



Merger of French and Portuguese Territories

For Prelims: [French and Portuguese Territories](#), Brazzaville Conference, [French Congo](#), [Africa](#), Article 27, [Goa](#), Salazar, [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#), [Tristão de Bragança Cunha](#), [Operation Vijay](#), Azad Gomantak Dal (AGD), Students Congress of French India, French Indian National Congress.

For Mains: Contrasting approaches of the French and Portuguese colonial powers in retaining their Indian territories after India's independence.

Why in News?

On **1st November 1954**, the **French possessions** in India were transferred to the **Indian Union** and **Puducherry** became a **Union Territory**.

- On **19th December**, India will celebrate **Goa Liberation Day** to commemorate the state's liberation from **Portuguese rule in 1961**.
- With **prolonged negotiations, nationalist movements and military action**, India succeeded in **integration** of French and Portuguese territories in India.

Why France Insisted on Retaining its Colonies in India?

- **Post- [World War II](#) Reconstruction:** The French government believed that the empire would help **revitalise** the **nation's post-war reconstruction** using colonial resources and strengthening its global influence.
- **Brazzaville Conference (1944):** The **Brazzaville Conference** held in 1944 in [French Congo](#) led to the concept of the [French Union](#).
 - It would **integrate** colonies more **directly into the French political system**, allowing them to remain part of France under a **redefined relationship**.
- **Democratic Rights: Article 27** of the constitution of the French Union offered its colonies the choice to **either stay** with France or **become independent**.
 - France was portrayed as a **liberal and progressive colonial power** which was used to **prolong its hold** over its colonies.
- **Cultural and Linguistic Influence:** Many residents in French India **spoke French, not English**, and felt culturally aligned with France rather than the new, English-speaking independent India.
- **Strategic and Political Calculations:** For the French government, whatever happened in India was to have its repercussions in their other colonies in **Indochina and [Africa](#)**. Consequently, their motive was to prolong the process of negotiation as much as possible.

Note:

In India, French colonies comprised **Pondicherry, Mahe, Chandernagore, Karaikal, and Yanam (Yanam)**.

Why Portugal Insisted on Retaining its Colonies in India?

- **Historical Claim:** Portugal emphasised its **centuries-long presence in Goa**, having ruled the territory since the early **16th century** unlike more recently established **British or French colonies**.
 - Goans substantially were voting for their representatives in the Portuguese Parliament from the 19th century.
- **Salazar's Dictatorial Stance:** Portuguese dictator **Salazar** viewed Portugal's colonies not as temporary possessions but as **integral parts of the Portuguese state** and declared Goa and other Indian territories as **overseas provinces**.
 - This stance made decolonisation unthinkable in his view, as it would be tantamount to the **disintegration** of Portugal's territorial integrity.
- **Geopolitical Leverage:** Portugal's membership in the **North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)** provided a deterrent against India's attempts to use force for Goa's liberation.
- **Strategic Significance of Goa:** **Goa's strategic location** on the western coast of India gave Portugal a **foothold in South Asia** and was viewed as a valuable asset for maintaining Portuguese influence in the region.
- **Catholic Population:** Portugal argued that the Goan **Catholic population** would not be safe in a predominantly **Hindu-independent India**.
 - This was a strategic move to gain **international sympathy** by implying that Portuguese withdrawal would expose religious minorities to persecution.



Note:

The Portuguese colonies in India included **Daman, Diu, Goa, Ilha de Anjediva, Nagar Haveli and Panikota**.

How did the French and Portuguese Territories Merge with India Differently?

Aspect	French Colonies	Portuguese Colonies
Colonial power stance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initially open to negotiation, focused on maintaining cultural ties 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Refused to cede territory, insisted Goa was part of Portugal
Local population's reaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some favoured staying with France, others supported integration with India. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong nationalist sentiment, and long-standing resistance to Portuguese rule. E.g., Pinto rebellion against Portuguese rule in Goa in 1787
Role of nationalist movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Several nationalist groups supported integration with India. E.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Students Congress of French India, the French Indian National Congress, Communist Party of French India sought merger with the Indian Union. ◦ In Chandernagore, the National Democratic Front (NDF) threatened a satyagraha if the French failed to propose a merger plan with India. ◦ In Mahe, the nationalist Mahajana Sabha threatened to set up a parallel government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong freedom struggle dating back to the 18th century. E.g., <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Goan nationalist leader of the 19th century Francisco Luis Gomes continually fought against Portuguese rule. ◦ Tristão de Bragança Cunha, father of Goan nationalism, had formed the Goa National Congress at the Calcutta session of the Indian National Congress in 1928. ◦ National Congress (Goa) advocated for complete independence of Goa, Daman and Diu and its integration with the Indian Union. ◦ Azad Gomantak Dal (AGD), a revolutionary organisation, launched an underground resistance.
Key events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Events Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ In June, 1948, the French government held a plebiscite at Chandernagore (West Bengal) that voted for merger with India ◦ French Indian possessions in 1951 were marred by violent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Events Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ On 15th August 1954, a mass satyagraha was organised by the National Congress Goa, which was brutally suppressed by the Portuguese authorities.

	<p>encounters in the borders that separated French from Indian territories.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Merger in 1954; ratification in 1962 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ In 1955, batches of satyagrahis who raised the tricolour were fired upon and many were killed and arrested in the process. ◦ By July 1954, the Communist Party of India along with a few revolutionary groups forced the Portuguese out of Dadar and Nagar Haveli. ◦ Operation Vijay in 1961 by the Indian government led to the military annexation of Goa, Daman, and Diu
Mode of transfer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Negotiated settlement and political integration with India 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Military intervention (Operation Vijay) and forced annexation
International influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ French Union concept influenced the process; concern over impact on French colonies in Africa and Indochina 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Portugal under Salazar dictatorship; NATO alliance complicated India's response
Indian government's role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, and negotiations leading to peaceful integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diplomatic efforts failed; military force used after prolonged diplomatic stalemate.

Conclusion

The decolonization of French and Portuguese territories in India highlighted **contrasting approaches—diplomatic negotiation versus armed conflict**. While French India saw a peaceful transition, Portugal's refusal to cede Goa led to military action. Both processes were pivotal in shaping India's post-independence territorial unity and inspired further global decolonization.

Drishti Mains Question:

Examine the contrasting approaches of the French and Portuguese colonial powers in retaining their Indian territories after India's independence.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Consider the following statements: (2021)

1. St. Francis Xavier was one of the founding members of the Jesuit Order.
2. St. Francis Xavier died in Goa and a church is dedicated to him there.
3. The Feast of St. Francis Xavier is celebrated in Goa each year.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only

(b) 2 and 3 only

(c) 1 and 3 only

(d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

Q.Consider the following events: (2018)

1. The first democratically elected communist party government formed in a State in India.
2. India's then largest bank, 'Imperial Bank of India', was renamed 'State Bank of India'.
3. Air India was nationalised and became the national carrier.
4. Goa became a part of independent India.

Which of the following is the correct chronological sequence of the above events?

(a) 4 - 1 - 2 - 3

(b) 3 - 2 - 1 - 4

(c) 4 - 2 - 1 - 3

(d) 3 - 1 - 2 - 4

Ans: (b)

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtiiias.com/printpdf/merger-of-french-and-portuguese-territories>