Amalor, Dr. Yves Byche, Dr. and Mrs. S. Chandrasekar, Monsieur le Consul Général Marcel Fleury, Helen Hoffmann, Monsieur Lucien and Madame Janine Leblanc, Thiru C. Ramou, Monsieur Léon Rollin, retired judge (France) M. J. Tamby, Skyline neighbors Subash and Twinky, and Madame Lullima Tetta; Monsieur Paul Rajandassou trusted me with his precious collection of *Le Trait-d’Union*; Monsieur Coujandassamy of Karikal I must thank for introducing me to the *Tirukkural*; Tamil teachers M. Muregessane and S. S. Muregessane brought my Tamil facility as far along as they possibly could; and my research assistant, guide, interpreter, and friend, S. Subramanian, of Seliamedu, cannot be thanked enough for his efforts, just as his parents cannot realize how much we have come to love “Suber’s” entire family.

My solitary journeys outside of Pondicherry introduced me to other extraordinarily kind people. In Calcutta they included Kanchana Mukhopadhyay, her parents, and her husband, Suver Sil; in Chandernagore, Kali Chorone Kormocar and Sri and Supriya Provat Kumar Mukherjee; in Goa, Dr. Carmo Azevedo, Dionisio Ribeiro, and Dr. Teotonio D’Souza; in Madras, Eric Descotes-Genon; in Mahé, Palery Damodaran, the family D’Cruz, and N. Purnshothaman; and in Yanam, Addinoy Srivincata, P. P. Balane, and Boloju Basavalingam. Fellow Americans David Brookman, George Gadbois, Nancy Johnson, and Bob Lender materialized at critical junctures in various locations to provide much appreciated assistance or just good company.

However rewarding and enlightening for myself, these periodic excur-
sions away from our home in Pondy were a great strain on my wife, Loïza. Here I will compound Ashis Nandy's dictum on autobiography with the emerging U.S. custom of full disclosure: my wife, Loïza Nellec-Miles, is West Indian, French, and, on her father's side, of South Indian ancestry. That she tolerated these separations at all, kept company only by our infant daughter, Arielle Pooshpam, is testimony to her faith in my research; that she encouraged me to go because I "had to" is indicative of her unremitting selflessness. Whatever merit this work has belongs, above all, to her.

But whatever errors this book contains are mine alone. This is so despite the diligent readings and corrections of the manuscript undertaken by my graduate assistant at Northeastern University, Mr. Jason Abraham, of Goa, and by my colleague, Dr. Mahfuzul Chowdhury, of Chittagong University. I am grateful to Fred Anang, also a graduate student at Northeastern, for the indexing.

William F. S. Miles
Inscription at the base of monument to the Marquis Dupleix, founder of Pondichéry